

CARTON 833

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

MANUSCRIPT DRAFTS, CHAPTER 9

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To be
Get summary
of trial &
appeal decision
p. 8, 13
Spelling of names
Texas, p. 14

CHAPTER 9: TRIAL AND IMPRISONMENT

(1/23/99 Version 4; revised using 1/22 & 1/29 interview material)

Brother Nelson passed, and the next thing I was subpoenaed. The government had decided to concentrate on the ILWU in the South. They didn't want that union there. That's the whole thing. After Nelson's conviction they thought about bringing me up on state charges (Louisiana had a law requiring members of the Communist Party to register with the Department of Safety), but they would have had to charge the stool pigeons that testified against Nelson, too. [cf New Orleans Item, 9/11/56] So instead the House Un-American Activity Committee came after me. I'd gotten word that they was gonna investigate me, the Un-American Activity Committee. 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, February 15, 1957.

This old doctor from the Charity Hospital, who was a member of the Party (Dr. William Sorum? see HUAC transcript), he was called before the Committee the same day. He was a stool pigeon and he said to me, "Let's go along with them, cooperate with them." I said "Man cooperate with 'em for what? I ain't did nothing." "I'm gonna cooperate with them," he said. I say, "That's you. Don't come tell what to do. I ain't gonna hand nothing over to them." See, they was trying to kill two birds with one stone. They was gonna try to get the International through me. But I didn't cooperate. They

thought I was a troublemaker, they didn't know I was a troubleshooter!

I ain't had a damn thing to tell them! Tell them what? I wasn't going to admit to nothing. Hell, I wanted to make a statement! That was the tactic I used. I said I wanted to make a statement first. They wouldn't let me make a statement so I wasn't gonna cooperate with them. I wanted to know was Senator Eastland a member of the Klan. Hell, they wanted to ask me what I belonged to, but I wanted to know what Eastland belonged to! That was the statement I wanted to make. I wanted to throw that monkey wrench in there. I don't remember where I got that idea from, but I came up with something for them! I blocked them -- they wouldn't let me make my statement, so that gave me reason not to answer their questions. I got as much right to know about Eastland as he got to know about me. Shit, I don't care who he represents! That's the reason I refused to answer, let them know all blacks folks wasn't afraid of their bullshit. They asked me over fifty questions, and I refused to answer them. I told them, "Until I be able to make a statement."

The man what supposed to be the chairman jumped down and ran all around the damn chair. Shit, I just rolled back in my chair like I wasn't thinking about him. He was talking about , "You don't scare me!" I said "You don't scare me either!" They figured they'd come down South and try to make a fool of out a black man. Try to make me act like a Uncle Tom, scratching my head. They didn't know I was ready for their asses! I'd had me a half-pint of Granddad that morning and I was ready. I was looking good, too. Even the guy on

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They brought Arthur Eugene there to testify against me. He said I was a member of the Party. I knew him from back in the 40s when he got kicked out of the National Maritime Union and he used to hang around Local 207 looking for work. Arthur Eugene was sitting in front of me, and I was sitting behind him in a big chair, like a king. (And with that half pint in me I felt like a king!) They told him point me out, and he turned around and pointed his finger at me and said "That's him." That picture was in the papers the next day. First time I ever seed a black man on the front page of the paper.

I don't know if they paid Arthur Eugene for his spying or what. I know they did pay him for testifying at the hearing. In fact, to my surprise, they sent me a check for being at the hearing that Friday. They sent me \$25. I thought, "What kind of shit is this!" They probably had that check made out already, thought I was gonna collaborate with them.

After the Un-American Activity hearing I thought it was all over with. I happened to go to James McCain, the lawyer's office one morning. I was in that area, and I stopped. He said, "Brown, you walking around here? You have been indicted." I thought he was kidding cause he used to kid with me a lot. 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 officer." He said, "They claim that when you signed that non-Communist affidavit, you was a member of the Communist Party." I said, "I was not."

I was indicted March 7, 1957 and served with a subpoena, but it was mailed to the wrong address. Then on March 29th I reported to sign up for my unemployment insurance. I was served with the subpoena there at the office to appear before the judge the same afternoon to post bond. I was unable to obtain \$5,000 bond and I was held until Monday, April 1st when Dr. Obrey (Aubrey?) Johnson posted the bond. I heard the bond money came from the ILWU in San Francisco. In the meantime the Division of Unemployment rejected my claim because they said that I was not available for work March 29th. I told them what happened, that I was picked up at the Unemployment office that morning, the 29th. I was arrested later that same day. But it didn't make no difference to them.

I fought to the best of my ability, with some support from unions, individuals, church members, some other trade unions, even some Catholic priests helped me. Some black Catholics helped me. Some visited where I was in jail before I went to trial. I was proud to be a member of the ILWU, one of the few unions where Negroes had full emancipation and shared leadership responsibility with white workers. Anti-Communists like Eastland did everything they could to destroy the union. What they was doing was unfair. I figured there wasn't no reason for me to be going to trial. For what? Because I was trade union man and when they brought me before the Un-American Activity Committee I refused to answer their questions? I wasn't in

the Party no more. We'd gotten orders not to pay no more dues, we was out of the Party.

After Andrew Steve Nelson died I had a dream one night about him. He was sitting in the chair in my room. He told me to get away cause they'd come and get me. It wasn't two weeks after that until they got me before the Un-American Activity Committee. The next thing I was indicted.

When I was out on bail before I went on trial I met this guy from Cuba, a brother. We talked about my case and I told him that if I went to jail I couldn't get no more than five years. He told me, "Hell, I wouldn't give up five minutes for these people!" He made me feel kinda bad. He said he could get me on the sea train going over to Cuba. Maybe he was right. I thought about all the work I had done in the trade union movement and civil rights and now this was what they was trying to do to me. Make me sacrifice five years! It made me mad, but I decided to stay here. The Cuban brother stayed a few days and helped me to put together some flyers and things about my case, then he left. I thought a lot about what the Cuban brother said, and I thought about that dream where Nelson told me to get to stepping.

When they was going to arraign me in October I decided to jump bail. I had this lawyer who had been appointed by the judge until I could get my own lawyer. I told the lawyer what I planned to do. He didn't say nothing much. They had kept postponing the thing and I thought maybe they wouldn't even look for me. Some people said they just wanted me out of New Orleans.

So I went to Hitchcock, Texas, and stayed with my Cousin Celie and her husband. I got a job at the cotton compress loading bails of cotton on to a truck.

After about a month the FBI caught up with me one night at my cousin's house. They knocked on the door and when I opened it a black deputy asked me was I Lee Brown, and when I said yes he told me I was under arrest. They let me go back in the house to put on some clothes. For a minute I thought about going out the back door but something told me not to do it. The next day after they put me in Galveston jail the newspaper said they had the house surrounded by FBI agents. Good thing I didn't go out they back, they would have killed me.

They took me to the jail in Houston where they kept me four or five days. I started talking to the brothers in the jail and made friends. I found out that the black folks, the young black folks, was not scared of the word "Communist." They'd read it in the paper. Some of them asked 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, for trade unions, decent home, decent education, decent jobs, and definitely get rid of race discrimination. In those times we would call it segregation and Jim Crow.

