

CARTON 7:39

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

MANUSCRIPT DRAFTS, CHAPTER 6

1998

2017/193

Chapter 6/ New Orleans (3)

(Version 2, 7/9/98)

In 1947 I and other workers rallied to try to defeat the Taft-Hartley law (footnote). Black labor representatives, religious leaders, political leaders, and the black community leaders had mass meetings in Shakespeare Park. Ernest J. Wright was head of the Peoples Defense League, a local organization. He organized these meetings and asked me to speak. He was also a union man. Crowds of people turned out for the workers and to listen to speeches against the Taft-Hartley Law. All the workers knew this law was brought about to weaken and break the unions. We raised money to send telegrams to the President, as well as Senators and Congressmen from the State of Louisiana. Andrew Nelson sent me, his troubleshooter, to the meetings and to play a part in this fight against the Taft-Hartley law. We discussed where it was best for me to go to hit it hard. My union, Local 207, was behind me all the way. We discussed in the union how dangerous this bill was for workers. We rallied and sent telegrams from the Local. I went to different meetings all around New Orleans.

President Harry Truman vetoed the bill, but Congress overrode his veto. Despite strong workingclass opposition, the Congress voted this bill into law in the United States of America -- against the American workers!

Is this  
Ernest  
Scott?  
of US  
Xpert  
(Scott was  
CR 111)

Among other things, under the Taft-Hartley law no union officers could be members of the Communist Party. The officers of Local 207 called a meeting to discuss this law. Nelson then discussed it with the top officers of the ILWU. During that time Harry Bridges was in trouble with the law. They was trying to deport him for being a Communist. We didn't want to add no oil to the fire. The international decided not to break the law but to go along with it, to protect the international and the local unions. We decided to withdraw our membership in the Communist Party. Nelson and I also knew they wanted to get rid of Local 207, put us all in jail. So this was a way to protect the international and the Local. We stopped going to Communist Party meetings. But this did not mean we lessened our militancy; we continued fighting for decent wages, decent working conditions, seniority rights, pensions, welfare funds, better schools, and better health institutions in the communities, as progressive trade unionists. And I still felt deeply that socialism was needed to solve the problems of all oppressed workers.

Another bill came up in the State of Louisiana, the "Right-to-Work" bill. Andrew Nelson and I took a delegation to the State Capitol at Baton Rouge to speak against this Right-to-Work bill. Many speakers was lined up to speak against the bill. We had many businessmen, middle-class people, ministers, progressive labor leaders and politicians who was against the bill, along with members of the unions. We was speaking before a nine-man committee and urging them

not to pass this bill. Finally the decision came: five to four; five for the bill, four against. We lost the fight. We lived with that law for two years. However, the unions managed to survive through this struggle.

Later Earl K. Long, Huey P. Long's brother, was running for governor of Louisiana. The labor movement said they would give him support, and he pledged to repeal the law if he became governor. We elected him governor. Earl Long did repeal the Right-to-Work Law. The Right-to-Work Law was knocked out. However, the Unions was still facing national anti-labor laws like the Kennedy-Landrum law, Griffin Act, as well as the Taft-Hartley Law.

The employers didn't want progressive trade union activities being in operation. Naturally, that was one reason the Taft-Hartley law was passed. The aim was to break up union activities, particularly in the South. The workers was aware of these things from the start. This made us more militant in carrying on union activities. We started organizing the unorganized throughout Louisiana and Mississippi, fighting Jim Crowism.

During this time I was working at Federal Barge Lines. In June 1948 a letter came from the Commerce Department saying that I was violating the rules by working for a government agency if I was a member of the the Communist Party. They wanted to get me off the Federal Barge Lines, which was then a government-run agency. I refused to answer

their questions. Then they wrote me a couple more letters, one of which said:

Department of Commerce  
Office of the Secretary  
Washington, DC

July 28, 1948

Mr. Lee Brown  
Inland Waterways Corporation  
611 Gravier Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Dear Mr. Brown:

In our letter of July 13, 1948, you were informed that unless the Board by July 26, 1948, received a properly notarized answer to the charges which were preferred against you in our letter of June 2, 1948, the Board would have to proceed on the basis of the evidence before it. This the Board will do, but, to avoid any possibility of a misunderstanding on your part, the Board has seen fit to extend the time to receive a proper answer from you until August 9, 1948. If, on that date, the Board is not in receipt of an answer conforming with regulations under which it functions, it will have no alternative but to consider the case on the basis of the evidence in its possession and reach such conclusion with respect to the matter as that evidence may warrant.

Very truly yours,  
For the Board,  
John L. Towne  
Secretary

Andrew Nelson, and I discussed this letter to decide what I should do. We also wrote a letter to the International Vice President of the ILWU in San Francisco.

I had refused to answer questions the Department of Commerce sent. I had until August 9th to answer the questions or be discharged from the job. But Federal Barge Lines had changed hands from a government agency to a private agency. The private agency was named Inland Waterways Corporation, and the government rules didn't apply to a private agency. Henry A. Wallace was the head of the Commerce Department (verify) and I think he intervened on my behalf. Maybe the ILWU contacted him, because later we got a call from the international asking if my job was secure.

Companies and government agents was attacking us on all sides. Even so, we was determined to win demands for union members. Moreover the Southern states was anti-union. This was one reason that union demands for workers was hard to obtain without a struggle. And my own job was often on the line.

Once before the Federal Barge Lines was trying to fire me off the job. I was dismissed because I was too militant, although they didn't say that. The president of my union,

Brother Nelson, took action immediately. My union Local called an emergency meeting with the company's five shop stewards (I myself was a shop steward). Some workers called for an immediate strike action. Some workers called for a work slow-down. So, the decision was put to a vote. The majority of workers voted for a work slow-down.

Next day, union members went to work on a work slow-down. Each member was slow going to their working position. Naturally, the company's superintendent, supervisors and foremen objected to this move. Throughout the day, the work slow-down continued. Some workers was asked, "Can you work faster?" The workers answered, "We are working." Some foremen said, "You are on the job, but not working."

The work slow-down lasted a day and a half. Finally, the superintendent called the Local president for an emergency meeting at two o'clock that afternoon. The shop stewards, the president of my union, and I went to the office. The company presented statements; the union presented my statements. Decisions was made at company headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri. Finally, when the decision was sent back to Local 207, the company president in St. Louis recommended that I be suspended for thirty days, before returning to work. The Union accepted this decision, with the understanding that no seniority was lost. The president and shop stewards notified the workers, "The work slow-down has been called off." That was a victory the union won. Most of all this proved how

strong and well-organized Local 207 was in those days in the South.

In the meantime, I worked at Higgins Warehouse until the thirty days was up. Then I returned to Federal Barge Lines

When I returned to work I was still dock steward, on the negotiating committee, Executive Board member, Trustee Board member and also a member of the Political Action Committee. I still remained a progressive trade unionist.

What Federal Barge Lines didn't know was that I was vice-president of my Local, and even if I was removed from the docks I would still be active on the Negotiating Committee on all contracts with all companies that had contracts with our Local.

Every two years an election for union representatives of Local 207 was held. The general membership would elect a five man Election Committee. The Election Committee travelled in a car, plant-to-plant, so each member could get a chance to vote. This took two or three days travelling time. The Election Committee members who had to take days off the job to do this work would receive the same pay from the union as on the job. When all votes was collected, the Election Committee came to the Local headquarters at 420 Gravier Street and counted each candidate's votes. Some union representatives would lose, some would win. This was trade union democracy. Both Nelson and I was re-elected as president and vice-president. I continued in my Local fighting for better wages and better working conditions as a

member of the Negotiating Committee facing the company, even while I was suspended from the job on the docks.

