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FOOTNOTE: In March 1952 the FBI had launched an investigation of Lee Brown on suspicion of having violated the Taft-Hartley Act by filing false non-Communist affidavits. Over the next six years the Bureau accumulated a 900-page dossier on Brown. As early as 1946 the FBI had established a network of paid informers, including Gladys Williams, to spy on Party meetings in New Orleans. In a memo dated May 19, 1953 the FBI admitted that "there is no known evidence to establish" that Nelson and Brown were members of the CP subsequent to the dates they executed non-Communist affidavits. Another memorandum on the same date claimed to have identified unnamed paid informers who could testify that Brown was in the Party after signing the affidavits. (One of these unnamed informers was probably Arthur Eugene.) However, the memo concluded that these informers were "precluded from testifying at the present time due to their paid informant status." The informers themselves, according to another memo, expressed "great reluctance to testify", contending that their exposure would diminish their usefulness as informants. (Left unsaid was their concern that their exposure would also terminate their enlistment on the FBI payroll. Non-cooperation also carried its risks: in a fit of annoyance the FBI cut off payments to one uncooperative informant.) The Bureau made great efforts to identify other informants who might be able to testify about Brown's post-1952 membership in the Party, but with no success. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover followed the investigation closely and occasionally sent memoranda to the New Orleans office urging greater diligence. In the end the Bureau decided to use paid informers to make the case against Lee Brown, although some hesitation was expressed about the quantity of "extraneous information" in Gladys Williams' reports and her "tendency to include in the reports her personal opinions and comments of persons in attendance at various meetings and activities." Apparently the Bureau found ways to obtain the cooperation of reluctant informers.

Brown's conviction so pleased Hoover that the Director suggested that the New Orleans FBI office "submit recommendations for recognition" so the he might reward the deserving agents who handled the investigation.

On June 22, 1960 the New Orleans office informed the Director that Brown's conviction had been reversed by the court of appeal and the indictment against him dismissed. There was no record in the file of the Director's response to this outcome..

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Seeking to undermine Eugene's credibility as a witness, the next day, March 26th, McGovern hammered away at Eugene's testimony, especially inconsistencies between his written statement and his testimony in court. McGovern elicited that Eugene's first contact with the FBI was in 1952; Eugene was contacted by the FBI and called in for a meeting on April 11, 1952. (396-97) After being questioned by FBI agents Eugene signed a written statement describing his involvement with the Communist Party. The statement was later read into the record by Judge Wright. In it Eugene said that during the 1948 National Maritime Union elections in New Orleans he backed two candidates who were identified as Communists. After the election he was kicked out of the union. He said he started attending Communist party meetings in New Orleans in 1948. He claimed that the "real reason" he went to the meetings was he thought it would help him get a union book and a job through the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union. (424, 427) Eugene's statement described Party meetings and activities he attended in New Orleans and San Francisco and on ships on which he worked. The statement said that "In February of 1951, I was screened [Footnote: In earlier testimony it had come out that at this time Eugene could not get work as a seaman, having been "screened" from ship work. During the Korean War any known Communists were "screened" by the U.S. Coast Guard and prevented from working on American ships as seamen. (308-9, 400)] at Providence, Rhode Island and came back to New Orleans. I haven't gone to any Communist

meeting or attended any Communist function since that time." A few lines later the statement has Eugene claiming: "I have not been a member since about September, 1950 and have had no contact with the Party itself since I left San Francisco. I do come into contact with the Communist party members occasionally, but none of them have attempted to get me to rejoin the Communist movement." (427-8) Although Eugene named many individuals in this 1952 statement, Lee Brown was not one of them. (NOTE: A memo dated 3/21/52 in my Dept. of Justice FOIA file from James McInerney, Asst. Attorney General, Criminal Division, to FBI Director says LB was, according to "confidential informants," a CP member as late as 4/51 and executed non-Communist affidavit in 7/51, and that FBI should conduct investigation "to determine whether the affidavit was executed fraudulently." This is followed by a memo dated 3/31/52 in my FBI FOIA file from FBI director ordering New Orleans FBI to open a case on Lee Brown. This marks the beginning of the FBI's effort to build a case against Lee Brown.)

In his cross examination McGovern pressed Eugene on the contradictions between his written statement and his court testimony.

McGovern: So you state, "I have not been a member since about September, 1950" and this statement is dated . . . April 11th, 1952. Is that right?

Eugene: Right.

McGovern: So, you haven't been a member during 1951?

Eugene: Yes, I was a member.

McGovern: Well, which is accurate, Mr. Eugene, the statement you gave the F.B.I. right after you wanted them to hire you, . . . or what you are going to tell the Court and Jury now?

Eugene: Well, this statement here, (indicating) this was the first statement I made to the F.B.I. They asked me to come up there to the office to give a statement, and I gave this statement. This statement here (indicating) is not accurate."

McGovern: It sure messes you up, doesn't it?

Eugene: No, it doesn't. I mean I wasn't going to give the F.B.I., at that time, when I made this statement (indicating) something to chop my own neck off with.

McGovern: You wanted the money?

Eugene: I didn't get any money.

McGovern: I mean right after they hired you?

Eugene: Right after that is when they convinced me that they weren't going to do me anything for any Communist activities." (385-86)

In his cross examination and summation defense attorney McGovern accused Arthur Eugene of being a liar. (400, 478, 491-2) McGovern pointed out that in his court testimony Eugene claimed he attended several Communist Party meetings with Lee Brown in 1951, but in his FBI statement he said he attended no Party meetings in that period. "Arthur Eugene,

out of his own mouth, under oath, is a liar," McGovern concluded. "He is a liar for pay." (478)

McGovern moved for a verdict of acquittal on grounds that the government had not proven its case. His motion was denied.

McGovern then stated that he had recommended to his client not to testify. "We have recommended to the accused that he do not take the stand. The Government has not proved its case." Instead he asked the judge to instruct the jury that the failure of the defendant to take the stand creates no presumption of guilt. (429, 519-20)

Realizing that his whole case rested on the credibility of Arthur Eugene, prosecutor Many in his closing statement argued that it was understandable that Arthur Eugene gave a "very guarded statement" to the FBI when he was first questioned in 1952. "As he said," Many added, "he did not want to put a hatchet in the hands of the F.B.I." (442) "I say again," Many told the jury, "put yourselves in his place. I assure you that it would not be easy for anyone, for Arthur Eugene, or for anyone else, and to get up and say, 'Yes, I did not tell the truth. Although I made the statement to an official body, I did not tell the truth,' but yet he did tell you that. So, you have which to believe? His testimony under oath here over a period of days, or the statement made in the first interview he ever made?" (446)

"There, in essence, you have it, ladies and gentlemen," Many concluded. "The only witness that has been brought

before you whose testimony is in any way impeached or contradicted, is that of Arthur Eugene, and that by the one statement given when he was afraid, when he didn't know where he was headed, and when first interviewed by the F.B.I. at a time that he had reason to fear. The Government submits to you that the evidence is clear and convincing beyond any reasonable doubt whatsoever." (448)

After reminding the jury of the presumption of innocence, that the burden of proof was on the Government, defense attorney McGovern, in his closing argument, attacked weak points in the Government's case. He first argued that it had not been proved that Lee Brown filed the non-Communist affidavit in question. Juanita Bunch, the government clerk, McGovern argued , could not state who brought or delivered the affidavits to her office; she assumed they came in from the union. (451, 456, 458-61) As to the signature, McGovern reminded the jury that the notary public, Israel Augustine, could not identify Lee Brown as the person who signed the affidavit (461-2). McGovern also argued that the government's effort to link Lee Brown to signatures on other documents and then link these signatures to the signature on the affidavit was not convincing.

With regard to the Brown's membership in the Communist Party, McGovern argued that even if Lee Brown was a Party member in 1946 as alleged by Gladys Williams, Robert Chan and Irwin Knight, that does not establish that he was in the Party in 1952, as alleged in the charge against him. (469-70)

As for Arthur Eugene, McGovern said he was "an admitted paid informer, who is also an admitted paid liar. He is either lying about this man in Court today, under oath, or he is lying to the F.B.I., or to you as members of the Jury and the Court. But he has got to be lying one place or the other, because he has admitted he is a liar, and he can't reconstruct his testimony." (478)

After the closing arguments finished on March 26th the trial judge issued instructions to the jury on Thursday morning, March 27th. Judge Wright in his instructions offered his own interpretation of the charges. In the actual indictment ^{the first count} Count one read: "On or about the 21st day of July, 1952, Lee Brown, in a matter within the jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Board, an agency of the United States, and in accordance with the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, did unlawfully, wilfully and knowingly make, use and file and cause to be made, used and filed with the said National Labor Relations Board . . . a false writing and document, namely an 'Affidavit of Non-communist Union Officer,' knowing the same to contain false, fictitious and fraudulent statement and representation as to material fact, to wit, that he, Lee Brown, was not then and there a member of the Communist Party" (818, FBI FOIA file, Sec 2, p. 320) Count two contained similar language with regard to affiliation with the Communist Party.

However, Judge Wright instructed the jury that "it must be shown to your satisfaction beyond a reasonable doubt that

this Defendant, made used, or filed or caused to be made used and filed, this document. Now, the indictment charges by using the word "and," and the Court uses the word "or," but under the law if it is shown to your satisfaction beyond a reasonable doubt that this Defendant made, or if he used, or if he filed this document, or if he caused the document to be made. used, or filed, then this particular element of the offense would be satisfied." In effect, the Judge instructed the jurors that if they concluded that Lee Brown made a false affidavit by affixing his signature to it, then this was sufficient to find him guilty. (508-9) However, the indictment itself required that it be proved that Lee Brown made, used and filed a false affidavit, and the question of whether he filed it was the stickler since there was no letter of transmittal. McGovern took exception to the judge's interpretation, pointing out that it "gives the Jury an alternative to base the conviction on the making of the affidavit alone." (522) This is the issue on which the final outcome of the case would hinge.

The case went to the all-white jury at 10:10 am. At 12:30 the jury asked for additional instructions from the judge as to what constituted membership or affiliation. The judge listed a series of activities that could be construed as constituting membership in the Communist Party, including paying dues or making financial contributions, possessing a membership card, attending meetings, classes, conferences or other Party gatherings, recruiting new members, distributing

literature, or participating in any other way in the activities, planning or actions of the Communist Party. (526-7) Affiliation, the judge said, meant a close working alliance or association between an individual and the Party. At 12:40 the jury returned to its deliberations, and at 1:04 pm the jury came back with a verdict.

The clerk read the verdict: "We, the Jury, find the accused Lee Brown guilty as charged under Count Number 1. We, the Jury, find the accused Lee Brown guilty as charged under Count Number 2." (529)

On Wednesday, April 2nd, Judge Wright sentenced Lee Brown to three years imprisonment in a federal penitentiary. The judge said he considered the two counts as one since they were in effect the same. (749, Times Picayune, 4/3/58, p. 1) Lee Brown signed a statement saying he did not plan to appeal and on April 16th he was delivered to begin serving his prison sentence at the Texarkana Federal Penitentiary. (750, 752) Subsequently, Brown's attorneys filed a motion for acquittal and an alternate motion for a new trial. Both were denied in early June, but the court granted the taking of an appeal. (Times Picayune, 6/5/58 p. 12)

Brown's attorneys filed a notice of appeal on June 14th (754, 5), and after several delays the appeal was filed in the spring of 1959. A year later, on April 21, 1960, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth District announced its decision. The court decided that the appeal "raises only one serious issue: was there reversible error in the Trial

Court's charge that the making, using or filing element of the offense would be satisfied if the jury found that Appellant 'made, or if he used, or if he filed the document . . . ?'"

The Court noted that in a prior case (Jencks v. United States, (5 Cir.), 226 F. 2d 540, 545) "the essence of the offense charged by the government is the filing of the affidavit and the burden rested on it to prove that the Appellant filed the affidavit or caused it to be filed."

(658) The court continued that "the jurisdiction of the NLRB is not invoked until the affidavit is filed and therefore the act of filing is as essential to the commission of the offense as is the act of making the false affidavit. It seems, therefore, too clear for argument that, standing alone, the charge here complained of left open to the jury the right to convict Brown without the proof of one of the elements which we and other Courts of Appeal have found a necessary ingredient, even the gist, of the offense." (659)

One short sentence concluded the Court of Appeals' legal analysis: "The judgment is reversed." With the growing civil rights movement changing the political climate and with HUAC and the anti-Communist provisions of the Taft-Harley Law being openly challenged by college students, progressive activists and labor leaders (the non-Communist oath would be declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1964) (The Cold War Against Labor, Vol 2, pp.705-8), the Government decided not to initiate any further legal action against Lee

Brown. In May 1960 U.S. Attorney M. Hepburn Many signed an order dismissing the indictment against Lee Brown. (660) Brown would be released from Texarkana, where he had been unjustly imprisoned for more than two years.

10
Chapter 9A: Prison and Release

(ver 1 8/25/99)

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~~ parish prison there in New Orleans, and I stayed there ~~a~~ until they came 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.

During the trial while I was stayed at the ~~parish~~ 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.

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. I also took up general education, and I got my diploma.