So I made friends, and they hated to see me go the morning when the marshalls come to get me. It made me feel good. The brothers was clapping, saying, "Good luck, Brother. Good luck." I liked talking to them. They would come in and talk and one by one ask me questions. I met all kinds. Some in there for murder, all

kinds of crimes. I talked with them and they accepted my advice. It give me strength, give me courage. It was bit of love and respect from my people.

They took me back to New Orleans and put me in the parish prison until the time for my trial.

They finally brought me to trial on March 24th in front of Judge Skelly Wright. I was charged on two counts of filing a false affidavit saying that I was not a member of the Communist Party in July, 1952. The Taft-Hartley law said that you could not be a member of the Communist Party and an officer of a labor union at the same time. If they convicted me on both counts, I could get 10 years in prison and a \$20,000 fine.

At first there was one black person on the jury, a female. The District Attorney got her off, so it was an all-white jury. I was in court a whole week for the trial testimony. By then I had new attorneys appointed by the court, Edward Koch, James McGovern and Earl Amedee, a brother. My attorneys decided that I should not testify. They thought they could make the case without having me testify.

They first brought in a black woman by the name of Gladys Williams. She said I was a member of the Communist Party. Now I used to go to her house and sit down and we talked and had a few drinks, but we never did discuss political affairs. She was asking me about the Nation of Islam. We talked about Elijah Muhammad and black history, but we never did bring up the political issue or discuss the Communist Party. Still she said that I was a member of the Party. I knew her husband a long time ago. He belonged to the

Progressive Party during 1948 and the Henry A. Wallace campaign, which I worked on. I heard they later separated. Maybe she was snitching on him.

Then they brought in a Chinese guy to testify against me. I never had seen but one Chinese in New Orleans, and that was on the dock where he was running a restaurant. But they found 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. I'd never seen him before.

Finally they brought in Arthur Eugene to testify against me. He said I was in the Communist Party. They asked him how he knew I was a member of the Party and he said he used to attend meetings with me. He said we used to have meetings standing in the street. "You don't know those Communists," he said, "they meet standing in the street!" Hell, he was lying so bad! They was fools to listen to his lies. To tell the truth, Arthur Eugene surprised me. I thought about how I had tried to help him years before when he got kicked out of the Maritime Union and needed work. I used to tell Miss Sims to give him a few dollars so he could buy cigarettes. I helped him find some jobs. I got the superintendent at the barge line to give him work cause I knew Eugene had a family. I didn't think he would do what he did to me. After the trial Eugene's wife was so disgusted that she quit him, and his mother didn't want him to come to her house no more.

During the trial I noticed that Mr. Mooney from the barge line was there every day. I guess he was watching to see what would happen to me cause I gave him so much hell!

INSERT SUMMARY OF TRIAL TESTIMONY HERE FROM TRANSCRIPT
AND NEWSPAPER QUOTES

They found me guilty at the end of the trial. Judge Skelly Wright said, "I'm going to give you three years on each count but I'm going to run them concurrent. You only have to serve three." They sent me back to the parish prison there in New Orleans, and I stayed there until they came to get me. 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. I was in a cell all alone.

During the trial while I was stayed at the Parish jail they didn't allow me to see no one, even when I went to the shower. 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! Especially if you're black, you're dangerous! But I spoke that night to a lot of the inmates. I had made quite a few friends cause during the time when I was going to trial, it would come on the radio inside the jail. And all the inmates there would clap for it and wish me good luck cause I was standing up fighting for the rights of my people and working people as a true trade unionist. They knew I wanted to see better conditions. I wanted to see better health conditions. I wanted to see better houses, better hospitals, better schools, better education for our people, 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.

After I talked that night there was 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. I said, "Let him talk. Let him bring it out." He clapped his hands after he couldn't get out what he wanted to say, he just, he clapped. Other brothers in there clapped with him. I learned that they were not afraid, like I had learned in Houston.

After that they taken me to Galveston. We laid over a night and a day in Galveston, and then went on to Texarkana prison.

AT TEXARKANA

When I arrived at Texarkana 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 was kind of old He said, "I'm fixin' to retire." I was talking to him about a new trial. My attorneys, James McGovern and Earl Amedee, had filed for a new trial. The officer advised me, he said, "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." He said, "You don't have too much time left, all but three years. Do these three years. I would just advise you cause I've been around these institutions, and I have some knowledge." The motion for a new trial was rejected, but my lawyers filed an appeal.

When I first arrived at Texarkana they put me in solitary confinement for 30 days. They gave a book of rules and regulations to study.

When they released me from solitary, I didn't have no real problems. In fact, that prison was like a school. I started going to the library and reading. I enrolled in some classes and eventually got my high school diploma.

I did a lot of reading, going into different subjects -- the labor movement, the religious movement, the political movement. I had taken up reading a large book they called Social Science Encyclopedia. That covered everything dealing with human beings -- 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. I would study history, some black history that I would find in the institution. Not very much. But I studied labor history there. Not the kind that I was able to get on the outside. Political history. I studied about communism, socialism. And it was very interesting. I learned a lot and studied 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. I studied and I put down notes. They had a young fellow there from New Orleans. He worked also in the education department. He knew how to use the typewriter. I asked him would he 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. In some ways that prison was the best school I ever went to.

One time they threw me in segregation, solitary. They said I was causing some kind of conflict, trouble. I was talking, discussing with some of the other inmates. We was discussing different issues, when a guard walked up. About six of us was sitting on the grass discussing. Some other men was playing baseball. The six of us was concerned with discussing issues that was confronting us when one of the guards walked up. We was discussing our own opinions about the conditions that we was living in, the conditions that we was confronted with outside, and why it was so many of us black people in the city jails, and the state prisons and the federal institutions.

Then this guard walked up and broke in and said, "How's the weather? How you all fellows doing today?" One of the young men say, "It's cloudy." He didn't know I had some Masonic knowledge and I understood that symbolic talk. Him saying it's cloudy meant that somebody in there was bad news, that they was talking against the system. I realized then that he was an informer. He just pretended to be interested in what we was saying so that he could inform on us.

The next morning, one of the guards came to my cell and blew his whistle and said, "Brown, now, all the way out." They was going to take me out. He said, "You going this morning. We're going to

put you in the segregation." I guess they decided I was stirring up trouble. They locked me in a cell by myself.

While I was in segregation one of the inmates come by who was a trustee. He said, "You need any books or whatever you need, commissary, just let me know, I got the slips. I'll put it down, you sign the slip and I'll bring it to you, your books and anything you need from the commissary." So the segregation was not so bad. The worst thing about segregation was that I couldn't go out on the yard.

After a while they let me work in the garden. There was a little garden that they had on the outside. I had taken up vegetable growing. I got some books on that. I wanted to study vegetables because in my studies and research I begin to learn that vegetables was similar to humans. They had to have a food, water, and oxygen, same as the human being. I said if I studied vegetable life, I can have greater knowledge of human life. So I taken it up and completed it, and I received a certificate for vegetable growing. It was after this that I took up general education, and I got my high school diploma.

I was imprisoned at Texarkana over two years, from Spring of 1958 to July 1960. (And I was in prison from the time I was brought back from Texas in November, 1957 through the time of my trial.) Finally came the day when I was released. My attorneys had won the appeal. The appeal court ruled that Judge Skelly Wright had made an error in his charge to the jury and my conviction was reversed.

