

CARTON 8:16

MANUSCRIPT, FOREWORD
JULIANNE MALVEAUX

1999-2000

2017/193

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE
BY LEE BROWN AND ROBERT ALLEN
FOREWORD BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX

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video
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This book is especially important because we have so few worker biographies, so few life stories of "the people" that Lee Brown has always been ready to represent. It is important to see history from this prism, to view our nation's evolution through the life of a man whose voice, strong and authentic, is amplified through this powerful, absorbing and detail-rich autobiography. I was especially riveted by Lee Brown's story because it reveals so much hidden history, a story that we ran the risk of losing were it not for the diligence of Lee's scribe, the scholar Robert Allen. It is useful for us to have a work history of an African American man that contrasts sharply with the revisionist vision of the "good old days" of industrial work. And it is important, in the post-industrial context, to be reminded of what work

has been for so many people. With the proliferation of technology, and the boom of jobs in the computer industry, it is important to remember that, once upon a time, people fought for the right to do back-breaking work, and fought to improve the conditions of their employment.

When people talk about the "good old days" for workers, they are often referring to the days when people held their jobs for thirty or forty years, starting off in a factory right after high school and working there until they received the gold watch of retirement. They are, perhaps, referring to the days when men with modest education could find jobs that paid decent wages. Lee Brown's story makes it clear that the good old days weren't good for everyone, and that African American men, especially Southern African American men, faced an array of challenges even during the economic expansions that came with World War II and the postwar period.

Brown has held an array of jobs -- handyman, actor, longshoreman, railway porter, waiter, and union organizer. He worked because he had to, and he was attracted to organizing because it was a way to bargain for fair pay from his employers. Gifted with an innate sense of self and of fair play, Lee Brown never let his work define him. Instead, he struggled to define the terms and conditions of his work and his life, and to improve the lives of others.

This book, *Strong in the Struggle*, is an engrossing call and response between Lee Brown, who recounts the facts of his life, and Robert Allen (whose work on Port Chicago clearly influences his understanding of the work status of black men in the World War II era and beyond), who puts Lee's life in a historical context. Using the rich source materials of labor movement and university archives, trial transcripts, and Lee Brown's own file, Allen is able to deepen our appreciation of the struggles and challenges that have shaped Lee Brown's life. The melding of these two black men's voices allows us to both appreciate Brown's life and evolution, and

to be reminded that his struggle was the struggle of millions of African American men in the early and middle twentieth century.

Brown emerges as a tenacious man whose understanding of the power of organizing was the pivotal focus in both his work and civic lives. Lee Brown has gathered signatures, organized, picketed, and placed himself in physical jeopardy for the cause of worker rights. He was a top union leader in an interracial union during the time when the South was still segregated, a shop steward and organizer who often involved the community in his union's quest for fair pay. His recollection of the challenges of organizing offer lessons to those who still struggle to bring people together around issues of economic justice. Through it all, this autobiography reveals his thirst for knowledge and appreciation for life lessons, and an optimism that allowed him to make the best of every situation, even the more than two years of jail time he spent on charges of violating the Taft-Hartley Act by being a member of the Communist Party while serving as a union official.

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Words like "hero" and "role model" have become cliches in a media age when the ordinary attempt to distinguish themselves with their trappings, and when those who are truly extraordinary have their light obscured by the bells and whistles of common, contemporary fame. The phenomenon reminds me of Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1946 poem, "Not They Who Soar," in which he wrote: "Not they who soar, but they who plod, their rugged way, unhelped, to God, are heroes." Lee Brown is that kind of hero, an ordinary and outstanding man, "heroes, they the soil who trod, not they who soar."

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Julianne Malveaux

January, 2000

Subj: Revised text
Date: Friday, January 28, 2000 12:10:21 PM
To: JMNia

Julianne—

I received the revised essay for Strong in the Struggle. I will pass copies on to Lee and our publisher (Rowman and Littlefield). I know Lee would be interested in doing a video and I feel certain that the publisher will also cooperate. Let me know what you have in mind. I'll keep you posted on developments here.

Thanks again.

Robert

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE

BY LEE BROWN AND ROBERT ALLEN

Foreword

FORWARD BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX

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Julianne Malveaux

January, 2000

Subj: Re: Note from Julianne Malveaux
Date: Wednesday, January 26, 2000 3:22:19 PM
From: JMNia
To: RobertA648

Robert:

Sorry for those garbled words. I'd blame it on the computer, but the fact is that cut and paste will drive me nuts one day. Meanwhile, here's the correct forward, with changes in a few places. I'm delighted that you and Lee are pleased with this, and look forward to seeing this book in print!

JM.