Other organizations besides the unions tried to educate black and white workers in the South. One of these was the Southern Conference Education Fund. SCEF played an important role in helping workers throughout the South. One time in '48 they organized a three-day conference in New Orleans that I attended. At the conference I met Walter White and his wife, Mary White (verify her name). Walter White was Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He was the guest speaker one night during the conference. I sat with his wife while he spoke. "Can't he speak!" she said. To tell the truth I never had no great confidence in Walter White. I respected him but he didn't seem too militant. The best thing he did, he was very light-skinned and could pass for white, and he used to go to white racist meetings in the South and get information on them. I respected him for doing that.

The next night I met Henry A. Wallace, who was also a guest speaker. The crowd was very responsive to him. It was black and white sitting together in the hall. They didn't have no separation. Afterwards, we shook hands and talked briefly about the need to register and vote. He was very friendly and supportive.

The third night, Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, the educator and founder of Bethune-Cookman College, was guest speaker.

She talked about problems facing black people in the nation. I was very impressed with the knowledge and feeling coming from her. When she was on her way out, coming down the aisle, I spoke with her and embraced her. I couldn't help but embrace her I was so impressed. We didn't talk long because she had to catch a plane and her time was limited.

In 1951 I was acting Executive Secretary of the Louisiana Civil Rights Congress. This was a branch of the national Civil Rights Congress based in New York. The purpose of the organization was to fight for the civil rights and voting rights of black people, and especially people unjustly put in jail, get lawyers for them. We fought against Jim Crow and segregation. Dr. Oakley Johnson had been the head of the Louisiana chapter but he got fired from his teaching job at Dillard University and he had to step down.

It was just a few of us. Brother Nelson and I worked on different cases in the Civil Rights Congress. Its existence was a great comfort to black people -- just by knowing hope was around and active in this time of violence, which was every place, especially in the South.

One example of what we did was a young black married man, named Paul Washington, who was charged with rape of a white woman in Algiers, Louisiana. This young black man was in jail six or seven months before our Local 207 heard about the case. We learned about Paul Washington through another black man who was a member of our union. This union brother said he had talked with a black trustee in jail, who told him

about the case. Paul Washington had received the death penalty.

Brother Nelson and I got in contact with the William L. Patterson, the National Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Congress in New York. We turned over the information we had received about the Washington case.

William Patterson came to New Orleans and we went to see Paul Washington. He asked if the Civil Rights Congress could help him in any way, because he was innocent of the rape charge and felt he didn't get a fair trial, since he had an court-appointed attorney and an all white jury. President Nelson called our attorney, James McCain, and asked if he would look into the Paul Washington case.

After the the attorney reported back, President Nelson presented Washington's case before our Local Executive Board to see if our Local could help. I spoke before the Executive Board in favor of supporting Paul Washington. I said, "Lots of our black people have been railroaded on false charges of rape. Our people have been continuously lynched legally and it is about time for our people, especially our trade union sisters and brothers, to fight against this so-called rape charge that is attacking our people. I call it legal lynching and I ask the Executive Board to give us their support!" I also told the members of the Executive Board that I would work with Brother Nelson on this case.

In the meantime, our Local set up a defense committee to raise funds to work together with the Louisiana Civil Rights

Congress. Jointly, we set up a Paul Washington Defense Committee. William L. Patterson and lawyers from the national office and started plans to have Washington's case appealed. Louis Berry, a local black attorney, also worked on the case. Dances and raffles was given to raise funds for the defense appeal. We brought the case to the black communities and churches. Ministers gave us permission to come before their congregations to present the Paul Washington case.

In the churches and communities I made a speech that went like this: "There are a lot of Paul Washingtons in the South being framed. This is a big fight and we are not fighting this battle alone. There are many organizations who are helping us fight for justice in the South. But we must also help ourselves, if we want others to help us. Numbers of unions are with us in our fight. Local unions and international unions are with us."

When the attorneys came to New Orleans I was with them in a local attorney's office when they prepared Washington's brief. I was part of their security. I went with the attorneys every place. I also went along when the attorneys went to jail to talk with Paul Washington. I had the opportunity to shake his hand and inquire about his health. Under the circumstances, Paul Washington was feeling all right at that time. When the time came for Paul Washington to talk to the attorneys about his case, the union brothers and I left them in privacy.

Union officials found out where Paul Washington's wife was living. They asked me to keep in touch with her. I visited his wife and little girl often. The only time Paul Washington got a chance to see his little girl was behind prison bars.

The attorneys, got Paul Washington a new hearing with the State of Louisiana Supreme Court. The State Supreme Court upheld the lower court decision. So, Paul Washington was still facing the death penalty. Then the attorneys made a motion to the United States Supreme Court, but the motion was denied. I can't recall on what grounds the motion was denied. We fought hard to save Paul Washington's life. Unfortunately, due to this unfair "justice," the death sentence was carried out. Paul Washington was executed on a Friday in July, 1952. I felt terrible, especially for his wife and daughter.

That same year our union Local 207 and I, as a member of the Civil Rights Congress, also tried to save the life of Ocie Jugger, a black man charged with rape of a white woman. Someone gave our union this information, because the Civil Rights Congress was working on all these so-called rape cases in the South.

Ocie Jugger's statement was that he had only asked this white woman for some food, because he was hungry. The court attorney gave our attorneys this report about the case. They said the police had a written confession that was signed by

Ocie Jugger. We knew this statement was a lie, because Jugger couldn't read or write.

In court, before an all white jury, Jugger was asked to read the name that was signed on the confession. He didn't know his own name on the paper. Then the attorney gave Jugger a piece of paper and asked him to write his name. He didn't know how to write his name. The attorney proved that point. Someone else had signed Ocie Jugger's name on the confession of rape. Ocie Jugger couldn't read or write, so it was impossible for him to sign a confession or any other thing.

During the trial, Ocie Jugger's lawyers kept asking the white woman had he raped her. During the whole trial, she never answered the question yes or no. Every time the attorneys asked her had he raped her, the woman pretended to faint.

The all white jury found Ocie Jugger guilty as charged, based on circumstantial evidence. This judge sentenced him to death by the electric chair. Then the judge set the date for the execution. Our attorneys made a motion for a new trial, which was denied.

In the meantime the date for Ocie Jugger's execution was getting closer. Four officials from different unions went to Opelousas, on a Thursday to ask for a stay of execution. The State of Louisiana was going to execute Jugger that Friday. Our attorneys went before a federal judge and asked for a

stay of execution for Ocie Jugger. The federal judge turned down the stay of execution.

That Thursday before the execution a large gathering of white people -- women, men, old, young, babies, and children of all ages -- came to see the electric chair, which was being brought in a truck to the courthouse yard. I never saw the likes of it in all my life! It was outrageous. You should have seen those people's faces, all lit up like a Christmas tree, cheering, laughing, hollering, in a state of excitement, like they was in an amusement park.

Four of us union men was standing among the crowd. Everywhere I looked these white people was picking up their children, putting them on their shoulders so they could see the electric chair. Some white people I was standing near was explaining to their children, "That is an electric chair. It is for a nigger. That's what they are going to kill that nigger in tomorrow."