(INSERT QUOTES FROM APPEAL DECISION) About five days before I was to be released they called me in 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. The chief classification and parole officer, I think his name was Mr. Anderson, he said, "We'll take you to the bus station in Texarkana and put you on the bus for Hitchcock, Texas" They give me my ticket and a change of clothes.

One thing they did not give me was my notes from my reading. They said you could take notes, but now when I got ready to go, I had to bring my notes. Now it tells you right in the little booklet they give you when you arrive that you can bring out notes or even your life story when you are released from prison. But when I went back before the warden, he looked at my notes and said, "You can't take this with you." He said it would cause trouble if I took my notes, so he kept them. That made me mad but there wasn't anything I could do about it.

They released me on July 12, 1960. They asked if I had any relations that would take me in while I did some parole time. I told them about my cousins in Hitchcock. They wrote my cousin Celie's husband -- we called him Boss -- and asked him would they take me in for a while. He wrote back and said yes.

When I got to Hitchcock, Texas, I went over to my cousin Celie's house, and I knocked on the door. They was so glad to see me. But my cousin Celie, had had a stroke. They was supposed to come up to the institution on that Saturday to get me, but that Friday another cousin had an automobile accident and got killed. They was very close together and when Cousin Celie was told about the accident she had a stroke and never said another word. When I went to the house they asked her, "Do you know who this is?" She

began to laugh and smile. Indeed, she knew who I was cause our family was very close.

So I stayed at Celie's house. 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 Lamar ~~(sp?)~~, some in Texarkana. I went around and I visited those I had scattered all over Texas -- Port Arthur, Houston, Beaumont. I let them know that I was back, and all of them was glad to see me. (OK)

I stayed there a while, about a month or so. I worked and helped cousin Boss and cousin Celie cause they needed help. I prepared her food. She had to eat liquid food. While Boss was gone to work, he was glad for me to be there to help her. I was glad to do it because they had helped me. Sometimes I would go and stay with one of my other cousins like Aunt Bernice. I could do that cause cousin Celie had quite a few friends and relatives who would be there all the time. Her daughter would stay there at night. So I could help take care of her, and go back and forth to see other folks as well. I was trying to do the best I could with what I had.

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They finally brought me to trial on March 24th in front of Judge Skelly Wright. I was charged on two counts of filing a false affidavit saying that I was not a member of the Communist Party in July, 1952. The Taft-Hartley law said that you could not be a member of the Communist Party and an officer of a labor union at the same time. If they convicted me on both counts, I could get 10 years in prison and a \$20,000 fine.

At first there was one black person on the jury, a female. The District Attorney got her off, so it was an all-white jury. I was in court a whole week for the trial testimony. By then I had new attorneys appointed by the court, Edward Koch, James McGovern and Earl Amedee, a brother. My attorneys decided that I should not testify. (WHY NOT?) ✓

They first brought in a black woman by the name of Clara (Gladys Williams?). She said I was a member of the Communist Party. Now I used to go to her house and sit down and we talked and had a few drinks, but we never did discuss political affairs. She was asking me about the Nation of Islam. We talked about Elijah Muhammad and black history, but we never did bring up the political issue or discuss the Communist Party. Still she said that I was a member of the Party. I knew her husband a long time ago. He belonged to the Progressive Party during 1948 and the Henry A.

Wallace campaign, which I worked on. I heard they later separated. Maybe she was snitching on him.

Then they brought in a Chinese guy to testify against me. I never had seen but one Chinese in New Orleans, and that was on the dock where he was running a restaurant. But they found 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. I'd never seen him before.

Finally they brought in Arthur Eugene to testify against me. He said I was in the Communist Party. They asked him how he knew I was a member of the Party and he said he used to attend meetings with me. He said we used to have meetings standing in the street. "You don't know those Communists," he said, "they meet standing in the street!" Hell, he was lying so bad! They was fools to listen to his lies. To tell the truth, Arthur Eugene surprised me. I thought about how I had tried to help him years before when he got kicked out of the Maritime Union and needed work. I used to tell Miss Sims to give him a few dollars so he could buy cigarettes. I helped him find some jobs. I got the superintendent at the barge line to give him work cause I knew Eugene had a family. I didn't think he would do what he did to me. After the trial Eugene's wife was so disgusted that she quit him, and his mother didn't want him to come to her house no more.

During the trial I noticed that Mr. Mooney from the barge line was there every day. I guess he was watching to see what would happen to me cause I gave him so much hell!

INSERT SUMMARY OF TRIAL TESTIMONY HERE

Also quote
from newspaper

They found me guilty at the end of the trial. Judge Skelly Wright said, "I'm going to give you three years on each count but I'm going to run them concurrent. You only have to serve three." They sent me back to the parish prison there in New Orleans, and I stayed there until they came to get me. 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. I was in a cell all alone.

During the trial while I was stayed at the Parish jail they didn't allow me to see no one, even when I went to the shower. 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! Especially if you're black, you're dangerous! But I spoke that night to a lot of the inmates. I had made quite a few friends cause during the time when I was going to trial, it would come on the radio inside the jail. And all the inmates there would clap for it and wish me good luck cause I was standing up fighting for the rights of my people and working people as a true trade unionist. They knew I wanted to see better conditions. I wanted to see better health conditions. I wanted to see better houses, better hospitals, better schools, better education for our people, 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.

After I talked that night there was 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. I said, "Let him talk. Let him bring it out." He clapped his hands after he couldn't get out what he wanted to say, he just, he clapped. Other brothers in there clapped with him. I learned that they were not afraid, like I had learned in Houston.

After that they taken me to Galveston. We laid over a night and a day in Galveston, and then went on to Texarkana prison.

AT TEXARKANA

When I arrived at Texarkana 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 was kind of old He said, "I'm fixin' to retire." I was talking to him about a new trial. My attorneys, James McGovern and Earl Amedee, had filed for a new trial. The officer advised me, he said, "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." He said, "You don't have too much time left, all but three years. Do these three years. I would just advise you cause I've been around these institutions, and I have some knowledge." The motion for a new trial was rejected, but my lawyers filed an appeal.

When I first arrived at Texarkana they put me in solitary confinement for 30 days. They gave a book of rules and regulations to study.

When they released me from solitary, I didn't have no real problems. In fact, that prison was like a school. I started going to the library and reading. I enrolled in some classes and eventually got my high school diploma.

I did a lot of reading, going into different subjects -- the labor movement, the religious movement, the political movement. I had taken up reading a large book they called Social Science Encyclopedia. That covered everything dealing with human beings -- 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. I would study history, some black history that I would find in the institution. Not very much. But I studied labor history there. Not the kind that I was able to get on the outside. Political history. I studied about communism, socialism. And it was very interesting. I learned a lot and studied 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. I studied and I put down notes. They had a young fellow there from New Orleans. He worked also in the education department. He knew how to use the typewriter. I asked him would he 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. In some ways that prison was the best school I ever went to.

One time they threw me in segregation, solitary. They said I was causing some kind of conflict, trouble. I was talking, discussing with some of the other inmates. We was discussing different issues, when a guard walked up. About six of us was sitting on the grass discussing. Some other men was playing baseball. The six of us was concerned with discussing issues that was confronting us when one of the guards walked up. We was discussing our own opinions about the conditions that we was living in, the conditions that we was confronted with outside, and why it was so many of us black people in the city jails, and the state prisons and the federal institutions. The guard broke in ^{and} said, "How's the weather? How you all fellows doing today?"