(FN: Lee Brown earned two certificates of achievement at Texarkana, a certificate for having "satisfactorily completed the course in elementary classes" awarded by the Education Department on May 20, 1960, and a certificate for having "successfully completed the prescribed course in vegetable crops" awarded by the Vocational School on July 5, 1960.)

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 mistake in his charge to the jury and my conviction was reversed.

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

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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, 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 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.



11
CHAPTER TEN: Starting a New Life/ Ver 3 (8/8/99)

(1/28/99, also 1/29/99 interview material)

I stayed in Texas two, three months 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. When I was there talking to her, I could look outside and see Brownie sitting all alone. He reminded me of myself when I was young working on the dry docks in Texas, how I used to sit by myself at lunch time. Rose called him, "Brownie, come here." He come and he saw who I was. He was young when I

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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.

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 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."

Rose fixed me a dinner for that evening, and we set up and talked. I was so glad to see Rose and Brownie. Brownie was growing up. Brownie may have been around ten years of age, or a little older. I wanted to help him, so I decided to stay around a while, trying to get me a job.

I bought Brownie a few books -- there wasn't too many books in New Orleans on black history. I don't even think they had a black bookstore in New Orleans, not to my knowing. I bought him a set of encyclopedias. They was called "The World Encyclopedia." A set of red books. 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 told him that because before I left New Orleans to go to prison I was trying to learn more about black history and getting involved with the Nation of Islam.

Before my trial sometimes 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 bald-head man talking about freedom, justice, equality, and black history. To me he looked like a Chinese. And I kept wondering, I said, "What Chinese is so

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concerned about black folks?" This was Elijah Muhammad. 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 was sister and brother we resembled each other so much-- and I said to her, "Levoja, I want you to write to this place in Chicago. 5335 So. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago 15, Illinois." I wanted to know about him and his organization, the Nation of Islam. Finally I got back an answer. Back during that time I was living at 2017 Jackson Avenue in New Orleans. His secretary wrote to me as Mr. Lee Brown at that address. The letter, which she wrote on July 31, 1957, said,

"As-Salaam-Alaikum:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the most Merciful, the Lord of the Worlds; and in the name of His Divine Messenger, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad.

"Dear brother:

Your letter has passed the Laborers' inspection. I hope it will be approved by Allah.

Enclosed are two forms and a small Muslim prayer book. Fill out the forms and mail. If married have wife sign her own name, or if under 18 have parents sign form.

May Allah bless you.

As-Salaam-Alaikum

Your Sister,

Susie Hussein"

I was interested so I filled out the application form and sent it in. The prayer book was compiled by Elijah Muhammad and

published by the University of Islam in Chicago. I still have it. I wasn't so much interested in the religion but what they had to say about history, that interested. Sometimes when you want to be free you'll catch hold to anything talking about freedom.

It wasn't until I got out of prison in 1960 that I was in contact with Elijah Muhammad again. I had wrote to him telling about getting out of prison and trying to find work. I received a letter addressed to Mr. Lee X Brown. He told me, "I received your letter of October the 26th, 1960, and it is my hope by this time you have found a job. I am very sorry to learn of your difficulty in finding a job, continue to strive hard and pray to Allah, and you will be successful. I am returning the clippings and notices of your trial, which I think you would like to keep. I pray to Allah for your success and blessings. As-Salaam-Alaikum. Your brother, Elijah Muhammad, Messenger of Allah." (fn: Letters in Nation of Islam folder)

When I got to California Elijah Muhammad wrote to me again to confirm my registration in the Nation of Islam. He said I could take this letter to any mosque. I went to the mosque here in San Francisco off and on, but mainly I was interested in history. When I joined the Nation of Islam it was because of my interest in black history. In the Party I learned about the class struggle but I wanted to get some black history, and that's what Elijah Muhammad talked about, Africa and black history. I didn't see no contradiction between being in the Party and being a Muslim. True Muslims, and I wouldn't call myself a true Muslim, true Muslims could also be revolutionaries. The prophets was revolutionaries.



I wasn't interested in prayers and all that 'cause like my grandfather taught me, you got to do something for yourself. Wasn't no pie in the sky, that's what I believed. You can use religion to get some of the things you want, like certain kinds of knowledge. But you can't use religion to get to Los Angeles. If I want to go to Los Angeles I can sit down here and pray til I fall out, and I ain't gonna get to Los Angeles. I'm gonna need to get a ticket and bus to get there. Praying won't do it. Like my grandfather said, the Lord helps those who help themselves. But I did learn more about black people's history from talking with people in the Nation and reading their books.

In New Orleans our union, Local 207, had merged with the united packing house workers' union. I needed a job so I went there and talked to the president of the packing house union, Thomas West. He said "Brown, we don't have anything here. Maybe you ought to think about going to California, San Francisco. I will give you a letter, give you a traveling card, to go to other places." He wrote a letter praising me as a fine union brother. (Fn: Letter in Local 207 Docs folder) By then I knew I couldn't get no job in New Orleans. During the trial my picture had been plastered in all the newspapers, they made a lot of propaganda about me. Now when I went to the unemployment office seem like they waited on everybody but me. I thought I might have a better chance of getting a job in San Francisco since that's where the ILWU was based. In August when I was still in Texas I had written to the ILWU in San Francisco asking for help. In November I wrote another letter to Harry Bridges about



my situation. I told him about the Un-American Activity Committee and getting convicted and sent to prison under the Taft-Hartley Act. I told him: "It is extremely hard for me to find work because of the trouble I was in. In the meantime, I am asking for some financial aid to help me until I find employment, which assistance of course will be returned. I would appreciate it very much if you would state my case to Local 10, because I am very much in need of help. My ten year old son is in school and I really need assistance." (Fn: Letter in ILWU folder)

About that time I got a letter back from Bill Chester, answering my first letter to the ILWU. Bill Chester was the ILWU Regional Director for Northern California at the National office on Golden Gate Avenue in San Francisco. He said he couldn't promise me a job but he'd do everything possible to help me. He also sent a check for \$100. (Fn: Letter in ILWU folder)

I knew the lady what I was living with before my trial. She had a house and rented rooms. Her name was Mrs. Matilda Poplar; we used to call her "Mommie." She had about eight people living in her house. Each of them had a room. And I had mine. When I came back to New Orleans, she told me, "You always, Brother Lee, have a place to live here. Money or no money." That's the same sister, Mrs. Poplar, who wanted to put up her house for bond for me during the trial, but the lawyer told her it wasn't necessary; they had got the bond. I stayed with Mrs. Poplar while I was looking for work. She said, "I have a friend named Mr. Preston Holmes. He has a son in San Francisco. I'm going to talk with him when he comes."

Preston Holmes came in that evening. He was an old longshoreman with the ILA there in New Orleans. Mrs. Poplar started talking. She say, "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 go there and maybe be more successful." And he says, "My son is named Joe Holmes. I will give you his phone number, and his address, and you tell him so he can know you talked to me that he sent me two shirts, and the shirts had the initials J. H., meaning Joe Holmes. Soon as you get to San Francisco, you call him, and he will take care of you."

Needed?

So I left New Orleans. Rose and Brownie stayed there. Rose and I had been separated since before I went to prison. I told Rose I may send for her and Brownie when I got to San Francisco, but I didn't know what would happen. I had my few clothes that I took and I left some of my books in a trunk up on Drive Street with "Mommie". I told Mrs. Poplar to take care of my books and some of the newspapers from the trial. All the people in the house who knew me greeted me ^{and} wished me good luck. They prepared me some fried chicken to take on the bus. All of them got together and gave me a little money. It made me very proud. I felt like 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 learned a lot. I talked to people there, made friends from all nationalities, trade unionists as well as religious brothers, some from the Nation of Islam. And I got along fine.

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I came to San Francisco on the Greyhound bus. When I got here, I called Joe Holmes on the telephone. I spoke to him and explained myself and told him about the shirts, and he told me to wait at the bus station. "I will come right away," he said. And I waited there in the station on 7th Street between Market and Mission Streets.

About twenty minutes Joe drove up. He took me to his home on Neptune Street. When we got there he introduced me to his wife, Florence. He showed me a room and said, "This room, you can live there, as long as you want." He put my luggage in the room. I was tired and I just went to bed.

The next day it was ^{an} holiday. I think it was Thanksgiving. The Holmeses took me with them to the house of a friend called Della. She was a member of the ILWU Local 6, the warehouse workers. She worked in a coffee factory here in San Francisco. They had something like a party, Thanksgiving dinner. Lots of her friends and neighbors was there. It was very nice. When I got there, they started to introducing me to their friends, and telling them why I came. Most of the people there was from the South and New Orleans. They started talking to me and asking me questions and I was very happy. They even passed the hat and said "We heard about your case."

That made me very proud, to be with working people and the struggles of working people. I feel like the world I live in is the university of learning. The people are teachers and the best teachers are at the grassroots level. I've learned many things in the labor movement. I learned a lot in the struggle.

The next morning I got up and went over to the ILWU hall at 150 Golden Gate to seek assistance to find a job. I talked to one of the ILWU representatives there. 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 started talking. The brothers taken up a collection and gave me some money to help me out until I could find work. I came 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 gave me \$100. Another friend gave me ten, another one gave me twenty-five dollars. I was treated very well by the brothers, and I appreciated it.

One day I went to the Culinary Workers Union on Sixth Street, which was Local 110. I had a letter and my card from the packinghouse workers local in New Orleans. The secretary told me, "You wait. The business agent will be in here, and his name is Sam Daniels." She said, "You sit down in the union hall and get you some coffee. If you 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 short, dark-skinned fellow, she pointed me out. He walked over to me, and 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 said, "Thank you, Sir." So I went into his office, and he looked at papers I had and he looked at my travelling card. He said, "You're a union man." "Yes, sir, I am. I been in the union for a number of years. Local 12, the Los Angeles Packinghouse workers, and from

there I went down to New Orleans, Local 207, where we had some problems." "I heard about it," he said, "and I read about some of the problems you had under the Taft Hartley law. Fortunately, we ain't never been attacked so far. I'm going to see what I can do for you" And he asked what kind of work I wanted. I said, "Any kind. I can do anything cause I need work." He said, "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 to Nebraska, washing dishes and whatnot." Then he said, "Maybe I can put you on at the Fairmont Hotel at night until we see what we can do."

There was another brother there. His name was Willie Bible. Sam Daniels said, "I want you to come back here tomorrow evening. Be sure you be here before 5:00 o'clock over to the union hall. I'm going to write out a work slip, and Brother Bible is gonna take you to the Fairmont Hotel and see can the kitchen steward there and see can he give you a few days to put you on, and I'm gonna call him and talk with him."

When I got to the Fairmont Hotel, which was one of San Francisco's grand hotels, Willie Bible took me into the office of Mr. Johnny Ward's the kitchen steward who did the hiring. Mr. Ward talked to me, he said, "I heard some about you, Brother. I once was in the Marine Cooks and Stewards union. 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 said, "I can put you to work around here washing dishes. You go to work tonight." He told me I had to go and get in a uniform to put on. I started washing

dishes that night. And I stayed washing dishes maybe a month or two.

One day Ward said, "You a good worker, Brother Brown." He called me Brother Brown. "I'm going to put you to work in janitorial, a regular job. Working at night. You're a night porter now." I said, "Thank you kindly, sir." That made me feel much better. I felt good that I had success enough to get me a regular job. And I had two off days each week.

After I was in San Francisco a while, I was thinking about the Party. I heard from someone that there was a Party bookstore on Market Street. I went there and I happened to talk to the fellow who ran the bookstore, and I introduced myself to him. We was discussing political conditions. I bought some Party literature, but I told him I was not in the Party at that time on account of the Taft Hartley. I told him 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 or an affiliate with the Communist Party.

So we talked and he told me some people there to contact. I started going to the bookstore, and I started going to Party meetings. I met some 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 industry.

Then I started to going to other meetings, different meetings concerning jobs, or fighting racism, or issues around, housing, issues that benefit the people. Later at one of these meetings I

happened to meet Kendra Alexander. She seemed very nice. I would go to meetings where I would hear her talk, and I was very much impressed with what she said. I liked the way she talked. I learned a whole lot from her. She inspired me very much.

When the bookstore moved to Valencia Street a couple of years later, I happened to meet another person, Sam Gold. Sam and his wife Molly came from Chicago. He had been in the Party a long time and ran the bookstore. We became good friends. I remember one time him and Molly brought me some chicken soup when I was living on Third Street. I told Sam I had doubts about getting back into the Party. He began to talk, to argue with me. I said, "I will support the issues. I have faith in the program. I have faith in the Party, the principles, but some of the people, some of the leadership I cannot understand." I read Party literature. They would have conventions and they'd pass resolutions, resolution on top of resolution concerned with Afro-Americans, and I still couldn't get the understanding of what was going on. It created doubt in my mind. I felt like the Party leadership didn't follow through. They'd pass resolutions on racism and jobs but then they wouldn't follow through on the program. They didn't do what they said they would. The program was good but some of the leadership was bad, didn't carry out the program. That caused me to have doubts.