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FORWARD BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX

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Julianne Malveaux
January, 2000

1/26/00

Dear Julianne -

Thank you for that absolutely wonderful foreword for *Strong in the Struggle*. Your comments truly expressed the spirit of the book and what we were trying to do. And more. I think your words will inspire many readers to open the book's pages. Your words also lifted our spirits. I called Lee Brown and read it to him and he was delighted. He couldn't stop talking about how happy your words made him feel. He told me to tell you that he appreciated what you wrote "to the depths of my heart." I thank you, too. There is nobody who could have written a more perceptive, powerful and moving statement for the book, and we both are deeply grateful to you.

I like the inclusion of the Dunbar poem because it further connects Lee's life to the culture and literary voices of our people. There might be some minor copyediting needed elsewhere in the text, but nothing beyond that. There is one place where some words appear to have been dropped out of the text you sent. The third sentence of the second paragraph begins "I was because . . ." Something is missing here, let me know how you want it to read. After I hear from you I will forward the text to the publisher (and request that payment be sent directly to you).

From the beginning of our work on this project Lee and I had hoped you would consent to write the introduction. That you did gives us great joy. Thanks so much, Julianne.

Robert

PS I don't have a pub date yet beyond early fall, but we'll let you know.

Subj: Note from Julianne Malveaux
Date: Monday, January 24, 2000 1:36:26 PM
From: JMNia
To: RobertA648

Hi Robert,

Again I want to thank you for the privilege of reading your and Lee's book. It is really a treasure that ought, with right promotion, bounce big time. I'm gonna keep it in mind for video work that I might get into in the fall. When is the publication date?

I sent the forward via email and we are also faxing it to you. The end may be a little hokey, feel free to edit, but I couldn't get the Dunbar poem out of my mind.

Take good care. I'll look to hear from you. (I've sent a note to Bob Chrisman and hope I'll be able to do something for the scholar.)

Best,
Julianne

Subj: Lee Brown Forward
Date: Monday, January 24, 2000 1:30:05 PM
From: JMNia
To: RobertA648

STRONG IN THE STRUGGLE
BY LEE BROWN AND ROBERT ALLEN
~~FORWARD~~ BY JULIANNE MALVEAUX

Forward

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LAST WORD PRODUCTIONS, INC.

JULIANNE MALVEAUX, Ph.D., PRESIDENT & CEO

1318 Corcoran Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009
202-462-1932
202-462-6612 (fax)

To: Robert Allen

FROM: Trina Holmes

DATE: January 24, 2000

RE: Letter of Recommendation

Number of Pages Including Cover: 4

Phone: (415) 771-0455

Fax:

Message:

Please call us to confirm receipt of information.

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Brown has held an array of jobs -- handyman, actor, longshoreman, railway porter, waiter, and union organizer. He worked because he had to, and he was attracted to organizing because it was a way to bargain for fair pay from his employers. Gifted with an innate sense of self and of fair play, Lee Brown never let his work define him. Instead, he struggled to define the terms and conditions of his work and his life, and to improve the lives of others.

This book, *Strong in the Struggle*, is an engrossing call and response between Lee Brown, who recounts the facts of his life, and the scholar Robert Allen, who puts Lee's life in a historical context. Using the rich source materials of labor movement and university archives, trial transcripts, and Lee Brown's own file, Allen is able to deepen our appreciation of the struggles and challenges that have shaped Lee Brown's life. The melding of these two black men's voices allow us to both appreciate Brown's life and evolution, and to be reminded that his struggle was the struggle of millions of African American men in the early and middle twentieth century.

Brown emerges as a tenacious man whose understanding of the power of organizing was the pivotal focus in both his work and civic lives. Lee Brown has gathered signatures, organized, picketed, and placed himself in physical jeopardy for the cause of worker rights. He was a top union leader in an interracial union during the time when the South was still segregated, a shop steward and organizer who often involved the community in his union's quest for fair pay. His recollection of the challenges of organizing offer lessons to those who still struggle to bring people together around issues of economic justice. Through it all, this autobiography reveals his thirst for knowledge and appreciation for life lessons, and an optimism that allowed him to make the best of every situation, even the two years of jail time he spent for violating the Taft-Hartley Act by being a member of the Communist Party while serving as a union official.

It is one thing to read of the excesses and abuses of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the abstract, or when they focused on internationally known figures and Hollywood stars, but it is quite another to read the way this one black man approached HUAC. Lee Brown's integrity in dealing with HUAC parallels that of Paul Robeson, someone who Lee both admired and spent time with. He refused to answer Senator James Eastland's questions until

he was allowed to make a statement of his own. Completely unintimidated by the trappings of congressional power, Lee Brown was true to himself and to the cause of freedom.

While this book overflows with history, it also brims over with amusing episodes in Lee Brown's life. He lived a full life, with as much fun as struggle, with the fellowship of engaging friends and colleagues. He overcame the personal tragedy of being separated from his mother at an early age, and speaks movingly of the reunion with her, as well as of the relationship with his "sister in struggle" and wife, Grace. While strength in struggle is the dominant theme in Lee Brown's life, it is a credit to Brown and Allen that Lee's humor, sense of fun and gentleness are also a feature in this book.