One of the young men say, "It's cloudy." As I had some Masonic knowledge, I understood that symbolic talk. That meant that somebody was in there that was talking things that ^{against the system} ~~he was not~~ allowed to talk. ^{He was an inmate} The next morning, one of the guards blew his whistle and said, "Brown, now, all the way out." They was going to take me out. He said, "You going this morning. We're going to put you in the segregation." I guess they decided I was stirring up trouble. They locked me in a cell by myself.

While I was in segregation one of the inmates come by who was a trustee. He said, "You need any books or whatever you need, commissary, just let me know, I got the slips. I'll put it down, you sign the slip and I'll bring it to you your books." So the ^{and say they got me}

segregation was not so bad. The worst thing about segregation was that I couldn't go out on the yard.

After a while they let me work in the garden. There was a little garden that they had on the outside. I had taken up vegetable growing. I got some books on that. I wanted to study vegetables because in my studies and research I begin to learn that vegetables was similar to humans. They had to have a food, water, and oxygen, same as the human being. I said if I studied vegetable life, I can have greater knowledge of human life. So I taken it up and completed it, and I received a certificate for vegetable growing. It was after this that I took up general education, and I got my high school diploma.

I was imprisoned at Texarkana over two years, from Spring of 1958 to July 1960. (And I was in prison from the time I was brought back from Texas in November, 1957 through the time of my trial.) Finally came the day when I was released. My attorneys had won the appeal. The appeal court ruled that Judge Skelly Wright had made an error in his charge to the jury and my conviction was reversed.

(INSERT QUOTES FROM APPEAL DECISION) About five days before I was to be released they called me in 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. The chief classification and parole officer, I think his name was Mr. Anderson, he said, "We'll take you to the bus station in Texarkana and put you on the bus for Hitchcock, Texas" They give me my ticket and a change of clothes.

One thing they did not give me was my notes from my reading. They said you could take notes, but now when I got ready to go, I

had to bring my notes. Now it tells you right in the little booklet they give you when you arrive that you can bring out notes or even your life story when you are released from prison. But when I went back before the warden, he looked at my notes and said, "You can't take this with you." He said it would cause trouble if I took my notes, so he kept them. That made me mad but there wasn't anything I could do about it.

They released me on July 11, 1960. I was released to the care of my cousins in Hitchcock. Before I was released, ^{they} I wrote my ^{OK} cousin Celie's husband, ~~Horace~~ ^{Horace}, and asked him would they take me in for a while. He wrote back and said yes. ^(CHECK) ^{They said I had to do some work}

When I got to Hitchcock, Texas, I went over to my cousin Celie's house, and I knocked on the door. They was so glad to see me. But my cousin Celie, had had a stroke. They was supposed to come up to the institution on that Saturday to get me, but that Friday another cousin had an automobile accident and got killed. They was very close together and when Cousin Celie was told about the accident she had a stroke and never said another word. When I went to the house they asked her, "Do you know who this is?" She began to laugh and smile. Indeed, she knew who I was cause our family was very close.

So I stayed at Celie's house. 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 Lamar (sp?), some in Texarkana. I went around and I visited those I had scattered all

over Texas -- Port Arthur, Houston, Beaumont. I let them know that I was back, and all of them was glad to see me.

I stayed there a while, about a month or so. I worked and helped cousin ^(M) Boss and cousin Celie cause they needed help. I prepared her food. She had to eat liquid food. While Boss was gone to work, he was glad for me to be there to help her. I was glad to do it because they had helped me. Sometimes I would go and stay with one of my other cousins like Aunt Bernice. I could do that cause cousin Celie had quite a few friends and relatives who would be there all the time. Her daughter would stay there at night. So I could help take care of her, and go back and forth to see other folks as well. I was trying to do the best I could with what I had.

RA copy

CHAPTER 9: TRIAL AND IMPRISONMENT

(8/29/98 Version 2)

Revised 11/23/99
Jimm 1/22
interview
muhaw

Brother Nelson passed, and the next thing I was subpoenaed. The government had decided to concentrate on the ILWU in the South. They didn't want that union there. That's the whole thing. So I was the next one they came after. I'd gotten word that they was gonna investigate me, the Un-American Activity Committee. 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, February 15, 1957.

Before the hearing this old doctor from the Charity Hospital, he was a stool pigeon and say to me, "Tell 'em, cooperate with them." I said "Man cooperate with 'em for what? I ain't did nothing." "I'm gonna cooperate with them," he said. I say, "That's you. Don't come tell what to do. I ain't gonna hand nothing over to them." See they was trying to kill two birds with one stone. They was gonna try to get the Intenational through me. But I didn't cooperate. They thought I was a troublemaker, they didn't know I was a troubleshooter!

How'd he
know do
Dustin?
from us
any?

I ain't had a damn thing to tell them! Tell them what? I wasn't going to admit to nothing. Hell, I wanted to make a statement! That was the tactic I used. I said I wanted to make a statement first. They wouldn't let me make a stement so I wasn't gonna cooperate with them. I wanted to know was Senator Eastland a member of the Klan. Hell, they wanted to ask me what I belonged to, but I wanted to know what Eastland belonged to! That was the statement I wanted to make. I wanted to throw that monkeywrench in there. I don't remember where I got that idea from, but I came up with something for them! I blocked them -- they wouldn't let me make my statement, so that gave me reason not to answer their questions. I got as much right to know about Eastland as he got to know about me. Shit, I don't care who he represents! That's the reason I refused to answer, let them know all blacks folks wasn't afraid of their bullshit. They asked me over fifty questions, and I refused to answer them. I told them, "Until I be able to make a statement."

The man what supposed to be the chairman jumped down and ran all around the damn chair. Shit, I just rolled back in my chair like I wasn't thinking about him. He was talking about , "You don't scare me!" I said "You don't scare me either!" They figured they'd come down South and try to make a fool of out a black man. Try to make me act like a Uncle Tom, scratching my head. They didn't know I was ready for their asses! I'd had me a half-pint of Grandad that morning and I was ready. I was looking good, too, well groomed! I had a ~~sharp~~ (Cobodi?) hair cut, I had on a steel-grey suit, black tie, white shirt, and black shoes. I didn't come there with one pants leg rolled up like I just came in off the farm.

They brought Arthur Eugene there to testify against me. He said I was a member of the Party. They asked him how he knew I was a member of the Party and he said he used to attend meetings with me. He said we used to have meetings standing in the street. "You don't know those Communists," he said, "they meet standing in the street!" Hell, he was lying so bad! They was fools to listen to his lies. Arthur Eugene was sitting in front of me, and I was sitting behind him in a big chair, like a king. (And with that half pint in me I felt like a king!) They told him point me out, and he turned around and pointed his finger at me and said "That's him." That picture was in the papers the next day. First time I ever seed a black man on the front page of the paper.

Arthur Eugene shocked me. I thought about how I had tried to help him years before. I didn't think he would do what he did. I don't know if they paid him for his spying or what. I know they did pay him for testifying at the hearing. In fact, to my surprise, they sent me a check for being at the hearing that Friday. They sent me \$25. I thought, "What kind of shit is this!" They probably had that check made out already, thought I was gonna collaborate with them.