All the black people who lived in that town had left the courthouse yard. Only the white people remained. Only two black men was left there -- a black union brother and myself. The other two union brothers was white -- one from the Leather and Fur Workers Union, one from the Tobacco Workers Union.

Our headquarters for that day was at a barber shop, so the Civil Rights Congress office in New Orleans could keep in touch with us. It was extremely dangerous in this Ku Klux Klan town. When the union brothers and I walked on the

streets in this little town going back and forth to the barber shop, white people tried to provoke us by bumping into us on the streets. This was perfectly clear to us. We didn't say anything to these people. We didn't give them any reason to go into their violent act. The white union brothers walked ahead of the black union brother and me and kept their eyes on us for security. When we went back to the barber shop, Dr. Oakley Johnson, who was at the office in New Orleans, had called on the phone and left word with the barber for our delegation to leave that Ku Klux Klan town before dark for our safety.

The next day, on Friday, so-called justice was carried out; Ocie Jugger was executed.

Later, after the execution of Ocie Jugger, Albert Jones, one of our attorneys who defended him, was visiting his own mother in the country in Louisiana. Someone shot him three times with a .22 rifle. He was hospitalized at the Charity Hospital in New Orleans. Often I went to visit him in the hospital. Finally, he recovered and continued in the union and civil rights, fighting for the rights of the poor black people in the South.

The Louisiana Civil Rights Congress tried to help anyone who was seeking our help. But sometimes we lost contact with the people who needed help. We heard about a lady in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, who was seeking our help, so I wrote a letter that Mrs. Simms typed up and sent it to her. The letter said: "Dear Mrs. Bailey, the Louisiana Civil

Rights Congress has heard about you from our national office in New York and we are interested in helping you, if we can. Since our office is in the South, it will be easier for us to get in touch with you than for New York to send someone down from up North. Now, we want you to send us more information about your brother and his wife. Please answer the following questions: What was the charge they were convicted of. Was it murder, robbery, rape, or what? Who was the lawyer who defended them? When were they arrested, when tried, when convicted? Do you have newspaper clippings about the case and will you send them to us? Could you or some other relative come to New Orleans later on and tell us all about the case? If we can get more information about the case, so we can know whether or not we can help, we will be very glad." I signed the letter: "Very truly yours, Lee Brown, Acting Executive Secretary, Louisiana Civil Rights Congress."

When I sent this letter and I didn't get an answer from the person, I thought maybe someone opened all their mail and they hadn't received that particular letter. I wouldn't have been too surprised, because the FBI opened all my personal mail, and union mail, and letters containing civil rights issues on different people. Sometimes the FBI would wait at the post office when my secretary went to pick up the mail. The FBI told Mrs. Simms that they was FBI and that she had to show them the mail. They intimidated her into showing them the mail, this is what they did. Anyway, after I didn't get

any answer from Mrs. Bailey, all I could do was close the case.

A black man who lived in Laurel, Mississippi, named Willie McGee, was in trouble with the authorities of that city, who claimed he raped a white woman. The Civil Rights' Congress in New York was handling this case at the time. Since the Civil Rights Congress in New Orleans was closer to Laurel, Mississippi, I was asked if I would get in touch with Dr. Oakley Johnson to work with us on this case.

First, a defense committee involving the union and people of the community was set up. Dr. Johnson often worked along with the union. Dr. Johnson asked me, "Would you go to Laurel, Mississippi and take Mrs. McGee (Willie McGee's mother) a bus ticket directly to her home?" A community meeting for Willie McGee's defense was being held in New Orleans and they wanted to bring his mother to the meeting.

Every precaution was being taken to keep Mrs. McGee from being followed and attacked by reactionary white people in Laurel. By taking a bus ticket directly to Mrs. McGee's home, we could prevent her from having to go to the bus station to buy a ticket.

Mississippi was dangerous for strangers to travel through, especially if you are a black person. Therefore, taking this under consideration, I discussed matters with Rose. She pleaded with me not to go to this small town in Mississippi. Despite all her pleading, I told her that this was extremely important, because it was a struggle for black

people throughout the Deep South and I had to go contact Mrs. McGee and buy a bus ticket, so she could come to New Orleans to attend a meeting to be held that coming Friday night.

I bought a ticket for Laurel and took the train that Wednesday at 8:00 am. Someone in New Orleans had notified Mrs. McGee in advance about the nature of my visit. Every possible precaution had been taken, so I wouldn't get hurt or draw suspicion from anyone in Laurel. When I arrived at the station in Laurel, quite a few poor black people was standing in the station. When I got off the train, all eyes seemed to be on me. I felt these people knew I was a stranger in town. Each one seemed frightened, like they wanted to tell me, "Go back where you came from, it's not safe here." But no one said one word to me in the station.

Outside a cab driver was standing waiting. He asked if I was the fellow from New Orleans to see Mrs. McGee. I told him yes. I got in the cab and he drove me to Mrs. McGee's home. My plan was to catch the next train back to New Orleans. Dr. Johnson told me that if I wasn't back in New Orleans at 10:00 pm that night, he would call to see if I had arrived safely; if not, he would call the FBI to investigate to find out what happened. I arrived at Mr. and Mrs. McGee's home. After an introduction, I didn't tell them I was from the Civil Rights Congress. Instead I told them I was from the union in New Orleans. The reason was that we had found out that Mr. McGee, Willie McGee's father, was giving out information about Willie McGee's case to the authorities in Mississippi. I was

careful in discussing the case, because he couldn't be trusted.

Mrs. McGee gave me a great deal of information about the case. Later, some friends of Mrs. McGee came to her house to talk with me. I didn't discuss the case with her friends, but I talked on other issues like the civil rights struggle. The main issue I spoke on was Jim Crowism in the South and how white oppressors was causing this Jim Crow system, which was keeping workers divided and also from organizing into unions.

When my discussion with Mrs. McGee's friends ended it was time to go back to New Orleans. I went to the bus station and bought Mrs. McGee a ticket to New Orleans. I wasn't under the suspicion of anyone in the station. I told Mrs. McGee that when she got on the bus, not to talk to anyone about where she was going. During that time the cab driver gave me his name and phone number, so he could come to the station and pick me up at a certain time. When I called the cab driver at that time, he told me we had to wait until the train whistle blew. Then he would take me to the station for security reasons and because I was a stranger in town. Everything went along as planned. I was back home in New Orleans at 10:00 o'clock that night.

Mrs. McGee arrived in New Orleans on a Friday. Immediately Mrs. McGee was sent to a private home for security, where she stayed until the time for the meeting.

The Willie McGee Defense Fund meeting was held in the community center. At eight o'clock Mrs. McGee was brought to

the meeting. A large number of people came to hear Mrs. McGee speak about her son. Before the meeting started, I was seated with Mrs. McGee on the platform. My job that night was to be a bodyguard for Mrs. McGee.

Despite the tight security and secrecy in communication, the plans about Willie McGee's defense leaked out. Two plain clothes detectives found out about the meeting and was sitting in the audience. Some white workers found out about the detectives presence and passed the word down. Dr. Johnson, who was in charge of the meeting, advised Mrs. McGee not to speak too much about the case, because the detectives was in the audience. Several other people spoke on Willie McGee's case. Some speakers came from the civil rights organization, some from labor, and I spoke on the case also. Before Mrs. McGee spoke, we collected donations for Willie McGee's defense fund.