There was also a problem with white racism, some white Party members that you knew who wouldn't speak to you on the streets. There was this white woman who attended Party meetings and one day I saw her on Seventh Street. I spoke to her, and she wouldn't even speak. She completely ignored me. I wanted to make sure, so I ran

back and caught up with her and I spoke to her again. She acted like she didn't know me. So I brought it up at the next meeting, but they wasn't too much concerned about it. Hell, they did better than that in the South! We used to bring Party members on the carpet so we could solve the problem. I told Sam Gold about it. He said he didn't like it either, but he begged me to keep coming to the meetings. I said I still supported the program but the leadership seemed weak. I stopped going to the meetings.

Fifteen of us was night porters at the Fairmont Hotel, and all the brothers was very friendly. We talked. We had lunch together. The lunch that was given to us was precooked food, and not very good. We started talking about how we would like to stop, have time to cook, to fix our own food, because the men didn't want the precooked food what the cook left there for us. The cook had left-overs, made from other food, and he give it to the help. I began to look in the union books, and I saw in the union books where you had the right to have job stewards. Some call them shop stewards. I call them shop stewards. Shop stewards to see that the company carries out the working agreement and that the workers get fair treatment. I said, "We need a shop steward. We have some problems that we need to solve." One of the brothers said, "What about you, Brother Brown? Would you take it? Seems like you talk like you have some experience." I said, "I had a little experience working in New Orleans on the docks, and working in the union. I had a little experience, and I'll be willing to try to work so we can solve some of these problems. We'll talk to Mr. Ward, bring him our problems, our grievances, and ask him to work with us."

So we did. Ward told us, "You have to sign your names on a sheet saying you want a shop steward, and then I'll call the business agent, Mr. Daniels." Daniels said, "You all want a shop steward?" I said, "The men have signed." He said, "Yeah? Bring in all the men, and we will elect a shop steward, and we will notify the company, notify Mr. Ward. I'll be there early, so you call can have the meeting." So we went to the union hall on 6th Street the next morning when we got off work. Daniels came about 8:00 o'clock and we had the meeting. We proposed things that we wanted to discuss with Mr. Ward. Brother Daniels asked, "Now who you all elect for your steward?" The men said, "We elect Brother Lee Brown." "Now, Brother Lee Brown," Daniels said, "you're a shop steward at the Fairmont Hotel to take care of the grievances and see that the company carries out the contract and that none of the brothers will violate the contract." He said, "This will work both ways." I said, "All right, Brother Daniels. I will do the best I can to work with the brothers, and I hope the brothers will work with me."

I was elected shop steward on April 17, 1963. I was the first shop steward among the culinary union workers at the Fairmont Hotel. In fact, I became the first shop steward in any hotel in San Francisco. This was the beginning of my involvement in the trade union movement in San Francisco.

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Need all the
dialogue?

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CHAPTER ~~ELEVEN~~: Struggles in San Francisco (ver 1, 7/11/99)

(Sources: Statement in Local 110 & Jack Tar folders; 5/31/94 and 7/19/94, 7/15/99, 7/23/99 interviews; arbitration hearing 6/2/69, 9/21/95, 10/27/95 interviews)

While working at the Fairmont I became aware of some of the working conditions, which was very poor. It was similar to a non-union house. Personally I felt compelled to attempt to straighten up some of the discrepancies and conditions at the hotel.

I noticed that it was mainly Afro-American women working as housekeepers cleaning the rooms. They was often mistreated and abused and discharged off the job, with no follow up to reinstate them from their union, Local 283 of the room cleaners union. I raised that question at a meeting of the Joint Board of the hotel workers' unions. One of the representatives, Charlie Gricus, got angry with me, telling me, "You don't have anything to do with it." I said, "I'm a member of the union and I'm going to speak out when I see anyone abused." So I took up the fight for the room cleaners. I was concerned about them and I wasn't afraid to speak up. I had knowledge of being a shop steward from working down South, and I was able to give support with the experience and knowledge that I had to struggle for better working conditions on the job.

As a result of my opinions and oppositions that I submitted to my superiors, the hotel representatives began to harass and make trouble for me. They made false accusations against me, said I was drinking on the job. Consequently I was discharged from my job in

1967, but the real reason was because of my union activities and my efforts to rectify the working conditions.

After being discharged I went to Sam Daniels, the business agent of Local 110. I explained the situation and he went to talk with representatives of the Fairmont hotel to question my dismissal. I was not present at the confrontation between Daniels and the Fairmont. The problem wasn't solved at the meeting, and after the meeting I asked Daniels to file action with the Adjustment Board, made up of representatives from the unions and the employers. But my request to be reinstated was denied. I felt that Daniels was more or less collaborating with the hotel; he was very close to the bosses.

During the time I was working at the Fairmont Hotel I met and got married to Moselle Mayfield. Moselle belonged to the union, too, but I didn't meet her on the job. She was working at the Holiday Inn. I met her on Third Street at her former husband's place. Her husband had married again. He had a cafe close to the shipyard where he sold barbecue. She was there one day with a lady friend, who was roommates with her, and we got to talking. Moselle was active in a church on Newhall Street. She tried to get me to donate to the church but I wasn't too interested in that. After a while we decided to get married, but her roommate, whose name was Candy, decided to stay there with us in the house on LaSalle Street. Now I didn't like that too much. I didn't like the way when we was shopping in the supermarket Moselle would ask Candy what she wanted before she ask me what I wanted. Sam Daniels used to come around and visit and said he didn't think it was right for Candy to be living there and causing conflict. So he come and talked to Candy. But Moselle got

angry and said, "If Candy going, I'm going." "Well," I said, "there's the door, sister. Get to stepping."

So we didn't get along too well, and we decided to get divorced after two or three years.

Around the time I was discharged from the Fairmont they had just opened up the Jack Tar hotel on Cathedral Hill. I knew the kitchen steward, an old fellow in his 70s by the name of Mr. Smith. He was a nice fellow, brown-skinned fellow. Him and I talked. I asked, "Do you have any work you can give me?" He said, "Where you worked?" I told him I came from the Fairmont and what had happened. He was an understanding man. We was Masonic brothers. He said, "Brother Brown, I can put you to work around here cleaning walls until something opens up and you can get a regular job." That's how I started at the Jack Tar.

I got a regular job first washing dishes and then as a night porter. The working conditions at the Jack Tar was equally as bad, and I began to voice my opposition against conditions. I organized a group of the night porters. We had a racially mixed crew, including some Spanish people, working there, and they said, "We want you to be shop steward." They had never had a shop steward on the job, but it was in the contract. Nobody had the experience or the guts to be shop steward. I said, "I accept," and they elected me shop steward on January 16, 1968.

The porters and the bar boys and vegetable cleaners was being overworked and I spoke up about it. The chef didn't like what I was doing, and that's when they made me assistant steward to Mr. Mitchell, figured I would sell the men out. Mr. Mitchell was the

executive steward of the Jack Tar; he was really just the head dishwasher. He was over the store department. He was also in the union. On Sunday when Mitchell went to church, I took his place on the job, helping to get the plates to the waiters.

One time when we had a union meeting of the men in the store department the chef and the personnel manager showed up. I said, "Y'all can't come in here. This is a union meeting." They said they had come to meetings before. I guess Mitchell used to let them come in but I wouldn't. They saw that I was shop steward and we had rules and they got mad. I also told all the brothers to wear their union buttons to let them know we was organized.

Once again I was told to mind my own business or else I would be dismissed. Mitchell told me that the kitchen chef and the manager, plus others, wanted me fired. This was because of my union activities. But they couldn't directly fire me for my union work, and they couldn't fire me for incompetence, so they accused me of being drunk on the job and they discharged me on January 26, 1969. They wanted me off the job, I was too hot. They never had a militant person that'd speak out, particularly for the Afro-American room cleaners. I wouldn't let them get away with abusing and discharging the room cleaners with no follow up. Never had nobody that would stand up and tell them that they was doing wrong. The black room cleaners was not getting meals. All the rest of them, even the doormen, the bar boys, got meals. They was after me, and they also wanted to get rid of all shop stewards in hotels, which they hadn't had before I come along even though it was in the contract.

My case went to an arbitration hearing on June 2, 1969. Mitchell was one those that testified against me, to save his job. When they had the hearing he was sitting up there crying. He really hated to do it, but he did. He got caught in a trap. He said I had to relieve him on a Sunday while he went to church. He claimed that he come back and I was drunk, said he smelled alcohol on my breath. What happened was that Mitchell wanted to fire this brother named Jefferson because he said he was drunk. I told Mitchell he didn't have the right to fire Jefferson. Mitchell say, "I'm going to fire you too, I'm going to fire both of you." That's how it started. Then at the hearing Mitchell said I was drunk, too. That was a front to keep from saying they was discharging me for my union activities as shop steward. I told ^{them} I hadn't had nothing to drink. They wasn't bringing me anything I didn't know. I knew all about their tricknology. I give them all hell up there, told them that I was discharged because I had made complaints about the conditions. I gave them a list of the demands I had raised: Stop mistreatment and unfair discharges of maids, free meal tickets for maids in all hotels, organize hotel and restaurant workers throughout the nation into unions, and end all discrimination against black people in the hotel and restaurant industries.

The room cleaners went on strike in the Fall of 1969 and since I was out of work the business agent of Local 110 called me down to Commercial Street to be picket captain. I was picket captain for three years. I worked for the four locals -- Local 44, the cooks, Local 48, the waitresses, Local 30, the waiters, and Local 110, my

local. The room cleaners Local 283 was on strike over working conditions, and the other locals supported them by sending pickets.

My job was to sign the picket slips. They was supposed to picket for four hours, then I sign the slip. I had my little book with the names and make them sign. Each week I worked for a different local. Each local paid me to be picket captain, and the one that paid me the most was local 30.

The whole three years we didn't have no fights, no arguments, no drinking on the picket line. I knew how to handle it.

The room cleaners finally won the strike after three years. One of the bosses who was at Harpoon Louie's diner on Commercial Street came out at noon one day and told me, "We're folding up. You got us." I said, "What you mean?" He said, "We're gonna sign the contract." He shook hands with me, and I told the rest of the pickets that we had won a victory.

I got a job with the Western Addition Black Security Guards. The Black Security Guards had been set up by the African Descendant Nationalist Independence Partition Party, which I was a member. I had got involved with the ADNIP party during the time I was angry with the Communist Party because of racism in the party. I read Wilson Record's book, The Negro in the Communist Party. I felt that the Party leadership, not all leadership but the national leadership, was not carrying out the program to fight racism and discrimination. The Party wasn't fighting to build a left center in the trade union movement. The Party should have been more effective against these right-wing unions and racist union leadership. The Party was not helping the grassroots, only serving the

intellectuals. I didn't feel like the Party was serving the interests of the masses, of the black workers.

The ADNIP party had an office on the corner of Fulton and Fillmore in the Western Addition. I joined them because I liked their program of building up the economic program of black people, and I figured that was one of the solutions to the problem. I don't think that black people should separate, but I think we should have our own community with our own stores, hotels and whatever.

When I was working at the Fairmont, I had tried to start a business of my own, "Brown's Foot Formula." The idea had come up in New Orleans when I was staying at Mrs. Poplar's. She had trouble with her feet. She had come up with a formula to help soothe her feet. Years ago I heard from her adopted daughter, Levoya, that Mrs. Poplar got run over in a car wreck and she never recovered and she passed. After I got out to California I worked on the formula which she had told me. Me and another fellow named Buddy McNeil, he worked at the Fairmont and helped me. It would help if you had bad feet, aching feet, corns, athlete's foot. You put it on and rub it in and it would soothe your feet. A pharmacist named Mr. Reid helped us get it past the Food and Drug Administration. We took it to a company to put it on the market. It cost us a thousand dollars apiece. But I made a big mistake because I didn't get a lawyer to follow up on it, and I didn't keep a copy of the formula. Somebody probably got it out there on the market now under a different name. I learned from that to never to do nothing in business without somebody to represent you, and keep copies of everything. It cost me a thousand dollars to learn that.

Al Sultan Shabazz was head of the ADNIP party, which was founded in 1962. I met him at a community meeting when I was working at the Jack Tar. He was from New Orleans and had been in the Army. He was very intelligent and well informed. He read a lot and he wanted to teach ancient African history. We discussed black nationalism and Africa and how we should have something in our community. I believe they did that in the Soviet Union, had different communities. I believe we would be better off if we would have a community, something we could identify with, that would give us the right to teach our history. I don't believe that in these schools, in the educational institutions, that we are getting our complete history, particularly our ancient history. We talked about racism and white supremacy and how we wasn't getting a fair shake. So I got interested. I knew a little bit of my history and I knew we was a long way from getting a fair deal. People in church say "Forgive them, for they know not what they're doing." I say any time a sonofabitch mistreating people, he know he doing wrong.

The ADNIP party said they wanted separation, two separate republics, one for blacks and one for whites. They had a list of nineteen states they wanted. They had set up a Provisional Government with Al Sultan as Prime Minister. I was more interested in the trade union movement and struggling to get the unions to deal with racism. I told Al Sultan I was in the union, so he appointed me Minister of Labor. I wrote articles for their newspaper and gave speeches at meetings.