After the hearing, when I was out on bail before I went on trial I rememeber this guy from Cuba, a brother. I told him that if I went to jail I couldn't get no more than five years. He told me, "Hell, I wouldn't give up five minutes for these people!" He made me feel kinda bad. He said he could get me on the sea train going over to Cuba. Maybe he was right. I thought about all the work I had done in the trade union movement and civil rights and now this was what they was trying to do to me. Make me sacrifice five years! It made me mad, but I decided to stay here. The Cuban brother stayed a few days and helped me to put together some flyers and things about my case, then he left.

After the Un-American Activity hearing I thought it was all over with. I happened to go to James McCain, the lawyer's office one morning. I was in that area, and I stopped. He said, "Brown, you walking around here? You have been indicted." I thought he was kidding cause he used to kid with me a lot. 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 officer." He said, "They claim that when you signed that ~~non~~-Communist affidavit, you was a member of the Communist Party." I said, "I was not."

I was indicted March 7, 1957 and served with a subpoena, but it was mailed to the wrong address. Then on March 29th I reported to sign up ^{for} my unemployment insurance. I was served with the subpoena there at the office to appear before the judge the same afternoon to post bond.

Dr. Henry Johnson arranged to get me
for trial

(HOW MUCH BONB??) I was unable to obtain bond and I was held until Monday, April 1st. In the meantime Division of Unemployment rejected my claim because they said that I was not available for work March 29th. I told them what happened, that I was picked up at the Unemployment office that morning, the 29th. I was arrested later that same day. But it ~~didn't~~ ~~different~~ make no difference to them.

I fought to the best of my ability, with some support from unions, individuals, church members, some other trade unions, even some Catholic priests helped me. Some black Catholics helped me. Some visited where I was in jail before I went to trial. (HOW LONG IN JAIL BEFORE TRIAL?) I was proud to be a member of the ILWU, one of the few unions where Negroes had full emancipation and shared leadership responsibility with white workers. Anti-Communists like Eastland did everthing they could to destroy the union.

They finally brought me to trial on November 4th in front of Judge Skelly Wright. At first there was one black person on the jury, a female. The District Attorney got her off, so it was an all-white jury. I was in court a whole week for the trial testimony. My attorney decided that I should not testify. (WHY NOT?) They brought in a Chinese guy to testify against me. I never had seen but one Chinese in New Orleans, and that was on the dock where he was running a restaurant. But they found 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. I'd never seen him before.

Then they brought in a sister by the name of Sister Clara. She said I was a member of the Communist Party. Now I used to go to her house and sit down and we talked and had a few drinks, but we never did discuss political affairs. She was asking me about the Nation of Islam. We talked about Elijah Muhammad and black history, but we never did bring up ^{any} the political issue or discuss the Communist Party. Still she said that I was a member of the Party. I knew her husband a long time ago. He belonged to the Progressive Party during 1948 and the Henry A. Wallace campaign, which I worked on.

They found me guilty at the end of the trial. I had already stayed in jail for most of the year before they brought me to trial. (CHECK THIS WITH LEE) Judge Skelly Wright said, "I'm going to give you five years on each count but I'm going to run them concurrent. You only have to serve five." (DID LEE GET CREDIT FOR THE TIME ALREADY SERVED IN JAIL?) They sent me back to the parish prison there in New Orleans, and I stayed there a until they come got me. 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. I was in a cell all alone.

LR failed to
show in court
4/11/57 and
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AK arrested
in Texas
late NOV. 21 1957

While I was there they didn't allow me to see no one, even when I went to the shower. 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! Especially if you're black, you're dangerous! But I spoke that night to a lot of the inmates. I made quite a few friends cause during the time when I was going to trial, it would come on the radio inside the jail. And all the inmates there would clap for it and wish me good luck cause I was standing up fighting for the rights of my people and working people as a true trade unionist. They knew I wanted to see better conditions. I wanted to see better health ^{conditions} meetings. I wanted to see better houses, better hospitals, better schools, better education for our people, 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.

After I talked that night there was 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. I said, "Let him talk. Let him bring it out." He clapped his hands after he couldn't get out what he wanted to say, he just, he clapped. Other brothers in there clapped with him. I learned that they were not afraid, like I had learned in Houston.

When they picked me up in Houston. (WHEN WAS THIS; WHAT HAD HAPPENED?) I happened 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 five days, and I was talking to the brothers in the place I went to. Made friends. I found out that the black folks, the young black folks, was not scared of the word "Communist." They'd read it in the paper. 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, for trade unions, decent homes, decent education, decent jobs, and definitely to get rid of race discrimination. In those times we would call it segregation and Jim Crow.

So I made friends, and they hated to see me go that morning (WAS THIS IN HOUSTON OR NEW ORLEANS?), when the marshalls come to get me. It made me feel good. The brothers was clapping, saying, "Good luck, Brother. Good luck." I liked to talk to them. They would come in and talk and one by one ask me questions. I met all kinds. Some in there for murder, all kind of crimes. I talked with them and they accepted my advice. It give me strength, give me courage. It was bit of love and respect from my people.

After that they taken me to Galveston. We laid over a night and a day in Galveston, and then went on to Texarkana.

Trial??

Need more details on
Arrival at Texarkana
and conditions

AT TEXARKANA

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 was kind of old. He said, "I'm fixin' to retire." I was talking to him about a new trial. My attorney had filed ^{for} a new trial. My attorney was Earl Amadie (WHAT HAPPEND TO MCCAIN?) The officer advised me, he said, "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." He said, "You don't have too much time left, ^{only about} ~~all but~~ three years. Do these three years. I would just advise you cause I've been around these institutions, and I have some knowledge." (WHAT HAPPENED TO THE REST OF THE FIVE YEAR SENTENCE?)

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. (LESS THAN ONE YEAR? THIS IS UNCLEAR) Then I'd have been free. They waited till the last minute when my time had got down very low. Time had got down very low. It was in the newspaper there - and the warden called me in, and during that period I was in segregation. They had separated me. They said I was causing some of the conflict; they claim we was talking, discussing. We was discussing different issues, when the officer walked up that day. About six of us setting on the grass discussing. Some men was playing ball. Some was playing baseball. Some of them playing body ball, and whatever. Six of us was concerned with discussing issues 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, "How's the weather? How you all fellows doing today?"

One of the young men say, "It's cloudy." As I had some Masonic knowledge, I understood that symbolic talk. That meant that somebody was in there that was talking things that he was not allowed to talk. We was discussing our own opinions about the condition that we was living in, the conditions that we confronted with outside, and why it was so many of us black people in the city jails, and the state prisons and the federal institutions.

The next morning, one of the guards blew his whistle and said, "Brown, now, all the way out." They was going to take me out. He say, "You going this morning. We're going to put you in the segregation." That meant they going to separate me. They put me in a cell by myself, which I'd been in a cell by myself down in New Orleans, before I went to trial.

While I was in segregation at Texarkana one of the inmates come by who was a trustee. He said, "You need any books or whatever you need, commissary, just let me know, I got the slips. I'll put it down, you sign the slip and I'll bring it to you, your books." So the segregation was

not so bad. The worst thing about segregation was that I couldn't go out on the yard. (HOW LONG IN SEGREGATION?)

After a while they let me work in the garden. There was a little garden that they had on the outside. (WHERE?). I had taken up vegetable growing. I got some books on that. I wanted to study vegetables because in my studies and research I begin to learn that vegetables was ^{the} same as humans. They had to have a food, water, and oxygen, same as the human being. I said if I studied vegetable life, I can have greater knowledge of human life. So I taken it up and completed it, and I received a certificate for vegetable growing. Later I also taken up general education, and I received a high school diploma. (SAY MORE ABOUT THIS)

(WHAT OTHER EXPERIENCES DID LEE HAVE AT TEXARKANA?)