My subject was the struggle of black workers in the South. I called for freedom and complete emancipation for the workingclass as a whole.

Mrs. McGee's message was brave and strong. She told everyone to keep up the good work and continue fighting for the rights of the poor people, because the people would win.

Some news reporters was present at the meeting. They took pictures of Mrs McGee and all the people on the platform and the audience. After the meeting Mrs. McGee was taken back to a secure place to spend the night. The next morning she went back home to Mississippi.

After this period, I was no longer able to be involved in the case. I was facing problems and had to take extreme precautions. They was getting after me too. So I didn't know the outcome of the Willie McGee case, although I heard that they didn't execute him.

CHAPTER SIX

Chapter 6/ New Orleans (3)

more  
page to

The Southern Conference Education Fund was in New Orleans for a three day conference. The Southern Conference Education Fund played an important role in helping workers throughout the South. At the conference I met Walter White and his wife, Mary White. Walter White was Executive Secretary of the National Association For The Advancement of Colored People. He was the guest speaker one night during the conference; we sat together during the meeting. Afterward, we discussed the meeting.

When?  
What was  
the conference  
about?  
L.S. White  
to SEPT?

The next night I met Henry A. Wallace, Vice-President of the United States of America during President Roosevelt's Administration. Henry Wallace was also a guest speaker. Later, we shook hands and talked. The third night, Mrs. Mary McCloud Bethune, the educator and founder of Bethune-Cookman College, was guest speaker. She talked about problems facing Black people in the nation. I talked from a Trade Union standpoint: what a great role labor could play in solving problems facing the workingclass in the world. We had to cut our conversation short, because she had to catch a plane and her time was limited.

more  
detail

What did  
Wallace say?  
What was  
Crowd  
11/20?

I was very impressed with Mrs. Bethune. When she was ready to leave, I kissed her as if I had known her all my life. Naturally, no one could help but love her. She was a very lovely person in action and ways.

Talked with  
her?

why?

who?

Describe

In New Orleans, I and fellow workers rallied to defeat the Taft-Hartley law. Black labor representatives, religious leaders, political leaders, and the Black community leaders had a mass meeting in Shakespeare Park. Crowds of people turned out for the workers. speeches were made against the Taft-Hartley Law. All the workers knew this law was brought about to weaken and break the unions. We raised money to send telegrams to the President, as well as Senators and Congressmen from the State of Louisiana. My union sent me to play a part in this fight against the Taft-Hartley law. My union, Local 207, was behind me all the way. <sup>wait to help</sup> I started travelling <sup>New Orleans</sup> ~~throughout the State of Louisiana~~ to rally the working people against this bill.

more details stories

President Harry Truman vetoed the bill, but Congress overrode his veto. Despite strong workingclass opposition, the Congress voted this bill into law in the United States of America--against the American workers!

Among other things, under the Taft-Hartley law no Union officers could be members of the Communist Party. The officers of Local 207 called a meeting to discuss this law. We decided not to break the law but to go along with it. We decided to withdraw our membership in the Communist Party. But this did not mean we lessened out militancy; we continued fighting for decent wages, decent working conditions, seniority rights, pensions, welfare funds, better schools, and better health institutions in the communities, as progressive trade unionists.

How decided?  
options?  
what did L. B. Frank?  
next course?

who?  
How done?  
still go H?  
CR mtgs?  
rallying  
civil rights  
Congress?

Another bill came up in the State of Louisiana, the "Right-to-Work" bill. Andrew Nelson, the president of the union and I, vice-

president, took a delegation to the State Capitol at Baton Rouge to speak against this Right-to-Work bill. Many speakers were lined up to speak against the bill. We had many businessmen, middle-class people, ministers, progressive labor leaders and politicians who were against the bill, along with members of the unions. We were speaking before a nine-man committee and urging them not to pass this bill. Finally the decision came: five to four; five for the bill, four against. We lost the fight. We lived with that law for two years. However, the unions managed to survive through this struggle.

More details on this

<sup>John P. Long's brother</sup>  
Earl K. Long was running for governor of Louisiana. He pledged to repeal the law if he became governor. We elected him governor. Earl Long did repeal the Right-to-Work Law. The Right-to-Work' Law was knocked out. However, the Unions were still facing national anti-labor laws like the Kennedy-Landrum laws, Griffin Act, as well as the Taft-Hartley Law.

The employers didn't want progressive trade union activities being in operation. Naturally, that was one reason the Taft-Hartley law was passed. The aim was to break up union activities, particularly in the South. The workers were aware of these things from the start. This made us more militant in carrying on union activities. We started organizing the unorganized throughout the Louisiana and Mississippi, fighting Jim Crowism.

During the time I was working at Inland Waterways Corporation, in the year 1948, a letter came to me on the job from Washington:

Mr. Lee Brown  
Inland Waterways Corporation  
611 Gravier Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana

*Final letter*

Dear Mr. Brown:

*What Board  
what charges?*

In our letter of July 13, 1948, you were informed that unless the Board by July 26, 1948, received a properly notarized answer to the charges which were preferred against you in our letter of June 2, 1948, the Board would have to proceed on the basis of the evidence before it. This the Board will do; but, to avoid any possibility of a misunderstanding on your part, the Board has seen fit to extend the time to receive a proper answer from you until August 9, 1948. If, on that date, the Board is not in receipt of an answer conforming with regulations under which it functions, it will have no alternative but to consider the case on the basis of the evidence in its possession and such conclusion with respect to the matter as that evidence may warrant.

Very truly yours,

( Secretary's signature )

*John L. Towne  
Secretary*

**( NEED MORE INFO: WHAT CHARGES? WHAT BOARD? )**

Andrew Nelson, and I discussed this letter to decide what I should do. We also wrote a letter to the International Vice President of the Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union in San Francisco, California. We wrote about problems I was having.

*what problems?*

2  
COPY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON 25

COPY

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

July 28, 1948

Mr. Lee Brown  
Inland Waterways Corporation  
611 Gravier Street  
New Orleans 12, Louisiana

Dear Mr. Brown:

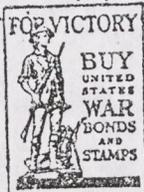
In our letter of July 13, 1948, you were informed that unless the Board by July 26, 1948, received a properly notarized answer to the charges which were preferred against you in our letter of June 2, 1948, the Board would have to proceed on the basis of the evidence before it. This the Board will do, but, to avoid any possibility of a misunderstanding on your part, the Board has seen fit to extend the time to receive a proper answer from you until August 9, 1948. If, on that date the Board is not in receipt of an answer conforming with the regulations under which it functions, it will have no alternative but to consider the case on the basis of the evidence in its possession and reach such conclusion with respect to the matter as that evidence may warrant.

Very truly yours,

For the Board:

*John L. Towne*  
John L. Towne  
Secretary

COPY



I refused to answer questions the Department of Commerce sent. I had August 9th to answer the questions or be discharged from the job. Before August, <sup>Federal Barge Lines</sup> Inland Waterways had changed hands from a government agency to a private agency. <sup>Forward with union</sup> The private agency was named <sup>Inland</sup> ~~Waterway~~ Terminal Corporation.