Words like "hero" and "role model" have become cliches in a media age when the ordinary attempt to distinguish themselves with their trappings, and when those who are truly extraordinary have their light obscured by the bells and whistles of common, contemporary fame. The phenomenon reminds me of Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1946 poem, *Not They Who Soar*, who wrote, "Not they who soar, but they who plod, their rugged way, unhelped, to God, are heroes." Lee Brown is that kind of hero, and ordinary and outstanding man, "heroes, they the soil who trod, not they who soar.

If he has not soared, he has flown, and his light shines, nonetheless. All in all, Lee Brown has lived an exemplary life, and I am grateful to him and to Robert Allen for sharing that life with us in these pages. There are lessons in this life, and history, but for me there is also the heartfelt appreciation of a brother in struggle whose commitment to economic justice has been a gift to every life he has touched.

Julianne Malveaux
January, 2000

Date: Tue, Dec 21, 1999 6:17 PM EDT
From: JMNia
Subj: Re: Happy Holidays!
To: RobertA648

Hey Bob --

Holiday best to you.

Let me say again how privileged I feel that you asked me to write the forward to Lee's book. I'd actually completed something but I have computer drama (frozen hard drive, etc, etc, new machines) and I've lost about 6 weeks worth of work. I've been drafting over and will have something soon. It's one of those "things happen for a reason" experiences. Allows me to recreate. . .

In any case, sorry to hear about publisher snafus. I'll be home (SF) for Christmas, but will also be in touch as soon as I'm done.

Take care, and warm regards to Lee.

Julianne

12/21/99

Dear Julianne --

Just a note to let you know that work is proceeding with the Lee Brown book, although the production time-line has stretched out a bit. I know you've been very busy so if you're not able to get the foreword in until January (say by the end of the month) that will be fine. I had hoped things would be farther along, but there were some personnel changes at the publisher's and that threw the schedule off for a couple of months. Fortunately, things are back on track now.

My best wishes to you for a pleasant holiday season and all good things in the New Year.

Bob

Julianne Malveaux

Date: Mon, Oct 11, 1999 12:13 PM EDT
From: JMNia
Subj: Re: Lee Brown Biography
To: RobertA648

I LOVE LEE'S BIOGRAPHY! Although I was sposed to be doing something else, I devoured it Sunday night. Don't know if I get to the forward soon, but I'll sure have it before December. You've done a great job.

Julianne

Date: Fri, Oct 8, 1999 12:32 PM EDT
From: RobertA648
Subj: Re: Lee Brown Biography
To: JMNia

Dear Julianne --

Thank you so much for agreeing to write a foreword for Lee Brown's, *Strong in the Struggle*. He was absolutely delighted when I gave him the news. From the beginning of our work on the project we both agreed that you were our first choice to ask.

I have sent you a copy of the manuscript by priority mail. Please drop me an e-mail to confirm its arrival. I will be in town until October 15, then I will be away until Oct 31st. The deadline is December 1st, but if you want to get it in earlier no one will object.

Robert Chrisman is away now but upon his return next week he will forward a copy of his letter inviting you to contribute to the *Schoiar*.

Once again many thanks, and

Best Wishes,

Bob Allen

ROBERT L. ALLEN
1034 VALLEJO ST.
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94133
(415) 771-0455

10/7/99

Dear Julianne -

Lee Brown and I are very
happy that you can write the
foreword. Many, many thanks.

Robert Chrisman will resend
his letter regarding an article for
the Scholar.

Best wishes,

Bob

P.S. you can email the foreword
if you like (RobertA648@aol.com)

Date: Thu, Oct 7, 1999 1:33 PM EDT
From: JMNia
Subj: Lee Brown Biography
To: RobertA648

Dear Bob:

I'm delighted to write the foreward for Lee's memoir. I'm very fond of him and have good memories of the time we spent on the NAACP board together.

I'd also like to contribute to the Scholar, as requested. I misplaced your letter -- organization is a challenge in a home-based office, even with a staff. Can you refax it and/or email it so I can get a sense of the deadline.

Thanks much and kind regards,
Julianne

Robert L. Allen
1034 Vallejo St.
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone/FAX (415) 771-0455

October 5, 1999

Dr. Julianne Malveaux
1318 Corcoran Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Julianne,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and your work going well. I am writing to ask you a favor. I just completed a book on the life and work of Lee Brown, a retired African American labor leader here in San Francisco. Both of us are fans of your work and we would be delighted if you would consider writing a brief (2-3 pages) foreword for his memoir. The publisher (Rowman & Littlefield) could offer you a modest honorarium (\$350) for your trouble.

I have enclosed a copy of my introduction and a few pages from the first chapter to give you a sense of the book. The full manuscript is about 325 pages. We would need the foreword by about December 1st.

Please let me know if this is possible for you. You can call me at 415/771-0455 or send me an e-mail at RobertA648@aol.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Allen

P.S. I hope you'll also be able to contribute to The Black Scholar.