Finally came the day when I was released. About five days before that they called me in 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. The chief classification and parole officer, I think his name was Mr. Anderson, he said, "We'll take you to the bus station," which is in Texarkana, Texas, "and put you on the bus for Hitchcock, Texas." They give me my ticket and a change ^{of} ~~in~~ clothes.

One thing they did not give me was my notes. 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. I had taken up reading a large book they called Social Science Encyclopedia. That covered everything dealing with human beings -- 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. I would study history, some black history that I would find in the institution. Not very much. But I studied labor history there. Not the kind that I was able to get on the outside. Political history. I studied about communism, socialism. And it was very interesting. I learned a lot and studied 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. I studied and I put down notes.

[They had a young fellow there from New Orleans. He worked also in the education department. He knew how to use the typewriter and everything. I asked him would he 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 booklet 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, "You can't take this one with you." That was my notes. He said this will cause trouble if you take this out. (WHY??) So he kept my notes. (WHAT DID LEE SAY? HOW DID HE FEEL ABOUT THIS?)

I had a total of 263 days of good time, so they released me on July 11, 1960. I was released on parole. I were released in Texas, in a little town by the name of Hitchcock.

Before I was released, they wrote my cousin there and asked him would he take me in. He wrote back and told them yes. Then I was released. I was released on the condition that I had about 180 days that I had to do as parole on the outside.

When I got to Hitchcock, Texas, I went over to my cousin's house (NAME OF COUSIN?), and I knocked on the door. They was so glad to see me. But my cousin's wife, cousin Seely (Celie?), had had a stroke. They was supposed to come up to the institution on that Saturday to get me, but that Friday another cousin had an automobile accident and got killed. They was very close together and when Cousin Seely was told about the accident she had a stroke and never said another word. When I went to the house they asked her, "Do you know who this is?" She began to laugh and smile. Indeed, she knew who I was cause our family was very close.

So I stayed at her house with my cousin, Boss. We called him Boss. 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, (SR?) some in Texarkana. I went around and I visited those I had scattered all over Texas -- Port Arthur, Houston, Beaumont. I let them know that I was back, and all of them was glad to see me.

I stayed there a while, about a month or so. I worked and helped cousin Boss and cousin Seely cause they needed help. I prepared her food. She had to eat liquid food. While Boss was gone to work, he was glad for me to be there to help her. I was glad to do it ^{cause} they had helped me. Sometimes I would go and stay with one of my other cousins like Aunt Bernice. I could do that cause cousin Seely had quite a few friends and relatives who would be there all the time. Her daughter would stay there at night. So I could help take care of her, and go back and forth to see other folks as well. I was trying to do the best I cold with what I had.

I stayed there and finished out my parole. Then I decided I would go down to New Orleans, see my son, Brownie, and his mother Rose who was my former common law wife. Brownie must've been about eight or ten years old then. I 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." 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."

My nephew, Skeet, happened to be at my brother's house that day. Skeet was a musician and he played with Fats Domino's brother, Freddie, in a small band. Skeet said, "I'll take you over Uncle Lee." So him and I got in the automobile. One thing about Skeet -- he happened to have in his glove compartment a little paper bag, a small bag of quarters. He said, "Here, Uncle Lee. This will help you some." I said, "Thank you, Skeet, for being so nice to your uncle."

This is hard to hard to talk about. It's emotional. Cause of the struggle I went through and the struggle I experienced from the depth of my heart when I went through it. I went there and I met Rose, and she was glad to see me. Brownie was sitting alone outside. I thought he was like what I was like when I was young. Setting always alone, by myself. Rose called him, "Brownie, come here." 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.

And I was glad to see him. I was emotional. Sometimes I get very emotional because it come from the depths of my heart. We sat there and talked. So Skeet say, "Uncle Lee, I'm ~~gone~~^{going}." And I thanked him 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."

I talked, and I was so glad to see Rose and Brownie. We sat down and talked for a long time. I remember when he was young, I bought a set of encyclopedias. They was 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."

I even bought him a few books - there 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 said, "You get what you can, and study your history," because before I left I was in the Nation of Islam. (UNCLEAR, BEFORE WHEN?? WHAT IS REST OF STORY OF MEETING WITH ROSE AND BROWNIE??)

Now before I went to prison - 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 Chinese is so concerned about black folks?" And what he was saying -- he was talking about my history, talking about my freedom. 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. Back during that time (WHEN IS THIS BEFORE OR AFTER TEXARKANA PRISON?) I was living at 2017 Jackson Avenue in New Orleans. He wrote to me as Mr. Lee Brown at that address. He told me about the Nation of Islam and the name of the Allah, the beneficial, the most merciful, the lord of the world. He signed the letter in the name of his divine messenger, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

Letter to Lee X Brown
The next letter I received ^{was} addressed to Mr. Lee X Brown, 1017 (?) Jackson Avenue. He told me, "I received your letter of October the 26th, 1960. It is my hope by this time you have found a job. I am very much sorry to learn of your difficulty in finding a job. Continue to strive hard and pray to Allah, and you will be successful. I returned the clippings of notice of your trial. I thank you. I pray to Allah for your success and blessings. A Salaam Alaikum. Your brother, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the messenger of Allah."

The next letter I received from the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, was at 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 (UNCLEAR ON TAPE), brother." He sent me greetings of (UNCLEAR ON TAPE), 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 Alaikum. In the name of Allah, the most merciful and [UNCLEAR 284] master of the day of judgment. I submit to him and seek his divine guidance." He said, "Now you are a registered Muslim. Just take this letter to any mosque. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon you. A Salaam Alaikum. I am your brother. The Honorable Elijah Muhammad." 294

(WHY WAS LEE INTERESTED IN NATION OF ISLAM?? WHAT DID HE WRITE IN LETTERS TO ELIJAH MUHAMMAD??)

I'm going to make sure I'm dealing with the era when I was in the federal correction institution in Texarkana, 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, to buy some books dealing with black history.

In New Orleans our union, Local 207, had merged with the packing house workers' union. So I went there and talked to the president of the

Copy on
address
date of
residence in
FBI file

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. Poplar there, and I was talking, and Mrs. Poplar what we call "Mommie". Well, Mommie said, "Mr. Holmes, you have a son in 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, ^{Cause} ~~and~~ 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 Mrs. Poplar 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.

on Harry
Rudger?
see next
page

Poplar with
in sent from p. 16

Best copy of letter

This is the letter I sent to Harry Bridges on November the 2nd, 1960. I was living at 2017 Jackson Avenue in New Orleans, Louisiana. I sent a letter to brother Harry Bridges, 150 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco to California telling about that I was released from the federal institution in Texarkana, Texas on the 12th day of July, 1960. I was in [inaudible] until October 3rd, '60. I maintain I have been trying to find work, and they refuse, refuse at New Orleans. At this time tried to find work. Brother Bridges, you know that I was the vice president of Local 207 and late Brother Nelson was president of during this time I was called before the Un-America Activity Committee. And I was brought to trial and was find guilty and received a three-year sentence. It is - it is hard for me to find work up here because of the trouble I was in. This I am asking you for finance aid or help me until I can find employment. The system cost, of course, will be returned. I have been - I would appreciate much if you will state my case with Local 10 because I very much feel in need of help. My ten-year-old son is in school, and I am really need assistances. Thank you very much for your cooperation in this matter. Lee Brown, ~~end~~. At 2017 Jackson Avenue, New Orleans. I sent a copy to J. R. Roberson, the vice president. I sent a copy to Lou Goldblackth, the finance treasurer. I send a copy to Brother William Chester, the director of the ILWU, and they respond. And I thanked them very much for they help. It was really good, and it helped me a lot.

insert from p. 12 →

Make this a separate copy

~~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 ~~at~~ that time I told him I was not in the Party, on account of the Taft Hartley I said that they had brought me up before the Un-American Activity Committee and I refused to cooperate with them, and they brought me to trial under circumstantial evidence and found me guilty as charged of being a member of ~~an affiliate with communists, with~~ the Party.