Before receiving that letter, <sup>Federal Barge</sup> Inland Waterway was trying to fire me off the job. I was ~~dismissed~~ <sup>suspended for 30 days</sup> one time. (WHY?) The president of my union, Brother Nelson, took action immediately. We met with the <sup>Federal</sup> ~~Inland~~ Waterway officers: president, general manager, and dock superintendent. Our shop steward came to the meeting that night with the company and wrote down statements from the company and the Union about my case. The company presented statements; the Union presented my statements. Decisions were made at headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri. Finally, when the decision form was sent back to Local 207, the president in St. Louis recommended that I be suspended for thirty days, before returning to work. The Union accepted this decision, with no seniority lost. In the meantime, I worked at Higgins Warehouse until the thirty days were up. Then I returned to Inland Waterways Corporation.

When I returned to work I was still dock steward, on the negotiating committee, Executive Board member, Trustee Board member and also a member of the Political Action Committee. I still remained a progressive trade unionist.

The most important thing that the company didn't know was that I was vice-president of my Local, and even if I was removed from the docks I would still be active on the Negotiating Committee on all contracts with all companies that had contracts with our Local.

??

??

Why?

Details?

— PU  
Inland  
An  
93

Fortunately, our Negotiating Committee was successful in winning the contract with Inland Waterway Corporation. Our Negotiating Committee didn't get everything we asked for; the company didn't get everything they wanted. The demands we did get met were in the best interest of all the workers.

Duplicate  
This is  
a 5?

The main thing we got was a 25 cents increase across the board, as was asked; upgrading proposals were won all the way without any trouble. The white workers stood behind us in these proposals; we were a united front. The company put the agreement into action; when a job opening came up, the company followed through according to the letter of the contract .

Black workers started workers on cranes, driving tractors, watchmen, and sack sewers. We had a chauffeur on the crane, as well as crane operations. The rank and file won complete victory. Not only did we fight on the barge lines, but other places where our unions had contracts.

Every two years an election for union representatives of Local 207 was held. The general membership would elect a five man Election Committee. The Election Committee travelled in a car, plant-to-plant, so each member could get a chance to vote. This took two or three days travelling time. The Election Committee members who had to take days off the job to do this work would receive the same pay from the union as on the job. When all votes were collected, the Election Committee came to the Local headquarters at 420 Gravier Street and counted each candidate's votes. Some Union Representatives would lose, some would win. This was trade union

Resolution  
was by  
an election  
Committee  
signature  
7 this  
page?

democracy which I continued in my Local as I kept fighting for better wages and better working conditions.

Companies and government agents were attacking us on all sides. Even so, we were determined to win demands for union members. Moreover the Southern States were anti-union. This was one reason that union demands for workers were hard to obtain without a struggle. And my own job was often on the line.

As I said, Inland Waterway became a private agency, Waterway Terminal Corporation. Even under this new private agency, I was fired. My union Local called an emergency meeting with the company's five shop stewards (I myself was a shop steward). Some workers called for an immediate strike action. Some workers called for a work slow-down. So, the decision was put to a vote. The majority of workers voted for a work slow-down.

Next day, union members went to work on a work slow-down. Each member was slow going to one's working position. Certainly, the company's superintendent, supervisors and foremen objected to this move. Throughout the day, the work slow-down continued. Some workers were asked, "Can you work faster?" The workers answered, "We are working." Some foremen said, "You are on the job, but not working."

The work slow-down lasted a day and a half. Finally, the superintendent called the Local president for an emergency meeting at two o'clock that afternoon. The shop steward, the president of my union, and I went to the office. The company's representative explained, "If the union will put the men back to work as before, we will reinstate Mr. Lee Brown back on the job." The Union president

*Disbelief*  
*Why*  
*This goes back*

answered, "With no time lost, pay for the two days he was off the job?" The company agreed to this arrangement. The president and shop stewards notified the workers, "The work slow-down has been called off." That was a victory the Union won. Most of all this proved how strong and well-organized Local 207 was in those days in the South.

*PA SKEP here?*

*How did  
L.R. get  
involved?*

In 1950 I was acting Executive Secretary of the Louisiana Civil Rights Congress. Brother Nelson and I worked on different cases in the Civil Rights Congress, which came into existence (WHEN?) to fight for the rights of Black people. Its existence was a great comfort to Black people--just by knowing hope was around and active in this time of violence, which was every place, especially in the South.

*Background  
on C.R.C.?  
purpose?  
etc*

One example was a young Black married man, named Paul Washington, who was charged with rape of a white woman in Algiers, Louisiana. This young Black man was in jail six or seven months before our Local 207 heard about the case. We learned about Paul Washington through another Black man who was a member of our union. This union brother said he had talked with a Black trustee in jail, who told him about the case. Paul Washington had received the death penalty.

~~We sent a union representative to see Paul Washington. He asked our union representative to see if the union could help him in any way, because he was innocent of the rape charge and felt he didn't get a fair trial, since he had an court-appointed attorney and an all white jury. President Nelson called our union attorneys and asked if they would look into the Paul Washington case.~~

After the union attorneys reported back to our union president and gave information about the case, President Nelson presented Washington's case before our Local Executive Board to see if our Local could help. I spoke before the Executive Board in favor of supporting Paul Washington. I said, "Lots of our Black people have been railroaded on false charges of rape. Our people have been continuously lynched legally and it is about time for our people, especially our trade union sisters and brothers, to fight against this so-called rape charge that is attacking our people. I call it legal lynching and I ask the Executive Board to give us their support!" I also told the members of the Executive Board that I would work with Bro. Nelson on this case.

Brother Nelson and I got in contact with the Executive Secretary (WHO?) of the Louisiana Civil Rights Congress. We turned over the information we had received about the Washington case. The Louisiana Civil Rights Congress started working immediately.

In the meantime, our Local set up a defense committee to raise funds to work together with the Louisiana Civil Rights Congress. Jointly, we set up a Paul Washington Defense Committee. Lawyers came in from the national office and started plans to have Washington's case appealed. Dances and raffles were given to raise funds for the defense appeal. We brought the case to the Black communities and churches. Ministers gave us permission to come before their congregations to present the Paul Washington case.

In the churches and communities I made a speech that went like this: "There are a lot of Paul Washingtons in the South being framed. This is a big fight and we are not fighting this battle alone.

Cyril  
6/4

National office?

?  
with  
Paul

at CRC?

There are many organizations who are helping us fight for justice in the South. But we must also help ourselves, if we want others to help us. Numbers of unions are with us in our fight. Local unions and international unions are with us."

*who/ from where? Am*

When the attorneys came to New Orleans I was with them in a local attorney's office when they prepared Washington's brief. I was part of their security. I went with the attorneys every place. I also went along when the attorneys went to jail to talk with Paul Washington. I had the opportunity to shake his hand and inquire about his health. Under the circumstances, Paul Washington was feeling all right at that time. When the time came for Paul Washington to talk to the attorneys about his case, the union brothers and I left them in privacy.

Union officials found out where Paul Washington's wife was living. They asked me to keep in touch with her. I visited his wife and little girl often. The only time Paul Washington got a chance to see his little girl was behind prison bars.

*more*

The attorneys, got Paul Washington a new hearing with the State of Louisiana Supreme Court. The State Supreme Court upheld the lower court decision. So, Paul Washington was still facing the death penalty. Then the attorneys made a motion to the United States Supreme Court, but the motion was denied. I can't recall on what grounds the motion was denied. We fought hard to save Paul Washington's life. Unfortunately, due to this unfair "justice," the death sentence was carried out. Paul Washington was executed on a Friday.