The ADNIP party had different businesses. They had a moving business and the black security guards. Al Sultan Shabazz had

contracts for security guards at a building on Geary Street and in the Martin Luther King housing projects and other places. He had about twenty people working as security guards. Not all of them was members of the party. I was put in charge of the guards. I was the supervisor. I had to check on them. I would go around to the guards at night, check to see if they was on their posts. If they have problems they would come to me. If they had a problem on the job or wasn't doing the job, I could suspend them, or give them a few days off, but I had to know both sides. We also had families that would come over to the office with their problems. People didn't want to take their problems to the police. Black people have enough intelligence to solve their own problems, but they need help. I know I worked with about three or four families that come there. We helped solve their problems, and they got back together.

We tried to stop people from being violent, 'cause that wouldn't solve the problem. We talked to people. I learned that from my Grandfather. I remember him saying, "When you get into violence, you ain't gonna solve the problem. You gonna make it worse." He taught me that if you get in an argument, before it gets violent, say, "Let's have a recess, let's table this and cool off." Then you come back and solve the problem. We was building the black community, showing what black folks can do. We advocated for the community and tried to clean up the community. The police didn't give us no trouble. Chief Cahill said, "I don't have nothing against the Black Security Guards. Everywhere my police go, they see them."

We had general membership meetings and served dinners. We passed out flyers in the community. We had education meetings. One

time we sponsored a meeting to commemorate the birthday of Marcus Garvey. The black guards had their own newsletter.

I was in the ADNIP party four or five years, until it broke up. Al Sultan left the country and went to Guyana. There was a stool pigeon in the party and Al Sultan was accused of hiding some guns somewhere. I never did see anything like that. He didn't want to go to court so he left the country. I never did see him no more. I heard that he wrote two books and opened up a bookstore over there. Then I heard he was going to come back to the United States but he was assassinated. I think the snitch was working for the CIA. After that the ADNIP party just fell apart. Those years I worked for the Black Security Guards was the last job I had before retiring.

While I was working at the Jack Tar Dr. Mitchell at UC told me I had to stop working in the kitchen, that the heat was too much and I was getting high blood pressure. I took some high blood pressure pills for a while, and later I got partial disability.

From the time I first arrived San Francisco I was meeting people and going to meetings and getting involved. When I first come here somebody told me to go see Dr. Carton Goodlett for help in finding a job. He had an office on Fillmore between Sutter and Bush. Dr. Goodlett was also the publisher of the San Francisco Sun-Reporter, a black community newspaper. He gave me twenty-five dollars to help me. I saw him again at the Cow Palace at a big civil rights rally where Martin Luther King was speaking. There was thousands of people there and I was sitting way in the back. Dr. Goodlett was there passing out copies of his newspaper, and we

talked for a while. A few years later while I was working at the Fairmont hotel I met Dr. Goodlett again. I was at a meeting on Van Ness Street and I run up on him. They had a lunch break at the meeting he said, "Brown let's go get some buffalo meat." I was surprised. I said, "Doctor, don't be pulling my leg." I never heard of nobody eating buffalo meat. We come on up to Tommy's Joynt at Geary and Van Ness. We sat upstairs and he ordered buffalo stew. I ordered the same thing. It was good. We talked about different things and got to know each other. After that I used to go by his office sometimes and talk.

In 1966 Dr. Goodlett decided to run for Governor. He asked me to support his campaign. I said I would and he gave me a letter authorizing me to collect funds for his campaign. I used to go around to meetings to talk about his campaign, raise funds, shake the bushes, talk to people one on one. I didn't do no hell of a lot but I helped out because I thought he was a good man, very progressive. (WHAT WAS GOODLETT'S PROGRAM? WHO WON ELECTION?)

Him and I stayed friends. I used to go to his office to talk about issues. When I got my medications from the Kaiser health clinic I would take them to him to look at, tell me if they was any good.

I was sorry when Dr. Goodlett passed in 1997.

I also was involved with the Auto Row protest that happened in (YEAR?). Van Ness Street was where all the car dealers was located and they decided to protests against the racism of the car dealers. I marched down there with Dr. Bourbon (SP?) who organized the demonstrations. They wanted the dealers to hire black salesmen to

work there on Auto Row. I think they got two,three jobs for some black salesmen. That wasn't a grassroots issue, it was about upgrading the professionals. Just like when we used to fight for better parts in the motion picture industry

Another time we picketed the hotel there on Market Street, the Sheraton Palace, to try to get them to hire more black workers. Like all them damn hotels, it was very racist about hiring black folks. I remember one night a busload of Africans pulled up while we was picketing. We started talking. They wanted to know what we was doing. We asked them not to go in there, and they didn't. We did get the hotels to hire more black people and improve conditions for the room cleaners, but only a few people went down there to the union to apply for the jobs. I don't know why more people didn't go for those jobs.

In 1968 I worked with the Peace and Freedom Party in Eldridge Cleaver's presidential campaign. Kathleen Cleaver asked me to work on the campaign. Kathleen had heard about me from a girl named Tracy Sims. We used to march in demonstrations down at City Hall. One time we marched down there when Cahill was chief of police. This was when Sam Jordan was running for Mayor. Sam was a retired longshoreman who had a bar on Third Street, and he was very active in the community. I spoke at the rally. Chief Cahill had brought out police dogs to scare the people. I said, "Turn those dogs loose! Goddamit, we'll eat 'em up!" I'd've probably been the first one to run, but it worked. I scared the Chief and he didn't let those dogs loose. Maybe Tracy told Kathleen about that.

Kathleen and I had a long conversation. She wanted me to join the Peace and Freedom Party and help them out. So I went around talking to people, handing out literature. I stayed involved with the Peace and Freedom Party right into the 1980s when I was on the central committee.

I also worked some with the Black Panther Party chapter in San Francisco. I met some of the members, a guy they called "D.C." and some others. They was a young group and I used to give them advice on handling security. This was when I was working with the Black Security Guards. We used to meet upstairs at the Panther office on O'Farrell Street. Some of them act like big shots in the community. But I remember one time the Panthers from Oakland came and took their money. Showed they was just selling wolf tickets.

I worked with the Panthers until they broke up. I was there when Betty Shabazz came to San Francisco. I was in charge of her security. I told the security guards how to search people, pat 'em and check for weapons. I was her personal body guard.

So I was involved with the Communist Party, the ADNIP Party, the Peace and Freedom Party, the Black Panther Party, and sometimes the Muslims and some other groups. I kept up my membership in the NAACP and went to their meetings on Divisadero Street. I was busy in those days, ^{busy} ~~man~~. That was my trouble, I was trying to do too much. It was crazy. On Sundays I would leave one meeting and go to another. And I didn't stop when I retired. I worked more, with the NAACP and with the Senior Action Network and housing groups. That's

how come I started to have high blood pressure and heart problems. I'm lucky not to be dead.

Through it all I was working to get freedom. I wanted people to be free. I thought it would come through socialism. I thought socialism was coming right away. We still need socialism, but we also got to have strong unions, low income housing, health care for the people, social security, day care centers, rest homes for the old people. We need all of this.

What disappointed me about the Communist Party was that the leadership didn't follow through on the struggle against racism, white chauvinism. I think there was some truth in that book by Wilson Record. The Party was mainly using intellectuals and didn't go to the grassroots in the trade union movement. The intellectuals and professionals mess up the Party and they divided the people. To me the Party members in the South was more dedicated, and there was more trade unionists in the Party. What we need is a strong party and a left-wing movement in the unions. The biggest mistake they made was when they didn't build the left wing of the unions, move the unions to the left-center. That's why I liked V.I. Lenin and William Foster: build the unions. That's the key. That's where the masses at.

The other organizations I worked with over the years, I wanted to get in there and bring up issues. Raise issues and let the people know what's going on. A good left-wing trade unionist will get in there and bring issues to the floor, like I used to do in the NAACP and the other mass organizations. Be a spark plug, and at least some of the people will go along with you.

15

CHAPTER ~~TWELVE~~: Grace in My Life (ver 1, 7/6/99)

(Sources: 10/27/95;7/5/99 interview material, plus info in Grace Oliver Brown file folder)

In 1967 I met the person who would mean the most to me for many years. I first met Grace Oliver at the Fairmont Hotel. She was working there as a room cleaner.

Every Christmas Ben Swig, the old man himself, the owner of the Fairmont Hotel, would give a big party at the Fairmont, and all the staff went to it. Grace liked to dance. Not me. She was doing a dance called "The Jerk" or something. Even Mr.Swig was clapping. She had on a black dance and she looked sharp, brother! I went up to her and told her how good she looked. That's when we met.

Grace and I used to meet in the cafeteria and talk. We talked about the work at the hotel, the labor movement. I liked her looks and she seemed to be very intelligent. She was very concerned about trade union activity. She was a member of Local 283, the room cleaners union. I didn't know if she had ever carried the ball for the union but she understood what it was about. We talked a few times and she invited me to come over to her house. Grace used to live on Sharon Street. I was living at 2502 Third Street. She seemed to be a very good woman, and we got into a relationship

Grace was born in Shreveport, Louisiana but her family came to San Francsico and she grew up here. She had six children -- two girls -- Ruby and Gloria -- and four boys -- Larry, Jerry, Alfred and Luke, Jr. The youngest was still in school. She was separated from her husband, Luke, and later she got divorced. I seen him a couple of times when he came by the house. I helped her with the

children. They wasn't no angels, but they respected the way I treated them and the way I carried myself. She was honest, she made them respect me. I was buying food and helping to pay the rent.

When we got married on January 21, 1976, Grace moved in with me on Third Street. By then the children was on their own. They would come visit on holidays and Grace would prepare a big dinner. Larry was married and he would come and bring his children. Ruby had got married and Gloria was living with her aunt. Like wasn't there and Alfred was locked up. Him and Luke was in trouble a lot.

When Grace and I met this was during the time that Terry Francois was the president of the chapter here of the NAACP. She told me that one time him and Dick Swig, Ben Swig's son, was going around asking the room cleaners how they liked the job. That's when Francois call himself fighting discrimination in the hotels. Quite naturally, she wasn't gonna bad mouth the job in front of Dick Swig. She said, yeah, she liked the job, she didn't bad mouth it. But they did have some trouble with racism, and I was telling her that they could do better.

Before I got to know Grace well I remember there was a lady worked there in the linen room named Mrs. Brown. She was a room cleaner, and I was telling her they should have black inspectors. At that time I was on the Local Joint Board for the hotel workers unions up on Market Street. I had raised the question in the Joint Board about how if they discharged a room cleaner they didn't have no follow up. The business agent wouldn't take up the case to get them reinstated. I was telling them about that, that there should be a change. To get back to Mrs. Brown and I and the black inspectors,

what?

more up

she called Bert, the head of Local 283. During that period you had separate locals for different hotel workers. The room cleaners, cooks, waiters, waitresses and bartenders was in different locals. We wanted the black room cleaners to be able to advance to inspector. This was like the same thing I had fought for in the South, to upgrade the workers on the docks. When you have an opening it should be open to anyone to apply and upgrade. I told Mrs. Brown to threaten to march on the local if they didn't demand that they put on black inspectors. Bert called Mrs. Bennett, the head housekeeper at the Fairmount, and got them to hire black inspectors 'cause he didn't want the room cleaners marching on the local. Mrs. Brown and I was talking about the march sitting in the cafeteria. They think we was drinking coffee and we was organizing!

Grace got involved in union activities after she left the Fairmont and went to work at the Mark Hopkins Hotel. In the cafeteria the room cleaners was being served precooked food that was left over from the restaurant, and they had to pay for it. I told her that wasn't right. The workers should get the food for free or bring their own. Grace discussed this with her fellow workers and they decided to boycott the cafeteria to protest. She organized them to bring their own lunch from home in a brown bag. The negotiations took a while but finally all the hotels agreed that the room cleaners could eat free in the cafeteria after they had worked so many hours. I give Grace the ball and she run with it. She had the consciousness to become an activist; all she needed was a little guidance in the right direction. If somebody got a little spark and

you develop it, they will grow. I learned that through the struggle in the trade union movement.

While this struggle was going on the manager of the hotel tried to discharge Grace two, three times, said she was drunk on the job and falling out. The bosses will try to pull anything, and they'll get away with it if you ain't got the strength to fight back. Grace went to the union. The union had a meeting of the grievance committee and Joe Belardi, who was head of the local joint board, went and fought for her himself. I knew Joe Belardi. He was born in the same town as my mother, Bolton, Mississippi. He got Grace's job reinstated.

They kept on harassing her at the Mark Hopkins Hotel. One day they discharged her again. Grace did drink, but not so much as to be falling out on no job. Grace got a statement from her doctor saying that she wasn't drunk but that she was suffering with seizures and that she was taking a medication called Dilantin*. (*Dilantin is a drug commonly used for management of seizures in patients with brain cancer. -- RLA) They called her at home and told her she was reinstated and to come back to work. But they continued harassing her. She finally decided that she would quit because she was tired of being harassed.

For a time Grace worked with other women in an organization called the Committee For Jobs. The Committee initiated a struggle for jobs for women on the waterfront. They faced a barrier of male supremacist harassment without much support, but they continued to sit in the hiring hall and to speak out. The Committee didn't really get

off the ground, and only later did this struggle gain the visibility and support to break through.

Later she got a job at a small hotel on Turk Street. She worked there close to five or six months. The hotel owner sold out. He had only two black room cleaners there, one of whom was Grace. He called the two into the office to give them two weeks' notice and a recommendation and two weeks' pay.