So we discussed, and he introduced, told me to contact some people there. was I 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 which I began to learn. I started going to the bookstore, and I started going to meetings,

and I met with those people who were from the culinary union, which was about five or six Party members who used to meet and discuss the issues in the culinary. That's the one I was instructed to contact by someone else I knew very well, and I started going to that meeting, and they soon began to break up and go into other groups. And I started to attend meetings with all the groups.

Then I started to going to meetings, different meetings concerning jobs, or fighting racism, or issues around, housing, issues that benefit the people. I happened to meet Kendra Alexander. 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 going to 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 [UNCLEAR ON TAPE]," and I was saying there were some things I didn't agree with. And he kept - I said, "I will [UNCLEAR], 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.

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 fried chicken and a little money and were very nice. And I came on into San Francisco on the~~

Arrival
in San
Francisco
to
MUR
p 11

50 p. 16, 17
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 a 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 ~~It~~ 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~~

explaining
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

(from interview tape 3/17/94, pp. 1-3)

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 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

(from interview tape 5/31/94, pp. 1-9)

Repetition

I came to San Francisco from New Orleans in the year of '60. I just had got released from the federal institution, Texarcana, Texas. And I spent a while with my cousin. I had to stay there about nine months because I were released nine months ahead on good time and behavior, they told me. I stayed there with my cousin, and I left there and went to New Orleans, Louisiana, went back there. When I got there, my union Local 207 was taken over by the United Packing Workers' Union. The President was named Peter Dent. So I went down and talked to Brother Dent, and he says, "Uh, Brother Lee, you know how it is. The work is slow here. And we have been taken over by the Packinghouse, United Packinghouse here," and I think the Local was 570, if I'm not mistaken. Been quite a while. But I'll try to get as much information as I can to go back and do a lot of research. I will do the best I can with what I have.

Yes, I talked to Brother Dent, and he say, "What I can do is write you a recommendation, give you a traveling card plus a letter, and that will help you in San Francisco." Cuz I'd talked to William L. Chester here, was the director of the ILWU, the International Director of the ILWU here at 150 Golden Gate here in San Francisco. I received a letter, and the letter told me, says, "If you come, we will try to do all we can to find you a job." I knowed I couldn't get no job in San Francisco - I mean in New

Orleans, 'cause I've tried when I went to the unemployment office. I put my card in there. And people come up behind me. I'd get there when it opened and 'round 8:30 or 9:00, and I put the box, and I set there and set, waited on them to call me, and people come in, and after [inaudible]. I was observing. The people knowed me because they made a lot of propaganda and publicity. My picture was plastered on all the daily papers even, and I knew it would be hard. I was spinning my wheels for nothing. So I say I'd better try to do much better than I'm doing here to, to listen at and take what Bill Chester said if I would come to San Francisco, he would try to find me work and do what he can. ~~And~~ [inaudible].

And I know the lady what I was living with before I - living in the apartment house. She runned an apartment house. Her name was Mrs. Matilda Poplar. She had about eight people living in the apartment, about eight tenants. Each of them had a room. And I had mine. When I went back, she told me, say, "You always, Brother Lee, have a place to live here. Money or no money." That's the same sister, Mrs. Poplar, wanted to put up her house for bond for me. The lawyer told - it wasn't necessary 'cause my bond was nothing but \$10,000, and [inaudible], get that. They got the bond, and I got out, and I was talking, and Sister Poplar said, "I have a friend name Mr. Preston Holmes. He have a son in San Francisco. I'm going to talk with him when he come."

Brother Holmes came, I think that evening. Mrs. Poplar started talking. She said, "Mr. Holmes," she say, "don't you have a son in San Francisco?" And Mr. Holmes say, "Yes, I do." She say, "Brother Brown is planning on going there pretty soon, to find work. He can't get none here. It's very hard for him, and he said he rather to, to go there and maybe be more successful." And he says, "Yes, my son is named Joe Holmes. And I will give you his phone number, and his address, and you tell him so he can know you and know that you talked to me that he, he sent me two shirts, and the shirts had J. H., meaning Joe Holmes. And I want to say you, I'll give you the phone number so he can know that I know you. Soon as you get to San Francisco, you call him, and he will take care of you."

When I got here, I called him on the telephone, but his wife answered the phone, and I asked to speak to Joe Holmes. At that time she say, "He is not here," and she say, "just a moment." She said, "I hear the car pulling up in front of the house. That may be him." She looked out of her window. She says, "Yes, that is him." She called him to the telephone, and his [inaudible], his father, his father. Yes, he called - she called him to the phone, and he told me to tell him his son sent him two shirts with the initial on J. H., meaning Joe Holmes. So he would know that his father had sent me to him. We're friends.

I spoke to him on the telephone and explained myself and told him, him about the shirts, and he told me to wait. "I will come right away." And I set there in the station on 7th Street between Market and Mission Street, between Market and Mission. I'm going to try to make this clear as I can.

Joe came down out there at the Greyhound station, sat impatient. About twenty minutes he drove up. He picked me up within twenty minutes to his - drove me to his home on Neptune, which is a street. We got there. He introduced me to his wife, Mrs. Florence Holmes. Were living, it were, who were living himself, pledging and hospitality he showed me. And he told me it were mine. He showed me a room and say, "This room, you can live there, as long as you want." I were welcome. He put my luggage in the room, and I went to bed.

after 8 am?
The next morning he got up and he went over to the ILWU- I went over to the ILWU hall, 150 Golden Gate, to seek assistance to find a job. I talked to one of the representatives in the ILWU hall that was the international hall on 150 Golden Gate. He sent me over to the Warehouse Union Local 6 to talk to one of the union representatives to get work. I met some of the union brothers in the hall, and we was talking. The brothers taking up a collection and give me some money, helped me out until I could find work. I stood around for a few days, and I went over to the hall several times during the period. One of those workers sent me to his good friend to ask him for some financial assistance. When I got there, they give me \$100. Another friend give me ten, another one give me twenty-five. That was here in San Francisco, in the year of 1960, when I arrived from New Orleans, Louisiana.