*What year?  
How did  
L.R. feel?  
Community  
reaction?*

Mrs. Simms

Is this  
the 11/17/52  
letter in CCC  
file?

Early in 1952 my office secretary brought me a letter  
which was signed by the National Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights  
Congress asking my active participation as one of the  
directors to contact all the people I felt I could  
and would add prestige and dignity to the event. (WHAT  
EVENT?) By that they meant the community people and labor  
people who had the respect of their neighbors. The letter also stated  
that all proposals would be welcomed if the finances permitted and  
that I should contact church and labor and professional people in the  
community and speak to them. They said the number that I secured  
would, of course, not be too large; but, I was supposed to contact all  
of them. Because New York would probably have ten or fifteen, I was  
asked to move the press once I received the call. I was wished good  
luck and good work.

Clearly then, this letter was for me to notify everyone who was  
interested in helping me out with the work that had to be done in  
the Civil Rights Congress in the year 1952. That letter was sent to me  
by William Patterson, the famous attorney. (WHAT HAPPENED?  
DID PATTERSON COME TO NEW ORLEANS?)

Our union Local 207 and I, as a member of the Civil Rights  
Congress, tried to save the life of O. C. Jugger, a Black man charged  
with rape of a white woman. Someone gave our union this  
information, because the Civil Rights Congress was working on all  
these so-called rape cases in the South.

O.C. Jugger's statement was that he had only asked this white  
woman for some food, because he was hungry. The court attorney  
gave our attorneys this report about the case. They said the police

Mrs. Simms  
was signed?  
what was  
the case? (920)

Why was  
Mrs. Jugger?  
(see 102)

/// ??

year?

Dick

Mrs. Scamm  
year

Is this  
the 11/17/52  
letter in CEC  
file?

Dub

Early one morning my office secretary brought me a letter which came from the National Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Congress .They were seeking my active participation as one of the directors as well as sponsors to contact all the people I felt I could and would to add prestige and dignity to the event. (WHAT EVENT?) By that they meant the community people and labor people who had the respect of their neighbors. 'the letter also stated that all proposals would be welcomed if the finances permitted and that I should contact church and labor and professional people in the community and speak to them. They said the number that I secured would, of course, not be too large; but, I was supposed to contact all of them. because New York would probably have ten or fifteen, I was asked to move the press once I received the call. I was wished good luck and good work.

Who was  
Mrs. Jugger?  
(see book)

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///??

Our union Local 207 and I, as a member of the Civil Rights Congress, tried to save the life of O. C. Jugger, a Black man charged with rape of a white woman. Someone gave our union this information, because the Civil Rights Congress was working on all these so-called rape cases in the South.

year?

O.C. Jugger's statement was that he had only asked this white woman for some food, because he was hungry. The court attorney gave our attorneys this report about the case. They said the police

WILLIAM L. PATTERSON  
National Executive Sec'y

November 17, 1952

COPY

Mr. Lee Brown  
420 Gravier St.  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Dear Lee:

You have probably heard that we have projected and are now zealously preparing a Christmas holiday crusade to visit Mrs. Rosalie Ingram on Christmas Day, December 25, 1952.

The visitors will come from all sections of the country. New York, however, will bear the major responsibility for the preparations and the delegation.

The purpose is three-fold; (1) To focus again the attention of the world of decent people on the horrible situation in which this heroic, innocent woman finds herself and her two sons who defended her honor and life; (2) To quicken the tempo of action for her freedom through legal action and mass support; (3) To bring greetings from friends and sympathizers.

We believe that the progressive South will respond heartily and readily to such a Call (incidentally, the formal Call is a beautiful thing and will be in your hands shortly). We are writing contacts in Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, the Carolinas, Florida and Alabama, informing them of the program and plans and soliciting support.

We feel, however, that your active participation can help guarantee success. Your numerous contacts will be, we are certain, deeply sympathetic and helpful in making the project the magnificent program that it is in essence.

We are asking you, therefore, to reach them immediately.

The crusade will include only women, Negro and white, of all ages.

All steps to assure transportation from the rail end to the prison will be taken. The widest publicity will be given to the trip as a security measure and in order to assure the greatest attention from sympathizers who cannot actively participate.

The warden will be notified of the Christmas season visit.

The New York people, and those from other points North will arrive at the rail end point early on the 24th.

2

Lee Brown

-2-

November 17, 1952

We are seeking your active participation as one of the directors as well as sponsors. We desire you to contact all those you feel can and will add prestige and dignity to the event. By that we are not thinking of the prominent personages but of community people, labor people, etc., who have the respect of their neighbors.

All proposals that you may have will be welcomed and utilized if the bugbear finance permits. Church and labor and the professionals in the community should be spoken to. The number that you secure will, of course, not be too large. Contact all. If we need to cut, it's better than starting with too few. New York will probably have ten or fifteen. There may be one or two from the West Coast.

Try to move the press once you have the Call.

Good luck, and good work,

*William L. Patterson*

William L. Patterson  
National Executive Secretary

had a written confession that was signed by O.C. Jugger. We knew this statement was a lie, because Jugger couldn't read or write.

In court, before an all white jury, Jugger was asked to read the name that was signed on the confession. He didn't know his own name on the paper. Then the attorney gave Jugger a piece of paper and asked him to write his name. He didn't know how to write his name. The attorney proved that point. Someone else had signed O .C. Jugger's name on the confession of rape. O. C. Jugger couldn't read or write, so it was impossible for him to sign a confession or any other thing.

During the trial, O. C. Jugger's lawyers kept asking the white woman had he raped her. During the whole trial, she never answered the question yes or no. Every time the attorneys asked her had he raped her, the woman pretended to faint.

The all white jury found O C. Jugger guilty as charged, based on circumstantial evidence. This judge sentenced him to death by the electric chair. Then the judge set the date for the execution. Our attorneys made a motion for a new trial, which was denied.

In the meantime the date for O.C. Jugger's execution was getting closer. Four officials from different unions went to Opelousa (S P?), Louisiana on a Thursday to ask for a stay of execution. The State of Louisiana was going to execute Jugger that Friday. Our attorneys went before a federal judge and asked for a stay of execution for O. C. Jugger. The federal judge turned down the stay of execution.

That Thursday before the execution a large gathering of white people -- women, men, old, young, babies, and children of all ages --

p. 98  
UKJ

came to see the electric chair, which was being brought in a truck to the courthouse yard. I never saw the likes of it in all my life! It was outrageous. You should have seen those people's faces, all lit up like a Christmas tree, cheering, laughing, hollering, in a state of excitement, <sup>like was</sup> as if they were in an amusement park.

Four of us union men <sup>was</sup> were standing among the crowd. Everywhere I looked these white people were picking up their children, putting them on their shoulders so they could see the electric chair. Some white people I was standing near were explaining to their children, <sup>u</sup> "That is an electric chair. It is for a nigger. That's what they are going to kill that nigger in tomorrow "

All the Black people who lived in that town had left the courthouse yard. Only the white people remained. Only two Black men were left there: a Black union brother and myself. The other two union brothers were white: one from the Leather and Fur Workers Union, one from the Tobacco Workers Union.

Our headquarters for that day was at a barber shop, so the Civil Rights Congress office in New Orleans could keep in touch with us. It was extremely dangerous in this Ku Klux Klan town. When the union brothers and I walked on the streets in this little town going back and forth to the barber shop, white people tried to provoke us by bumping into us on the streets. This was perfectly clear to us. We didn't say anything to these people. We didn't give them any reason to go into their violent act. The white union brothers walked ahead of the Black union brother and me and kept their eyes on us for security. When we went back to the barber shop, our representative in New Orleans had called on the phone and left word with the

How did  
L & G.?  
Name?

barber for our delegation to leave that Ku Klux Klan town before dark for our safety.