I suggested to Grace that she should get on disability because she was ill. She was still having seizures. She would never tell me what exactly was the problem because she said she didn't want to worry me, but it worried me more that she wouldn't tell me. She stopped drinking but she didn't get any better. I took her to the Social Security Office on Mission Street to apply for disability and social security. When we went down there I told Grace don't go there like some people do, with one shoe or a blue sock and a green one or a red one. Go there looking neat. Dress well. I had learned that when I was negotiating in the South and meeting people. If you want to be successful, look successful. When we went to the office the lady told Grace, "Don't worry. I'm going to put you on right away." I was there observing, and I had on so many damned many union buttons that maybe the lady was thinking, "We don't want no trouble!" Grace started receiving social security on September 13, 1982, and I was named payee so she wouldn't have to go out to cash the checks.

During the time that Grace and I was together I was involved with the Communist Party and the AD NIP party. I was interested in any organization I thought could help black folks. Grace wasn't too

interested in the AD NIP party. I think she attended a couple of meetings with me, but that was about all. She didn't have any connection with the Communist Party except what she knew about it from me. She wasn't against the Party and she didn't oppose me being involved with it. Grace would go along with some of the issues, like fighting racism and and working on the job situation. We used to go to the People's World fundraising event every year. But I think her attitude to the party came out one day when I told her the FBI seemed to not be bothering the Party anymore and she said, "Well, that's because you all ain't doing nothing!"

Although she wasn't well Grace still did some work in the community. I had to raise hell to get a polling place put in Dog Patch at the bottom of Potrero Hill so old people wouldn't have to climb up the hill to vote. We worked together on that. Grace worked on registering people to vote, and she worked at the polls. Meantime, I was learning and she was learning; we was learning to work together around issues.

Grace wasn't no Harriet Tubman, but she did the best she could, and I respected and loved her for that. We could work together and she gave me inspiration to move forward. She encouraged me to write, and she helped me. I had faith in her, I had confidence in her, I could trust her. If she was living today she would still be out there.

The only thing was that her drinking was pretty bad sometimes, but we worked on that -- and she finally did stop, two years or so before she died. But she couldn't stop smoking. I used to buy her

three, four cartons of cigarets a month. She said she just couldn't stop it.

Towards the end we had a fire at the apartment building where we was living on Third Street. The fire broke out early one morning. Grace was sleeping in her son's apartment, Number 3, because I had a big Belgian shepherd that she was allergic to. A lady passing by saw the fire and warned people. Grace was sick, but she got up out of bed and went into the hallway which was in total darkness. Two other tenants saw her going the wrong way toward the fire and they took her outside of the building. The firemen came and put the fire out before it did too much damage.

The fire started on the back porch. That made me suspicious, because a fire had started there once before. We believed maybe the landlord had started the fire. So I started staying up and watching, and I got a couple of the tenants to act as security at night.

On Monday January 13, 1986, I had to attend two meetings. When I got home the lady at the store told me that Grace had passed. The ambulance came and got her that morning and took her to General Hospital. She had went there once before to get operated on. I didn't have too much faith in General Hospital, but a lot of people said it was a good hospital. I didn't trust those white doctors. Maybe they gave her too much medication. Grace wouldn't tell me what the operation was for; I believed it was cancer.

Grace had started going to the Metropolitan Baptist Church and that's where the funeral service was held. A lot of people attended the service, and I got hundreds of cards and telegrams.

I loved Grace. We had a good relationship, and I had a good sister I could trust. I had a lot of faith in her and she had faith in me. I'm sorry that I couldn't save her.

Grace was very much loved and highly respected in the community. Perhaps one of the finest tributes showing this is demonstrated in this letter from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, dated January 23, 1986:

Dear Mr. Brown:

This is to inform you that, upon motion made by Supervisor Doris M. Ward, the Board of Supervisors adjourned its regular meeting of January 21, 1986 out of respect to the memory of the late Grace Oliver Brown.

The members of the Board, with a profound sense of civic and personal loss, are conscious of the many fine qualities of heart and mind which distinguished and brought justifiable appreciation to Mrs. Brown in the community.

The Supervisors realize that mere words can mean so little to you at a time such as this, but they do want you and the members of your family to know of their deep sympathy and heartfelt condolence.

Sincerely,

John L. Taylor

Clerk of the Board

Over the years I have faced other deaths among my loved ones. My mother passed years before I left New Orleans to come to San Francisco. She died before I went to the penitentiary. She was

sick. I remember the doctor called me and my brother and sister into her room. He said, "I can't save her, but I can keep her alive a little longer." She had a slow leak in her heart. He wanted to do something that would keep her alive. "We may be able to help others," he said. I wasn't opposed to it and the rest wasn't either. We may have made a mistake, I don't know. This was when I was working on the barge lines, around 1951, when she passed.

After I got to San Francisco I used to call and talk to Rose on the telephone, talk to the children, Brownie and Rose's other children, Yvonne and Theodore. I went back to New Orleans on the bus one year before Brownie passed, and I spent about five days with him. He drove me around in the car and we talked a lot. Instead of setting in the front of the car I always sit in the back because I didn't believe in using those buckles, putting on the seatbelts. He always wanted me to talk. He say, "Talk to me, tell me something." He wanted to know about different things I was doing.

I stayed with my cousin from my father's side; we called her "Sugar Duck." She was the daughter of Joe Reese. She was 60, 70 years old and be strutting all over. We went to the store and she wanted to buy three Irish potatoes. I said, "Cuz, put that back." I got the basket and started to dropping chicken, meat and other things in there. I was gonna stay there a week or longer and I wanted to help out. The lady at the counter looked at me when I pulled out a hundred-dollar bill. She act like she ain't never seen a black man with a hundred-dollar bill.

Brownie had a job driving a water truck, delivering bottled water. He said he liked the job. That was the first time I seen him

since he was small, after I got out the joint. I was gald to see him. He was married and had three children, three boys: Donald, Derrick and Darwin. His wife was named Barbara. I think he was doing good. That was one year before he got drowned. He was 26 years old, I believe.

The next year (1977?) Brownie drowned in the swimming pool in the place where he lived. Yvonne's son found him in the pool late one night. I don't know how it happened, but I thought something was wrong. I asked Rose's brother-in-law to try to find out, but he never found nothing.

When Brownie passed Rose called me, and I went to New Orleans again to go to the wake. Cousin Sugar Duck left the key with a neighbor. I got there and taken a bath and went to the quiet hour. Sugar Duck was there, and as long as I could look back and see her I felt strong. I knew I wouldn't have no break down. I knew she was there to protect the family if anybody fell out. My sister and my brother was rubbing me on the head and all that. Brownie's wife was whooping and hollering. Sugar Duck carried a bottle of camphor oil. She needed it the next day at the cemetery. Rose's daughter, Yvonne, fell out when they was lowering Brownie down into the ground. Cuz stuck the camphor bottle under her nose, and she come back.

Rose and Moselle have passed, too. Rose died a few years ago. I didn't know nothing about it until my sister sent me the news. Rose had been sick in the hospital. She used to smoke a lot. I think that's what killed her.

Moselle got killed in a automobile wreck. Last time I was passing her cousin's beauty shop on Third Street four or five years

ago she called me and told me. I couldn't believe it. That was the second time Moselle was in a car wreck. She and her Uncle Doc was in another car wreck when they was on their way to Florida.

Brownie's wife got married again, but her and her husband separated. She raised the children and kept me in touch with the children. One of the boys come out here and stayed but he was bad news. He was living in Union City and always getting in trouble. That was Derrick. Brownie's youngest son, Darwin, got married, and now he has a daughter named Calisha Kenyate Brown, my great granddaughter. Her mother, Bobbi, sent me a picture of her. She's five years old now. They say she's a "real Brown." I don't know exactly what they mean by that, but it sounds good.

14
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Retirement: Activism and Writing (Ver 1,
8/4/99) (Sources: 7/28/99 & 5/24/94 interviews, folders with
LB writings)

Trade Union Activism

I retired on disability when I left the Jack Tar, but I worked some for the Black Security Guards, as I said. When Grace and I lived on Third Street shortly after we got married, that's when I got my first Social Security check. I got it first and then she got Social Security.

After I retired I was still active in the trade union movement. I worked with my union and supported progressive labor organizations like the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. In 1975 all of the hotel workers locals had merged into one local, Local 2, the Hotel and Bartenders and Restaurant Workers Union. (Ask LB to discuss his opinion of this) I was active in the Local 2 Retirees Association, and in 1979 I ran for the executive board of Local 2. We had a progressive slate called Action Thru Unity. It was headed up by Charles Lamb for president, Larry Tom for vice-president and Sherri Chiesa for secretary-treasurer. The union had been losing membership and we wanted to organize the unorganized workers. Membership had dropped from 24,000 when the locals merged to only 17,000 in 1979. Our ticket won that election, and I got the most votes of any executive board member.

I was on the affirmative action committee of the executive board. I wanted to get more black people working in

the hotels, and as members in the union. By 1982 we only had 1,379 black members out of a total of 16,000. I was very concerned. I said there was a great need for the affirmative action committee. I tried to encourage young people in the black community, and all the unemployed workers, to seek employment in the culinary industry.

I ran for the executive board again in 1981, along with Jean Damu, a young progressive brother that I knew in the union. In our campaign for the executive board Damu and I pointed out that we had fought for unity and democracy in Local 2. We kept the rank and file affirmative action committee alive. During the hotel strike in 1980 we called on the union leadership to democratize the conduct of the strike and to seek support from other unions. We urged the local to support freedom struggles in South America and Southern Africa. We called on the international to organize workers in fast food restaurants like McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken, and to push for the 35 hour week. We opposed the firings of many minority business agents by the current administration of the union. We wanted a strong executive board, but our opponents was doing everything to split the progressive vote in that election and keep us from winning.

Even though I wasn't on the executive board any more, we kept the Unity and Democracy Caucus going and I still continued on the affirmative action committee. I was also second vice-president of the Retirees' Association. When time came for negotiations for a new contract for hotel workers I

issued a press release: "Trade Unionist Lee Brown's views and report on Local 2 Hotel Workers sent a loud and clear message to the hotel owners in San Francisco. No sweetheart contract. For a good contract, we vote 'yes.' They voted 94% for a good contract. Some workers voted 'no', but the majority voted 'yes.' No takeaways. We will strike again, if necessary. We will not go backwards. They say that we will support the rank and file negotiating committee; we will support the staff of Local 2, for we all learned a lesson in the first struggle for a decent contract.

"They also threatened to take away some holidays: July 4th and Thanksgiving Day. They threatened also to take away the union hiring hall and that made the workers angry. And I repeat they will not go backward, they will go forward. These threatening issues united and made the rank and file much stronger. And these are the issues: We demand a decent working contract around wages, vacation, holidays, meals for all employees including room-cleaners. . . . From my point of view, the hotelworkers are much stronger than they were in the first ~~sd~~ strike, when they [employers] threatened to take away the hiring hall which is the backbone of the hotelworkers. The real source of the union's power is its rank and file membership. We are united behind the negotiating committee and the staff of Local 2 struggling for a better and a fairer contract in the culinary industries. Struggles will teach us a lesson. Labor must get involved in American ~~pol~~itics. The bosses are scheduled to present

before the statewide elections December 13th a bill by Assemblyman Don Sebastiani (R-Sonoma) -- author of the scheme. This scheme is designed to make California become an open-union-shop and a right-to-work state. So, we must fight back and organize a united front. All community members should be encouraged to seek work in the culinary industries. There are many job classifications, briefly, from cooks, food servers, buspersons, bartenders, including dishwashers, roomcleaners, and telephone operators. Now I want to encourage the Black community, in particular, and all unemployed workers to seek employment in the culinary industry. . . . As a former member of the Executive Board and appointee of the Affirmative Action Committee and second vice-president of the Retirees' Assoc. (Local 2), I will continue fighting for a progressive, democratic Local 2 and a strong, fighting, militant union in the culinary industry, for a training program to upgrade and/or promote the workers, [and to support] the rank and file negotiating committee and chief negotiator, Charles Lamb. The rank and file membership has been well-informed through bulletins, leaflets, speeches, newsletters, etc.

"I will repeat: we will not go backwards. We will continue going forward. Local 2 members speak with one voice for trade union unity and democracy. I, Lee Brown, will remain your brother in struggle until the emancipation of the workers in the United States of America."

Senior Activism

After I retired I had gotten back into the Communist Party. Sam Gold had first asked me to come back into the party. I did go to some party activities. I was a fellow traveller, and that's how I met Kendra Alexander, a sister who became chair of the Party in California. Kendra impressed me as a sincere person and I had respect for her. We used to discuss about trade unions. She also encouraged me to get back into the party. Although I still had my criticisms of racism in the party, I started going to meetings. By 1979 I was a member and paying dues again, and I paid dues through 1991.