I was treated very well, and I appreciate it. I had my papers and union card and - from the Local in New Orleans, the Packinghouse Workers, what Brother Thomas West had given me, the president at that time, the United Packing had taken over the union. Our Local 207, it wasn't no more Local 207. It was [inaudible] with 270, I believe, I mean 5 - I'm worry. 570. And I went to the, the Culinaries on Sixth Street, which was a Local 110. The letter what Brother Thomas West gave me, told me to take that to any union hall or union representative. So I went over there and I presented - I asked to see a business agent. Someone told me, "You see a business agent." And this business agent was named - he say, "You'll see a man by the name of Sam Daniels." And I talked to a lady there at the window, was information. I think her name was either Cornelius or Mrs. Susie Barclay. And she say, "You wait. It's a business agent will be in here, and his name is Sam Daniels." She say, "You sit down in the union hall and get you some coffee, if you so care for any, you're welcome to it. You're amongst friends." That made me feel very good.

When Brother Daniels came in, a very low, dark-skinned fellow, and she point me out, cuz he went over by her before he went inside of his office. And she point him out to me. And he walked over to me, and he says, "My name is Sam Daniels, the business agent here, and I learned that you was looking for me. Would you please step in my office?" I say, "Thank you, Sir." So I went into his office, and he looked at the paper that the President West give me, and he looked at my union book. He say, "You're a union man." I say, "Yes, sir, I am. I been in the union for a number of years. Local 12, the Los Angeles Packinghouse, and I went there and I went down to New Orleans, Local 207, and we had problems," and "I heard about it, and read about some of the problems you had under the Taft Hartley that the trade unions staff had under the Tart Hartley law. ~~Unfortunately~~ that we ain't never been attacked so far. We had some problems, but I'm going to see what I can do." And he asked what kind of work. I said, "Any - I can do anything now cuz I need work." He say, "What about working in a hotel? Have you ever washed dishes?" I said, "Yes, I washed dishes. When I was in L.A., I used to ride the Union Pacific, Los Angeles ^{Chicago} [inaudible] Nebraska, washing dishes and what-not." Then he said, "Maybe put you on at the Fairmont Hotel at night until we see what we can do."

So it was another brother there. He was the janitor^{ial} ~~work~~ in the union, keep the union clean, by the name of Brother Bible. Everyone called him Bible. But I believe his name were Willie Bible. If I'm not mistaken. He say, "This man - I want you to come back here tomorrow evening. Be sure you be here before 5:00 o'clock over to the union hall." Say, "I'm going to write out a work slip, and Brother Bible is gonna take you to the Fairmont Hotel and see can the steward there" - the steward was name Brother Ward, Johnny Ward - "see can he give you a few days to put you on, and I'm gonna call him and talk with him." In the meantime, Bill Chester, director, national director of the ILWU called, and I think a number of others called.

When I got there, they talked - Mr. Ward. Willie Bible take me into Mr. Ward's office. Ward talked to me, say, "I heard some about you, Brother." He say, "I once was in the union, the Marine Cooks and Stewards." I say, "Yes, sir." He say, "I heard you been in the union quite a while." I said, "Yes, sir." Mr. Ward was a tall, brown-skinned fellow, very friendly. He say, "Yeah, I put you to work around here washing dishes and what-not." So he say, "You, you go to work tonight." He told me I had to go and get in a uniform to put on [inaudible]. I started washing night, washing dishes. And I stayed washing dishes, oh, maybe a month or two. The next thing I learnt, he say, "I'm going to put you a good worker, Brown." He called me Brother Brown. "Brother Brown, I'm going to put you to work in janitorial, regular job." He say, "You got a

regular job - you've been [inaudible] - you got a regular job. Working at night. You're a night porter now." I said, "Thank you kindly, Sir." [inaudible] It make me feel much better. It was good that I was success enough to get me a regular job. He say, "You a regular. You come in in your off days." I think it was - I had two off days. I can't really which two it were, but he say, "Now you have your regular job. You come in and you have time to come to work and come in at [inaudible] - I think it was 12:00, but I didn't wait till 12:00. I come in at 11:00, 11:30, to make sure that I go in, and change clothes, be ready to go to work, cuz I know how hard it was.

In New Orleans, while I was union representative, fought for the rights of workers. [inaudible] cotton compresses, the feed mill, the rice mill, and on the docks. Not deep water ships, but barge lines. I fought them and I went there, had [inaudible] New Orleans, back to New Orleans I thought about it. That's where I got my trade union education, working among people fighting for rights, better conditions, fighting for health needs, seniority, pension plan. When I got here in San Francisco at the hotel, as I become a porter, I began [inaudible].

[tape skips]

Fifteen of us, ~~who~~ were night porter,^S All the brothers were very friendly. We talked. We had lunch. They starting off, it was given us precooked food, and not - we started talking about we would like to stop, have time to cook, to fix our own food, because they didn't want the precooked food what the cook leave there. They been there, made from other food, and he give it to the help. And I began to look in the union books, and I see in the union books where you had the right to have job stewards. Some call them shop stewards. I call them shop stewards, but that's what I like in New Orleans, job stewards. Shop stewards to see that the company carry out the working agreement that the workers get a fair. And I say, "We need a shop steward. We have some problems that we need to solve." And they say, "What about you?" One of the brother say, "What about you, Brother Brown? Would you take it?" I says, "Yes." "Seemed like you talk like you have some experience." I say, "I had a little experience working in New Orleans on the docks, working in the union. I also was on the negotiating committee, shop steward, vice president, executive board member, advisor to the president." I say, "I had a little experience, and I'll be willing to try to work so we can solve some of these problems." We talk to the steward, to Mr. Ward. We bring him our problems, our grievances, and ask him to work with us.

So we did. We signed up. We say, "Now you have to sign your name, and then I'll call the business agent, Mr. Daniels." We still's in Local 1, attend the Culinary Workers' Union. And he said, "You all wants a shop steward." I say, "The mens have signed." He say, "Yeah. Bringing

in all ~~[inaudible]~~, and we would elect you shop steward, and we will notify the company. Notify Mr. Ward." So we went to the union hall, was still on 6th Street. ~~I can't [inaudible] the address. The number, but it was on 6th Street,~~ Local 110. So we went upstairs when Mr. Daniel come. He come about 8:00 o'clock that morning because we had to go home and sleep. He said, "I'll be there early, so you call can have the meeting." We had the meeting. We propose things that we wanted to discuss with Mr. Ward. And so when the brothers, like me, Mr. - Brother Sam Daniels. I say, ~~[inaudible]~~ "Now you all elect - who you all elect for your steward?" We say, "We elect Brother Lee Brown." So that was - OK. Brother Daniels say, "Now, Brother Lee Brown, you a shop steward at the Fairmont Hotel to take care of the grievance and see that the company carry out the contract and that none of the brothers will violate the contract." He said, "This will work both ways." I says, "All right, Brother Daniel," ~~I say, "I have had . . ."~~ He say, "I know you have had some experience in the labor movement." I say, "I will do the best I can to work with the brothers, and I hope the brothers would work with me."

~~Yes. Getting back,~~ ^{So} I was here in San Francisco ~~still~~ working at the Fairmont Hotel ~~here at the Fairmont.~~ I have by a release. I made and I find my work. But I'd like to say that I got into San Francisco, I arrived here in 1960, and I joined the Local 110 with my traveling card, which was my book, and a letter from the United Packing Workers' Union from Brother Thomas West. > Now I'm a member of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union, ~~and I at the Fairmont Hotel.~~ I become the first shop steward in any hotel in San Francisco during the year ~~[inaudible]~~. I was involved in the Civil Rights struggle with the NAACP, and continued my fight against racism in employment.