The next day, on Friday, so-called justice was carried out; O. C. Jugger was executed.

*Albert Jones*

Later, after the execution of O. C. Jugger, one of our attorneys who defended him was visiting his <sup>own</sup> mother in the country in the South. Someone shot him three times with a .22 rifle. He was hospitalized at the Charity Hospital in New Orleans. Often I went to visit him in the hospital. Finally, he recovered and continued in the union and civil rights, fighting for the rights of the poor ~lack people in the South.

*name?  
race?*

The Louisiana Civil Rights Congress tried to help anyone who was seeking our help. We heard about a lady in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, who was seeking our help, so I sent her a letter. The letter read: "Mrs. Bailey, the Louisiana Civil Rights Congress has heard about you from our national office in New York and we are interested in helping you, if we can. Since our office is in the South, it will be easier for us to get in touch with you than for New York to send someone down from the North. Now, we want you to send us more information about your brother and his wife. Please answer the following questions: What was the charge they were convicted of. Was it murder, robbery, rape, or what? Who was the lawyer who defended them? When were they arrested, when tried, when convicted? Do you have newspaper clippings about the case and will you send them to us? Could you or some other relative come to New Orleans later on and tell us all about the case? If we can get more information about the case, so we can know whether or not we can

*sr?*

*what happened?*

COPY

August 8, 1951

Mrs. L. M. Bailey  
216 Coy Street  
Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Dear Mrs. Bailey:

The Louisiana Civil Rights Congress has heard about you from our national office in New York, and we are interested in helping you if we can. Since our office is in the South, it will be easier for us to get in touch with you than for New York to send someone down from up north.

Now, we want you to send us more information about your brother, James A. Hall, and his wife. Please answer the following questions:

1. ~~What was the charge they were convicted of? (Was it murder or robbery or rape or the like?)~~
2. ~~Who was the lawyer who defended them? What is his address?~~
3. What was the date of the trial? When were they arrested, when tried, when convicted.
4. Do you have newspaper clippings about the case, and will you send them to us?
5. Could you, or some other relative, come to New Orleans later on and tell us all about the case?

If we can get more information about the case, so we can know whether we can help or not, we will be very glad.

Very truly yours,

Lee Brown, Acting Executive Secretary  
Louisiana Civil Rights Congress

help, we will be very glad." I signed the letter: "Very truly yours, Lee Brown, Acting Executive Secretary, Louisiana Civil Rights Congress."

When I sent this letter and I didn't get an answer from the person, I thought maybe someone opened all their mail and they hadn't received that particular letter. I wouldn't have been too surprised, because the FBI opened all my personal mail, and union mail, and letters containing civil rights issues on different people. Sometimes the FBI would wait at the post office when my secretary went to pick up the mail. The FBI told the secretary that they were FBI and that she should show them the mail. This is what they did. Anyway, after I didn't get any answer, all I could do was close the case.

details

Why  
thought  
so?  
Mrs. Simms  
got info  
from  
online  
there

McGee A Black man who lived in Laurel, Mississippi, named Willie McGhee, was in trouble with the authorities of that city, who claimed he raped a white woman. The Civil Rights' Congress in New York was handling this case at the time. Since the Civil Rights Congress in New Orleans was closer to Laurel, Mississippi, I was asked if I would get in touch with Dr. Harvey to work with us on this case.

yes?

Billard  
Dillon University

Dr. Harvey was a teacher at a Black university (SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY) in New Orleans. First, a defense committee involving the union and people of the community was set up. Dr. Harvey worked along with the union. Dr. Harvey asked me, "Would you go to Laurel, Mississippi and take Mrs. McGhee (Willie McGhee's mother) a bus ticket directly to her home?" The committee meeting for Willie McGhee's defense was being held in New Orleans.

Every precaution was being taken to keep Mrs. McGhee from being followed and attacked by reactionary white people in Laurel.

By taking a bus ticket directly to Mrs. McGhee's home, we could prevent her from having to go to the bus station to buy a ticket.

Mississippi was dangerous for strangers to travel through, especially if you are a Black person. Therefore, taking this under consideration, I discussed matters with my girlfriend. She pleaded with me not to travel in a small town in Mississippi at that time. Despite all my girlfriend's pleading, I told her that this was extremely important, because it was a struggle for Black people throughout the Deep South and I must go contact Mrs. McGhee and buy a bus ticket, so she could come to New Orleans to attend a meeting to be held that coming Friday night.

course?

I bought a ticket for Laurel and took the train that Wednesday at 8:00 am. Someone in New Orleans had notified Mrs. McGhee in advance about the nature of my visit. Every possible precaution had been taken, so I wouldn't get hurt or draw suspicion from anyone in Laurel, Mississippi. When I arrived at the station in Laurel, quite a few poor Black people were standing in the station. When I got off the train, all eyes seemed to be on me. I felt these people knew I was a stranger in town. Each one seemed frightened, as though they wanted to tell me: "Go back where you came from, it's not safe here." But no one said one word to me in the station.

Outside a cab driver was standing on the outside waiting. He asked if I was the fellow from New Orleans to see Mrs. McGhee. I told him yes. I got in the cab and he drove me to Mrs. McGhee's home. My plans were to catch the next train back to New Orleans. Dr. Harvey told me that if I wasn't back in New Orleans at 10:00 pm that night, he would call to see if I had arrived safely; if not, he would call

the FBI to investigate to find out what happened. I arrived at Mr. and Mrs. McGhee's home. After an introduction, I didn't tell them I was from the Civil Rights Congress. Instead I told them I was from the union in New Orleans. The reason was that we found out that Mr. McGhee, Willie McGhee's father, was giving out information about Willie McGhee's case to the authorities in Mississippi. I was careful in discussing the case, because he couldn't be trusted.

Mrs. McGhee gave me a great deal of information about the case. Later, some friends of Mrs. McGhee came to her house to talk with me. I didn't discuss the case with her friends, but I talked on other issues like the civil rights struggle. The main issue I spoke on was Jim Crowism in the South and how white oppressors were causing this Jim Crow system, which was keeping workers divided and also from organizing into unions.

When my discussion with Mrs. McGhee's friends ended it was time to go back to New Orleans. I went to the bus station and bought Mrs. McGhee a ticket to New Orleans. I wasn't under the suspicion of anyone in the station. I told Mrs. McGhee that when she got on the bus, not to talk to anyone about where she was going. During that time the cab driver gave me his name and phone number, so he could come to the station and pick me up at a certain time. When I called the cab driver at that time, he told me we had to wait until the train whistle blew. Then he would take me to the station for security reasons and because I was a stranger in town. Everything went along as planned. I was back home in New Orleans at 10:00 o'clock that night.

Mrs. Mcghee arrived in New Orleans on a Friday. Immediately Mrs. Mcghee was sent to a private home for security, where she stayed until the time for the meeting.

'The Willie Mcghee Defense Fund meeting was held in the community center. At eight o'clock Mrs. Mcghee was brought to the meeting. A large number of people came to hear Mrs. Mcghee speak about her son. Before the meeting started, Mrs. Mcghee and I were seated on the platform. My job that night was to be a bodyguard for Mrs. Mcghee.