Kendra Alexander put me on the Party's senior commission because they didn't have any blacks on it. One of the people I met on the commission was Billy Allan. I think Billy was the chairman of the commission. I liked Billy. He was honest, he wasn't racist, and I respected him. There was a tribute held for me in 1982 and Billy was out of town but he sent a statement that said Lee Brown "brings to the organized working class movement a dedication, militancy, and clarity needed so much in these complex times, when the class is under such fierce attack by the Reaganites and Reagonomics. He speaks loudly, valiantly and with passion against the twin sources of disunity, redbaiting and racism. No redbaiter or racist will get away with their divisiveness while Lee Brown is able to get to the floor and rebut that splitting tactic of the bosses. In the senior movement he has made his mark. A

vice president of the retirees organization in Local 2, he sends out the call to all seniors to unite and get with it, to beat back the attacks on their rights and needs by Reagan. Onward and upward I say to Lee Brown."

Billy died in 1988. I wrote to Billy's wife, Stephanie, and his family to express my wholehearted sympathy. Billy was very knowledgeable of the trade union movement. He tried to connect the Party with the seniors and the trade union movement. I learned a lot from him.

I was a member of many different senior organizations, including the Senior Action Network, the National Council of Senior Citizens, the National Caucus and Center for the Black Aged in Washington, and Legal Assistance to the Elderly. I was a member of different committees and boards that studied issues and policies and whatnot, and made recommendations and reports. Starting in 1986 I worked on the senior advisory committee of the Legal Assistance to the Elderly, and in 1990 their newsletter published an article profiling my life and my work in the trade union movement.

I was a member of the board of directors of the Senior Action Network but because of health reasons I had to resign. But I continued on the crime committee that met once a month. In 1992 I was nominated for a S.A.N. Senior of the Year Award. They gave a trophy. They also gave me a certificate of honor for volunteer service to the San Francisco community.

In addition to being on committees, for many years I went to the senior rally every year in Sacramento where we

would raise issues concerning the needs of seniors. I was a monitor at the demonstrations and I was on the board of the California Legislative Council for Older Americans that sponsored the marches. I would still be going now except that in 1997 I had a heart attack and my doctor, Dr. Arthur Coleman, told me I had to slow down.

I also wrote many articles and letters to editors about issues affecting seniors. This is an article that was published in the People's World newspaper on May 19, 1984:

As a Black Trade Unionist, I call for an end to the discrimination against Black seniors on a national level. This means all those in senior organizations, retiree groups, community groups, churches, etc. -- minority and white senior elders -- should fight for equality of all seniors.

Black seniors are also suffering as part of the workingclass for being Black, so that means they are doubly oppressed. Therefore, all of us -- seniors and non-seniors -- must work together to bring about equality for all minorities, seniors and especially Black seniors in this country.

Poverty continues to increase for older Blacks. There are nearly 800,000 older Blacks among the poor in the U.S., according to the Census Bureau statistics for the '80's, which are some two of every five Blacks who are 65 years or older. This includes a high number of elderly Blacks who are living below the poverty level.

Black Americans are living in health hazard housing, fire hazard housing and overcrowded housing. Some older Black couples are living on an income of \$4,954. Among older Black women, three out of seven are poor.

Cutbacks in program such as Social Security, food stamps, Medicare, and escort services mean older Blacks will be hit hardest and suffer worse than they already do.

It is the great fear of race in the minds of Americans which is causing crisis and conflicts among citizens in this country, where they suffer from this great fear of racism and people have to suffer. For example . . . Black senior women suffer doubly from being exploited on account of being part of the workingclass and Black. So, Black seniors are second-class citizens, definitely; because of this, it must be

on our agenda to fight for all minority seniors, particularly Black seniors.

As a trade unionist speaking for the grassroots seniors in this country, I know it is Black senior organizations who are representing (and not very well) the masses at the grassroots level. And I'm speaking from the experience of collecting information and personal investigation and scientific research and talking to people well-informed. And I am a member of national senior groups as well as local.

Now is the time for seniors to demand their rights: food, shelter, health care, energy, transportation and decent homes that we can afford. We must demand that no more cuts are enacted in social programs. And this means that seniors must also fight for peace and jobs for all.

My wife Grace helped me to start off writing after I retired. She encouraged me, and she assisted me. She would type up my articles and letters and help me with the writing. My friend Tom Dunphy also helped me. He would interview me and write it down. Both of them also helped me with starting to write my life story. I wasn't no fancy writer, but I tried to express my ideas, what I think needs to be told, because other writers and editors wasn't getting down to the grassroots. I wrote many articles for the Peoples World and I wrote a regular column called "Diary of a Black Trade Unionist" that was printed in the New Bayview News. My articles and letters was sometimes printed in other publications like The Black Scholar.

Housing Issues

Another issue I worked on was trying to get decent housing for all people. When Grace and I lived on Third Street I worked with the Tenants Union and I was chairperson of the Committee for Fair Rent.

I also wrote about the housing crisis and possible solutions. Here are some excerpts from an article I published in the New Bayview News, May 28, 1981:

As a Trade Unionist I fight for the right of housing for working people in this country. I would also include the seniors, retirees, the disabled or handicapped, and housing especially for the poor and working class youth. Because the young who want to have their own decent place to live cannot find anyplace to live, they are forced to live in overcrowded homes. Mostly these "homes" are a health hazard and a fire hazard. These traps are indecent and immoral. WE NEED HOUSES FOR PEOPLE, NOT FOR PROFIT. It is a human right. Houses for people is a basic human right.

In California we are 210,000 housing units short, and that is not including the unliveable housing. By not having adequate houses for the people we have lost over 175,000 jobs in California. . . .

Those who can well afford to get housing get more help, and the poor, working class and low income continue to cry out for a decent place to live. The only thing they ask for is a decent place to live. A place that we can afford. And especially hard hit are our single women with children. . . .

I now would like to present a solution to the housing crisis in the USA as follows: A battle for rent control. Because we have a serious fight ahead. (Rent control law is in serious jeopardy in Calif., if not the whole country.) We need a national rent control law. The poor people are living in worse houses in the central city areas. The landlords only use a small sum of their profits, which they receive from the pockets of their tenants, to patch up the falling down housing, and then use any repair as an excuse to raise the peoples rent. This then forces the seniors and us poor out. The hardest hit are on fixed incomes. Those of us on fixed and slipping incomes have to give up food for higher rents and utilities. . . .

We must act, we must turn talk into action, and form housing committees for immediate action. We can then form community organizations on a block by block basis to do something other than just talk about this problem. Go after your churches, your labor organizations, and your neighbors to form committees. .

. . .

The NAACP (5/24/94 interview p. 11)

show a lifetime ability in work

Since my days in Houston I have always been a supporter of the NAACP, and after retiring I continued to be active. I was very concerned about senior issues, housing, and health care. For a while I was the chair of the NAACP's senior citizen committee. Sometimes I had problems with the leadership of the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP, but I always thought it was an important organization and I worked along with other progressive members like Harold Treskunoff to do what I could to support it.

I feel that the local leadership haven't been democratic about choosing delegates for national conventions. They pick delegates they want, but the delegates should be elected by the general membership, like we do in unions. The chapter I attended in New Orleans was more democratic. And the leadership here doesn't follow through on issues we need to be fighting on -- that's housing, health needs, jobs. You could build the NAACP if they worked on these issues. That's the way you build an organization, around issues.

I tried to sum up my views of the NAACP in an article the was published in 1984 in the Sun-Reporter newspaper:

I would like to express my concern regarding the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and my involvement in the association. In 1939 I became aware of the NAACP in Houston, Texas and later became a member of the NAACP Youth Movement in Los Angeles. I was involved in fighting for better roles for black Americans in the motion picture industry. Mrs. Charlotte Bass, editor and publisher of the California Eagle, the major black newspaper in Los Angeles during the Depression, was the Executive Director of the Youth League of the NAACP.

We must continue the fight for better roles in the motion picture industry, television, and other

entertainment fields. We must not treat the subject lightly. We have made some gains in the Negro and Hollywood films, but not enough. Hollywood must take a new look at the black American and continue the fight to eliminate the roots of racism in the industry. In the past a number of black films were made which told about the struggle for a better life in the U.S. Several films such as "Home of the Brave," "Lost Boundaries," "Intruder in the Dust," and a number of other films were made but they did not tell the complete story of black people in helping to build America -- that's one reason why we should encourage more people to join the NAACP because the NAACP is the oldest civil rights organization in America.

We should help build the NAACP, help build the people's movement. I acted in the labor movement for over 46 years and sold a number of memberships in our Local 207 in New Orleans. Our union staff and executive board worked very closely with the national organizational branch of the NAACP to maintain rights of organized labor and the field of health, housing, education and jobs for youth and adults and in other areas as well. .

. .

I am a man who is concerned with the struggle of our people and other oppressed people in the fight for a better education and jobs for the youth and all unemployed, concerned in the housing area and public demand for more housing and national health needs and last but not least: peace.

The NAACP must change in order to grow. Some must come down off their high horses and be human! -- respect the rights of the people, regardless of what level they've attained. Those of us concerned with the NAACP and conscious of the struggle in America must learn to relate and listen to each other, because no matter what level, we're all victims of racism in America.

I would like to say to the leadership of the NAACP that we must call upon our friends in labor, religion, and other areas to help secure freedom. The struggle for freedom of black Americans is the struggle for freedom for all America.

Join the NAACP today, not tomorrow, for tomorrow may be too late. First recruit your family into the NAACP, then your neighbors. I feel that this is our duty and our responsibility that we must sacrifice in the cause of freedom. So let it be on our agenda, for time is running out.

We're going into 1985 and I propose that we study the history of black workers in America and black history in general. We must have knowledge of where we came from in order to know where we're going. I propose also that you become a nation of readers! We have been in a storm in the struggle for liberation of oppressed people in the U.S. And we must become allies with all

organizations that fight for freedom for all oppressed peoples in the U.S.

We must also study the history of the NAACP, from the beginning of the Niagara Movement in 1905 to the present. . . .

I remain with you in the struggle, and continue the unfinished march for justice.

Peace and Solidarity Work

When the movement against apartheid in South Africa started I got involved in it. I participated in marches and demonstrations and I spoke at rallies. I went in 1981 to New York City to the Conference in Solidarity with the Liberation Struggle of the People of Southern Africa. I was the representative of Local 2, sent by the president and the executive board. Thousands of people came to this conference.

When I returned from the conference I wrote an article reporting on it. Here is an excerpt from the article, which was published in the People's World, November 7, 1981:

The purpose of the conference was to establish a plan of action to educate and organize the U.S. masses against the racist apartheid regime of South Africa. Apartheid is the racist system of government whereby the white minority (17 percent of the total population) owns and controls over 85 percent of the wealth. The 70 percent Black majority suffer atrocities most North Americans find difficult to comprehend.

The distribution of wealth in South Africa is itself a reflection of how these atrocities are possible. Blacks in South Africa are among the world's most poverty-stricken people.

The declaration submitted by the New York delegation was adopted by the conference delegates; it included the following:

- * To organize mass support in the U.S. for the liberation movement of South Africa;
- * To expose the U.S. government and corporations' leading role in the South African apartheid system;
- * To mobilize the people in the U.S. from the grassroots in the anti-apartheid struggle.

I will report back to Local 2, demanding ongoing assistance to the liberation struggle in South Africa. I urge everyone to fight this system of genocide against South African Blacks.

"An Injury To One Is An Injury To All."

I continued to be active in the anti-apartheid movement, In 1985 I marched in a demonstration with Alameda County Supervisor John George. A photograph of us marching together was published in the California Voice newspaper. I'm proud that I marched in demonstrations. I didn't get to meet them ^(Mandela) but I'm also proud that I helped provide security when Alfred ~~Enzo (sp?)~~ and Nelson Mandela came to the Bay Area.

In an article that the The Black Scholar published in May/June 1981 issue I discussed the different social issues and connected them to the trade union movement, peace, the military budget, and political involvement. My article was called "Views on the Military Budget."

I am writing on behalf of the lower and moderate income ~~workers~~, on how Reagan's military budget affects us as working people. Reagan's interest is not the worker's interest. Escalating the already bloated military budget only robs the people of services necessary for their survival. Senior citizens, retirees, the disabled, handicapped: all standards of living are reduced when money is taken from social programs and used instead for MX missiles. Poor people, youth, single mothers are all victims of a needlessly inflated military budget.

The workers cannot afford to rent decent housing, let alone buying a home; food and utility prices are far more than many people can pay; schools are being closed, denying young people any kind of education. Poor people face overcrowded living conditions with severe health and fire hazards.

Do U.S. workers really know what's happening? I say that Reagan is anti-people. He represents pro-monopoly and pro-military spending, serving the interests of big business and putting profits before the people's well-being. We face tough years ahead. Reagan has given the green light to bust unions in the U.S.A. The resurgence of racism is being used to divide the ranks of labor.

The threat of a sub-minimum wage for youth is an attempt to separate young people from organized labor. Unemployment continues to rise as workers are repeatedly bombarded with plant closures and runaway shops; hospitals, clinics and schools are being closed, which not only denies communities of needed services, it also adds to unemployment. The U.S. is in an economic crisis and the people must act now.

Organized labor has the ability to lead in the struggle for the rights of all workers. Trade unionists must participate in coalitions with representatives from religious groups, senior citizens, youth, community and political organizations. We must build a united front which serves the interests of working people in this country. An enormous military budget and constant threats of nuclear war do not serve our interests.

Trade unions must become the vehicle for workers to struggle in their own interests. Labor's goal must be to organize the unorganized. Unions need study circles and union classes to educate workers on trade unionism and practice unionism, teaching workers trade union consciousness, with a knowledge of trade union democracy.

Free education and health services and decent housing for all people in this country must be struggled for. We must fight for rent control and lowering of utility prices. We must close tax loopholes of the monopolies. We must fight against unemployment, inflation, runaway shops; we must demand jobs for all with effective affirmative action for nationally and racially oppressed people. I feel this is a people's program. And we must not forget those on Social Security and S.S.I.

There is a solution to high unemployment that trade unions can become involved with: workers' fightback is the answer. We can demand more houses for poor and elderly people. Housing increases will create jobs for construction workers throughout the country. Keeping schools open will employ vast numbers of people from janitorial and food service workers to clerical workers and teachers, as well as educating the nation's youth. Keeping hospitals and clinics open also offers an abundance of jobs. Trade unions can fight the devastating effects of plant closures by supporting and participating in public and government joint takeover of closed plants. The time has also come to demand a shorter workweek with no cut in pay. Railroads can be re-opened in large cities, putting Americans back to work at union wages and working conditions. The possibilities are endless if we organize to stop Reagan's war economy and demand that our needs be met.

It is time to put talk into action. I call upon today's youth to turn out in masses to register and vote for candidates who work for peace and the people's

needs. We must become politically conscious by building relationships with one another in all workingclass communities. We must have faith and confidence in one another and strive for peace throughout the world.

I say that labor must be in the forefront of this struggle and call for unity for all organized labor in the U.S.A!

Doctor of the Working Class

I have worked in many organizations and learned many lessons. As a worker and a trade unionist I'm struggling, I'm trying to do the best I can to call up the needs of the people. I have worked and lived in the midst of the workers. I must know everything that I can about working people, the union people, that I work with at the grassroots level. I must try to understand the poor and the masses of the people. I must find the correct approach that I will be able to work with them, and they will help and work together and help themselves and help me. I must win the confidence of working people as I struggle in community service.

It was in July, 1981 that I became a doctor of the working class. I gave myself the Doctor of the Working Class degree. My university is the university of the world, and the people are the best teachers. I feel that through my experience in the struggle I earned that degree. I'm proud to be Lee Brown, D.W.C.

(FN: Lee Brown obtained a Certificate of Registration for an unincorporated non-profit association from the State of California. The association name is "Doctor of The Working Class" with Lee Brown listed as Founder and Director. The



registration certificate was issued on July 21, 1981, and is signed by March Fong Eu, Secretary of State.)

APPENDIX?

PHOTOGRAPHS

HONORS and TRIBUTES (inc. PW article, others)

15
CHAPTER 14 -- Looking Back, Facing Forward

(Sources: Interviews 8/11/99 and 8/21/98)

My grandfather always told me that god helped those who help themselves. That told me something, that you had to help yourself, that you didn't have to look up, there wasn't no god up there, god was down here within you. You got to move the situation, struggle to change things, and have faith in the people.

Sometimes people at the grassroots get to fighting each other. The problem is you got some shaky leadership, even in the labor movement. They collaborate with the bosses. They mislead the workers. That has got to change. We need to have a new labor movement, a new struggle.

When I look back I see that the trade union movement gave me inspiration and knowledge and experience of how to fight for freedom. I learned that the workers wasn't getting complete freedom and justice. We had to combat racism, fight for better working conditions, fight for jobs, upgrading, health needs, housing.

I learned that you have to fight for issues as the way to build any organization. If you want a strong organization you pick out issues to organize around. We fought Jim Crow as one issue to build the union. The union did an extraordinary job in the South on this and other issues. We dealt with social issues, like voter registration, as well as job

issues. In 1948 we was fighting like hell to get people registered in the campaign for Henry Wallace.

Racism is still a problem, and it's a problem in the unions. I remember when they was talking about the merging the hotel and restaurant workers unions in San Francisco back in the 70s, Charlie Gricus came to my house one day. He was telling me that we would have a better chance of fighting Jim Crow. He wanted me to work with him in bringing together the unions so we could merge. I thought it was good. But after they merged into Local 2 they still had problems with racism, not getting more black people into hotel work and into the union. They also didn't have many black people working on the staff of Local 2, only one brother on the staff. I talked to the president about that but they didn't follow through. So racism is still a problem in the labor movement. It was better when we had Charles Lamb and Sherri Chiesa as the union leaders. We had more blacks in the union then. *Now it says that* ~~The~~ leadership of the union is working with the company to keep blacks out. So you got to fight the union and the company both.

m 1955
I also think that the merger of the CIO with the AFL was a deadly mistake. We had bad leadership. We could have had strong unions throughout America. But the bosses wanted to block the organizing of a lot of businesses. There's a lot of places that are not organized. When the CIO was around it organized the textile, automobile, fur and leather workers, dock workers, packing house workers and many workers. But

when they merged with the AFL that stopped the organizing drive. I blame the Party for that. The Party should have built a leftwing movement in the trade unions, to keep the unions from going to the right. We needed a left-center movement to hold the unions and fight around issues like racism, health needs, housing. That could have moved the masses of the people. So that was a mistake made. ~~They didn't do that.~~

I know some people look to [AFL-CIO president] Sweeney to make things different, but I say the power comes from the rank and file. The people themselves got to speak out. I don't give a damn how good a leader you got, if you ain't got a strong rank and file to fight around issues and build the organization.

We got to build a new, strong labor movement around issues. We need to be very militant and fight for issues. Blacks should study the history of progressive movements. We need to study how to mobilize the people. Reparations is one issue that we can mobilize black people of different classes with. We need to talk about redistributing the wealth. We can get brown people and some white people to unite with black people around that kind of issue.

We need an international labor movement. They need to make international contacts in other countries like South Africa where there is a strong union movement. First we need to start here, but we need to make contacts and have dialog with workers about issues we can use to build the labor

movement. You got to have a new labor movement. That means talking with progressive minded workers, black, white, brown, every kind of workers, to support a new labor movement. It's like taking a ball and rolling it. You got to start it off. People need to know the truth. As long as you got the capitalist system you ain't going to make it here, not the poor. They may get a few crumbs, the middle class may, but not the poor. We need a big movement here around issues. We need to get out there and hit the streets. When you start an organization you need organizers and you need to be able to protect them when they get thrown in jail. Like we did in the South. You get arrested, you have somebody to get the people out before things get vicious in the jails.

*need to be
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In New Orleans I worked with the NAACP and civil rights. I met Martin Luther King when he came to New Orleans. I was introduced to him by Rev. L. Davis. I talked with him a little bit around issues. He was down to earth. I told him I was for peace, freedom, socialism, and he didn't flinch. You know he went to a socialist school, quiet as it's kept, the Highlander School. I think Dr. King was correct in fighting for civil rights, and I think we made a lot of progress, but I think we should have been working to educate the working white about racism and how he is hurting himself by trying to maintain white supremacy.

I think Julian Bond and Kwesi Mfume are good top leaders of the NAACP, but you still got to wake up the membership.

They need to mobilize the young people to build the NAACP. They can't let it just get conservative, middle class, petty bourgeois. They'll be satisfied as long as they get a dollar but that won't solve any problems. You need the masses, poor people, in the membership. That's where the power is. Like I told them in the labor movement, the source of power is the rank and file membership. Listen to them and you can't go wrong. I got faith in the masses.

I believe the Muslims helped to enlighten people, too, especially the brothers, to get them to come out and stand up like a man. They taught them how to treat one another right, get off of dope and alcohol, to respect women, and to treat everybody right. They said the Muslims was anti-white, but I never read anything by Elijah Muhammad where he said to hate anyone.

I worked with the NAACP and the Muslims because they can bring out issues, help the people, and you need to reach all people to educate and motivate them.

Issues and conditions will move the people, but they need somebody to carry the ball. You got issues here -- you got people hungry, people sleeping in the streets. You need somebody to get out there and mobilize them, wake 'em up, shake the bush. Conditions will move anybody, but you got to have some leadership.

You need good leaders, people who are militant, got some experience and are willing to fight back. You don't want leaders who gonna go along with the bosses and collaborate

Repetitive about
leadership

like some of these preachers. At the same time you have to be careful when you make criticisms because you can divide the people. You have to lead by bringing out issues. That was how I tried to lead, throwing out issues and getting people to support the issues.

In the Communist Party I learned to be more militant. The Party gave me a militant consciousness. I learned the issues we need to fight for and how we need to organize to fight for jobs, housing, health needs and against discrimination, particularly white chauvinism. But I also came to see there was racism within the Party, and I read books, Wilson Record's book, Bill Gould's book, Black Workers in White Unions, that opened my eyes.

I felt the leadership of the Party in the South was more militant, more struggling. We had some militant white leaders here in San Francisco, like Archie Brown, and Billy Allan and Mickey Lima. But in the South you had to stick together, and some went to jail like the case of the 64. We never did have that kind of problem with white chauvinism.

The Party gave me experience and knowledge, but we had some bad apples, some bad leadership. I studied Marx and Lenin, historical materialism, dialectical materialism, bringing the workers together. I read books by William Z. Foster, Herbert Aptheker and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. I learned to see errors in how we was fighting and how to fight to move stones out of the way in our everyday struggles. We

studied and had classes on the labor movement and all kinds of issues. I also used to meet with the black Party members from other unions to talk about job issues, racism on the job, and other issues. If you know and know that you know about issues, and if you observe and learn from the struggle, from books, from people then you can help find a solution to the people's problems. I learned a helluva lot about the capitalist system from studying in the Party.

When they called me before the UnAmerican Activity Committee I think they was trying to use me against the ILWU. Maybe they figured I was a weak man, didn't know nothing. They didn't know I was studying at night, my head in the books, reading Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin.

So they put me in prison. But that was like throwing the rabbit in the briar patch. I was at home. You'd be surprised at the people you meet in prison from the left. We was discussing Marxism, socialism. Hell, I think I read more about communism in prison than I did outside.

I supported the program of the Communist party, but over time I thought the national leadership became weak. You could have built a left-center in the labor movement. You could have built a strong trade union movement. When they passed that damn Taft-Hartley law that should have been stopped by the labor left-center movement. The Communists could have played a very important role. Then when the AFL and CIO merged that should have been stopped. That's why they

stopped organizing the rank and file. The leadership sold out to big business.

In February 1992 the northern California Party members split off from the Party. I wasn't at the national Party convention a few months before the split, but I understand the national Party leaders wouldn't let Angela Davis, Charlene Mitchell, Carl Bloice, and Herbert Aptheker and other people speak and raise issues about democracy in the Party and the fight against racism. I supported Angela Davis and the others, but Gus Hall, the national party chairman, kicked them all out of the convention. That's when I stopped paying dues and quit the Party.

I also thought that Gus Hall was against the senior movement. That's another reason I didn't care too much for him. Henry Winston, who was Afro-American and national chairman of the party before he died in 1986, was a strong supporter of the senior movement. We used to talk about issues whenever him and his wife came to California. When Henry Winston died and Gus Hall, who used to be General Secretary, took over the chairmanship that ended black-white collective leadership at the top level of the Party. A lot of the black Party members didn't like that.

Kendra Alexander and the northern California party members formed a new organization called the Committees of Correspondence. But the Committees of Correspondence had their own problems. They set up a steering committee to put together the program. But a few individuals came up with the

program without discussing it with the whole steering committee. We didn't know a damn thing about it. We should have had a chance to discuss it before it was brought to the general membership. That's democracy! I talked to Kendra Alexander about that and she agreed with me that it was wrong. After that I still supported the Committees of Correspondence, but I wasn't so actively involved anymore.

If we don't get ourselves together we gonna move back. I remember one time I made a speech and I said we gonna have creeping fascism in this country. One guy got up and said, "No, you ain't got creeping fascism, you got running fascism in this country." That's what we gonna get if people don't wake up.

I still believe that socialism is the only solution to the problems of working people. They say that socialism failed in Russia, but the people in Russia still want socialism. That's a lot of propaganda coming out there. The people ain't finished yet. They're gonna rebuild the Party. The Party fell apart but the people still want socialism.

Same thing here. The people need to get some knowledge about issues and we need good leadership. That's what its gonna take to build the movement for socialism. You got to get some people who will stand up and build an organization around issues. You got to bring in people from the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, any where you can find people willing to stand up and mobilize. I know some middle class

people may think everything is alright, but you got to fight that. Raise issues! Education, health care, housing.

Some young people today only think about making money. I say to young people, try to get an education. Not just to get a good job, but you need to also know how to help your people. You can work for business or the government, but you should put something in the community, too. A community health center, community schools to teach our history and teach the history of the struggle. Build something for the people.

Today big business controls everything. Big business controls the educational institutions, it controls the churches, controls the penitentiaries, controls the government, controls the laws. There's got to be a change. It's gonna be hard, but the workers got to do it. No child should go to bed hungry at night. That's wrong. People not gonna stand around and starve. People need to wake up and fight to survive. They have to fight for bread-and-butter issues, and when they see they can't get that under capitalism then they gonna move toward socialism. You just got to educate 'em, motivate 'em and agitate 'em.

That's my opinion, brother. You can tell 'em Lee Brown said it.

Great Chapter!

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extensible
And family as
means of survival?