Despite the tight security and secrecy in communication, the plans about Willie Mcghee's defense leaked out. Two plain clothes detectives found out about the meeting and were sitting in the audience. Some white workers found out about the detectives presence and passed the word down. The ~~one~~ who was in charge of the meeting advised Mrs. Mcghee not to speak too much about the case, because the detective was in the audience. Several spoke on Willie Mcghee's case. Some speakers came from the civil rights organization, some from labor, and I spoke on the case also. Before Mrs. Mcghee spoke, we collected donations for Willie Mcghee's defense fund.

Dr. Johnson

My subject was the struggle of Black workers in the South. I called for freedom and complete emancipation for the workingclass as a whole.

Mrs. Mcghee's message was brave and strong. She told everyone to keep up the good work and continue fighting for the rights of the poor people, because the people would win.

Newsreporters were present at the meeting. Pictures were

taken of Mrs McGhee and all the people on the platform and the audience. After the meeting Mrs. McGhee was taken back to a secure place to spend the night. The next morning Mrs. McGhee went back home to Mississippi.

After this period, I was no longer able to be involved in the case. I was facing problems and had to take extreme precautions, so, I didn't know the outcome of the Willie McGhee case.

outcome of case  
what problem? LN  
Friday?

Subj: Reflections on Black History # 40: Fourth Cook on a Railroad Diner  
Date: 98-06-22 02:19:47 EDT  
From: Flemingf  
To: Sunreport  
BCC: BlkSchlr

6-21-98

Dear Editors and Readers,

Thomas Fleming's story has now reached his railroad years, when he worked for the Southern Pacific from 1927 to 1932, traveling all over the West Coast and as far east as Chicago. His stories are not just about railroads; they include his observations about black life in all the cities he visited, the labor movement, and the main historical events that took place during this period.

You are welcome to reprint these columns or post them on a website with no restrictions. Thank you for your continued support of this project. Fleming receives a lot of email, and responds to every one.

Sincerely,

Max Millard  
Assistant to Thomas Fleming

REFLECTIONS ON BLACK HISTORY

By Thomas C. Fleming

Column 40: Fourth Cook on a Railroad Diner

The growth of the American railway system during the last days of the 19th century saw an ever-growing number of black men, and some black women, among the hundreds of thousands who worked for the railroads.

In the South, they not only served in the stewards department, but laid track and worked as locomotive engineers, firemen, brakemen and conductors. This ended when the Big Four train unions, which represented these four professions, became established on virtually all American railroads in the early 20th century and excluded blacks from membership.

After that, blacks were confined to being porters, dining car crew, maintenance workers in the railroad yards and redcap porters who worked the terminals in most towns in America. The baggage handlers were called redcaps because of their distinctive head

RECEIVED JUN 22 1998

RECEIVED JUN 22 1998

Ask L. K. about  
this?  
Research?

gear, which was usually a cap with a red top.

The Pullman Company, which operated the Pullman sleeping cars, hired the porters, maids and barbers for their cars, plus the attendants who worked in the club cars and the observation cars, which were found on all of the fast luxury trains. The observation cars, located on the rear of the train, had an outside platform with chairs for anyone who wished to have an outside-the-car look at the country as the train sped on toward its destination.

When I was hired by the Southern Pacific Railroad in Oakland, California in 1927, diesel trains were still in the future, and the old reliable steam hog was still the pride of the rail lines. The diesels did not completely replace the steam locomotives until the 1950s.

As the fourth cook on a dining car, I was primarily the dishwasher, but I had to peel potatoes, clean vegetables, and help with whatever the chef or second cook asked me to do. They'd put you on the frying pan sometimes; they were supposed to be teaching you how to become a cook. Then you got promoted to third cook, second cook, and eventually chef.

When I entered the dining car for the first time, the chef gave me a white jacket, checkered trousers and white cap that cooks wear. Then he sent me to the commissary with a waiter to get supplies for the diner.

As I walked through the railroad yard in West Oakland, I saw the sleeping cars, chair cars, diners, club cars, observation cars and baggage cars being prepared for departure.

There were hundreds of men and women maintenance workers, primarily black, swarming all over and inside the cars, getting them ready for their next trip to distant cities. Some were hosing the cars down or cleaning them with long-handle brushes. Others were examining the wheels and pouring oil inside the wheel boxes.

Some were icing the car up, by placing ice in containers at the top of the cars. Others were bringing in coal, which they put in the bunkers in the kitchens. Others were sweeping the cars inside, using vacuum cleaners to pick up dust on the felt-covered seats, or bringing linen to the Pullman sleeping cars. It was all very new and exciting to me.

The commissary was like a combination warehouse and kitchen, which supplied all the dining cars leaving Oakland and San Francisco. We loaded the food into a big two-wheel hand truck. The food on trains was much better and more plentiful, and with more variety of menus than you have now. The Southern Pacific had everything the public would get in luxury hotels – fresh green vegetables, milk in 10-gallon cans, cases of eggs, three kinds of fish, shrimp, and sometimes oysters and lobsters.

The Southern Pacific prepared everything in advance. It packaged a special flour mix for biscuits and shortcake, and another one for hotcakes. All you had to do was add some milk and stir it together. For bran muffins, they would grind up black figs and put it all through the mixture. They gave us a lot of pie dough at the commissary, but we had to know how to make it ourselves in case we ran out.

The beef was in huge slabs; the chef would cut out the different steaks and prime ribs. They had pork chops, lamb chops, filet mignon and chateaubriand. The meat for hamburger was ground up with a hand operated meat grinder. When chickens were boiled for chicken salad or chicken fricassee, the stock was placed in gallon cans and saved for making sauces and gravy.

The kitchen had a big charcoal broiler and a coal-burning range, with a coal bin between them. There was a dishwashing machine with an electric motor.

The chef took me over to a large grindstone in the railroad yard and began to teach me how to sharpen the knives. Most cooks had their own personal kitchen knives and huge forks. They were very professional, and were capable of working in any fine restaurant in the country. But most fine restaurants wouldn't hire black chefs.

I soon learned that the well-heeled passengers did not attempt to learn the names of the porters or waiters while traveling. They apparently assumed that all of the porters bore the name George, after George Pullman, the manufacturer of the sleeping car. All porters and waiters were addressed simply as "George." This senseless name-providing by white travelers seemed to rile some black employees, especially the chefs.

Most chefs mocked the waiters and porters by calling them "George" in the most disdainful manner. Some waiters resisted this and engaged in short debates with anyone from the kitchenside who called them "George." The chef on my first trip took pride in

the fact that he did not have to depend on tips from the traveling public to earn a living.

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Copyright 1998 by Thomas C. Fleming. At 90, Fleming continues to write each week for the Sun-Reporter, San Francisco's African American weekly, which he co-founded in 1944. A 48-page book of his early stories and photos is available for \$3, or a 90-minute audiotape for \$5, including postage. Send mailing address to [tflemingsf@aol.com](mailto:tflemingsf@aol.com).

(Note: a JPEG photo, titled 40train.jpg, is available to accompany this week's column. Caption: Southern Pacific dining car, 1945. Chef Melvin Pierson (center), Cannis Elie (l.) and Oliver Medlock (r.) prepare for rush of patrons as the "Daylight" prepares to pull out of San Francisco for Los Angeles. Photo courtesy of David Perata, author of "Those Pullman Blues.")