AFTERWORD: A COMMENT ON THE EMERGENCE OF LEE BROWN'S

LEADERSHIP

In recounting his life and struggles as a militant trade unionist, Lee Brown repeatedly contends that issues and leadership are keys to building any organization. While issues arise as a consequence of the circumstances in which people find themselves, how does leadership emerge? In the following pages I want to examine this question by looking at the formation of Lee Brown's character in relation to his self-described emergence as a leader in the trade union movement.

Early Years

There are a number of factors that appear to be formative in Brown's development as a leader. One of these was the example of his grandfather. Brown makes it clear in the text that his grandfather had a great impact on the formation of his character. His experience with his grandfather gave him the beginnings of a social consciousness and a set of moral values that would stay with him for life.

The elder Brown, for whom young Lee was named, is remembered as kind-hearted, generous, gentle man who tried to help poor people. His home was a gathering place for local people who came to talk and get advice on issues of farming, church business, money matters, and health. The elder Brown also taught young Lee to be concerned for others, to share

his toys with other children. "He taught me how to get along with people," Brown remembers.

~~The~~ Grandfather Brown was also an industrious man who owned a small farm and had a small hauling business. His hauling service brought him into contact with whites, but he always maintained his dignity and bowed to no man. To young Lee, Grandfather Brown was a role model and teacher, whose influence was made all the greater by the evident love that young Lee felt for and from the older man. The two were constant companions for the ^{few} year or so that young Lee lived with his grandfather.

While life on his grandfather's farm may have been pleasant, young Lee was soon introduced to the realities of racial segregation in the South. He realized that his grandfather may have died because in segregated Louisiana a hospital that would treat black people was many miles away. He also saw that many black families, unlike his grandfather who owned a plot of land, were poor, struggling sharecroppers, subject to mistreatment by whites. When he started school after his grandfather's death he discovered that black children were not allowed to ride on the school buses but had to walk six miles to school. Although black farm children only attended school three months out of the year, Brown gained an early love of reading that would continue through his life.

Living with his Uncle Tot and Aunt T-Babe he learned of another racial reality of Southern life: the sexual

harassment of black women by white men and the precarious situation of black men. When Uncle Tot's sister, Bernice, was harassed by a white man in a bar, Tot was forced to flee when the white man turned up dead. Later Brown would reunite with Tot in Galveston and be introduced to the labor movement.

With his grandfather dead, his parents out of the picture, and Uncle Tot on the run, Brown remained with his Aunt T-Babe but at age 15 he decided to strike out on his own, evidencing an independent streak and desire for new experience that would keep him periodically moving for the next ten years. Like many young men during the Great Depression, Brown hopped a freight train and rode the rails in search of a better life.

Working as a live-in servant for a white family in a small town in Louisiana, Brown saw that white racial attitudes were not monolithic but might vary even in the same family. Forced by the mother in the family to take his meals outside in the backyard, the daughter objected that this was wrong and got permission for him to eat at a table in the kitchen. His housing was a small shack out back. He was also allowed to plant a small garden and sell anything he grew to supplement his small salary. He shared part of his harvest with the family and industriously sold the rest from a red wagon he pulled through the streets, an enterprising spirit that, no doubt, would have made his grandfather proud.

After two years Brown decided to move on to Galveston, Texas, where Uncle Tot and Aunt T-Babe had settled. While

looking for work in Galveston, Brown visited the local courthouse to listen to cases. He noticed that more black defendants than whites seemed to be on trial and going to jail. He concluded that equal justice was not being dispensed.

Uncle Tot worked at the Todd Dry Dock, and after a while Brown managed to get a job there doing common labor. There was a union of the black common laborers at the dry dock. A strike was called in 1938 that lasted three months. Uncle Tot was a strong union man and he and young Lee both walked the picket lines. White workers honored the picket lines. The strike lasted three months but it resulted in a wage increase for 35 cents to 50 cents per hour. Brown was elated and inspired by this union experience. For the first time he saw the possibility of change through organizing. "The union made me feel that I could do something for poor people like myself and my cousins. The union gave me a way to go forward, to help change things."

Work was slack in Galveston and Brown could find only a poorly paid job at a brickyard in Green Bayou. Here he encountered Old Man Henderson who introduced him to the NAACP and the idea of an organization fighting for freedom. It had immediate appeal to Brown. "We was searching for freedom," he said of himself and a friend, "young men who wanted to be free. I know I wanted to be free, and wanted to join something to get freedom." The search for ~~a somewhat nebulous~~ freedom emerges here as a theme in his life. The meaning of

freedom -- and unfreedom -- would become more clear with time and experience.

As a railroad worker in Arizona Brown faced his first challenge as an organizer. When a foreman tried to fire a worker named San Antonio over a minor incident, Brown intervened. He called a meeting of the workers and organized a strike. "At the meeting I said that we shouldn't go back to work until the foreman put San Antonio back to work. All of them agreed." The next morning the workers refused to get to work and Brown, acting as spokesmen, told the foreman the men would not go back until San Antonio was put back to work. The foreman said he couldn't do it. Brown threatened to go to the roadmaster in Yuma. The foreman caved in and agreed to San Antonio's return.

Reflecting on the experience Brown said: "After this experience was over, I realized that unity with other employees was what made the foreman act. If all employees united together on jobs there would be less trouble and less firings would come from the employer." But there is more evident in this incident, in that it anticipates and is characteristic of his emerging leadership style. Drawing on his experience in the Galveston strike, and improvising when needed, in this confrontation Brown used four tactics: (1) mobilize and unify the workers (meeting), (2) seize the initiative from the boss (confrontation next morning), (2) refuse to accede to the boss's definition of the situation (can't rehire San Antonio), and (4) if necessary, raise the

stakes (threat to call roadmaster). Later in Los Angeles he used a similar approach in dealing with a white waitress in a restaurant who refused to serve a black customer. These organizing tactics would serve him well as an organizer and union shop steward in years to come.

Brown was also able to listen and respond positively to criticism that challenged him when he failed to manifest his values. His would-be acting career provides a ready example. He enjoyed taking bit parts in movies and acting as though he were a rising star. The parts he took, however, were the same demeaning roles to which most other black actors were confined. Brown did not hesitate to berate these roles and the actors who took them as Uncle Toms. When he took his girlfriend, Mildred, to see a film in which he had a bit part-- picking cotton --, she was appalled. She let him know in no uncertain terms. "You should be ashamed to play in scenes that are so degrading to black people, because you fight in the NAACP for better playing parts for blacks." Surprised at having this contradiction revealed, Brown was embarrassed. A less open person might have dissimulated or attacked the bearer of the message. But Brown took Mildred's criticism to heart and he refused any further parts in movies.

Adulthood

Brown's life in New Orleans, from 1944 to 1958, witnessed the maturation of his character, the growth of his leadership skills, and the enrichment of his social

consciousness and political vision. His work with Local 207, his involvement with the Communist Party, and his relationship with Andrew Steve Nelson, who bridged the two organizations, would dramatically change his life.

In Andrew Nelson he met black man, a Communist, a militant labor organizer who would become his friend and mentor. Brown started attending Executive Board meetings and speaking up about conditions on the docks, especially the issue of upgrading black workers who often were common laborers, whereas whites had access to more desirable jobs. Soon he was elected shop steward. Nelson, older by several years, began grooming Brown for a leadership position. Their Friday lunch meetings and Sunday dinners became occasions for political discussions, informal instruction and union strategizing as well as enjoyment of delightful New Orleans cuisine which Brown clearly relished. Nelson was like an older brother, a man whom Brown admired much as he had admired his Grandfather. In time Brown would become vice-president of Local 207 and co-leader with Nelson.

His work with Local 207 gave him rich experience with a militant union dedicated to improving the lives of working people, especially black workers. Along with the mentorship of Nelson, it gave him the opportunity to learn new skills and rise to a leadership position based on his skills, militancy and courage. As an interracial union with black leadership, Local 207, struggling in the midst of a society based on white supremacy and black subjugation, also gave him

an inkling of a different kind of society that might be created through struggle.

Nelson also introduced Brown to the Communist Party. Brown had been favorably impressed by a Communist organizer in met in Los Angeles, but he had never attended a Party meeting until invited by Nelson. Nelson said the Party could train him to work with and organize people.

What impressed Brown about the Communist Party in New Orleans was its commitment to building the trade union movement, its advocacy and practice of racial equality (including black leadership), and its anti-capitalist stance. Brown was not particularly interested in the intricacies of Party politics or doctrinaire debates over Party line. What drew him was the Party's active involvement in working to improve the lives of working people, especially black people. But the Party offered more than the union because it also gave him a vision of a new society based on socialism and racial equality. Brown already understood, based on his own experience, that the interests of the bosses and workers were antithetical. The Party gave him an analysis of capitalism that deepened his innate understanding of boss-worker conflict. The analysis further gave him an appreciation of racism (Jim Crowism) as a deliberate ruling class strategy to divide and weaken the working class by fostering racial hatred. For Brown the Party gave him another militant, fighting organization with a program (fight Jim Crow, build strong trade unions, support voting rights and

progressive candidates) and vision (racial equality, socialism) that coincided with his developing social consciousness and working class values.

The Party encouraged his love of reading and he threw himself into reading Marx, Engels, Lenin and other socialist literature.

As with his experience in Local 207, the Party gave him new skills. "I learned how to run meetings, set up committees. Sometimes we had all-day meetings on how to organize people, how to get them to register to vote by educating them, how to work with politicians, how to fight Jim Crow."

The Party also introduced Brown to individuals who strongly influenced his outlook. For the first time he was in an organization with whites who shared his commitment to racial equality and who treated him as an equal. He was impressed by the Party's district organizer (Levin) and he became friends with C.J. Meste, the International representative who was also a Party member. Brown and Meske enjoyed talking about conditions facing black and white workers in the South, and what could be done. They also sold Party literature together.

During these years, Brown's came to see in the trade union movement and the Communist Party the keys for improving the lives of black people and combating racism. His faith was reinforced by his own experience. The eight months he worked with black and white striking sugar refinery workers in the

towns of Reserve and Gramercy was one such key experience. Drawing upon his union and Party training, Brown managed to break down racial divisions among the workers and unify them, with the result that the strike was won. Clearly, in his mind, a program of actively fighting Jim Crow could succeed. This was the way to unite the working class, and it demanded organizational and personal action.

Brown was impressed by the personal commitment of white Party members to practice racial equality in their personal lives. To Brown, personal integrity is a measure and indicator of political integrity. That is why the case of the 64 -- black and white people, many of them Party members, arrested for having an interracial party in New Orleans -- was so important to him, especially the fact that the group successfully fought the original convictions and got them overturned. "We helped establish the right to associate and visit each others' homes and attend meetings or demonstrate together regardless of race, color or creed. To me this was a victory for the workingclass in the South -- not just black workers or white workers. It was the working people as a whole that won. We put a nail in the coffin of Jim Crowism!"

Brown's biggest disappointment was his feeling, years later after living San Francisco where he had moved when unable to find work in New Orleans after his release from prison, that the Party and the trade unions were capitulating to racism. The triggering event was being snubbed on the streets by a white Party member and his feeling that the

Party failed to deal with this instance of "white chauvinism." This may appear to be a minor incident, but to Brown it was emblematic of a deterioration of political consciousness and militancy in the Party and the trade union movement. That deterioration was also reflected, in Brown's view, in the failure of the Party to stop the AFL and CIO merger, and the failure of newly created Local 2 to stop the growing discrimination against black workers in the hotel and restaurant industry in San Francisco. Brown's alienation from the Party and Local 2 in San Francisco becomes more understandable given how much he values opposition to racism in practice, not just on paper.

Similarly his attraction to forms of black nationalism reflects both his continuing interest in the problem of black unity and consciousness and his sometimes doubt about the Communist Party. He makes it clear that his attraction to the Black Muslims was due less their religious doctrine and more to the fact that the Muslims affirmed that African Americans had a unifying history linked to past civilizations and cultures, a history not limited to slavery and savagery. His involvement with the AD NIP party came during a period when he was disillusioned with the Communist Party and had been fired from his job at the Jack Tar. The AD NIP Party, through the Black Security Guards, provided him with work and a sense of organizational activism on behalf of the black community. It also provided an outlet for his early writings in which he advocated trade union militancy.

Actually, at one level Lee Brown saw no contradiction between being involved in black nationalist groups, trade unions, the Communist Party and the NAACP. He states that he was always interested in anything that would help working class black people and, in his mind, all of these offered possibilities for improving the lives of black people. His involvement with the NAACP -- an affiliation that continued throughout his life -- suggests a powerfully felt commitment to being part of a struggle specifically aimed at gaining civil rights in the present society. He brought to the NAACP a militancy and concern for working class issues that had informed his trade union and Party activism. These were not always welcome, leading to a sometimes fractious relationship with the more bourgeois NAACP leadership. Nevertheless, he never abandoned his commitment to the NAACP and his hope that it might emerge as a militant, progressive organization.

Finally, it is worth noting that Brown's affirmation of his support of the program of the Communist Party despite what he sees as the failures of its leadership reveals his fundamental faith. It suggests a basis for his continuing optimism and activism in the face of setbacks: The failures of individual leaders may be all too common, but this does not negate ^{his hope} commitment to ~~and hope~~ for the struggle. *for a more equal society*

"I got faith in the masses," says Lee Brown.