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June 1, 2000

Robert Allen
1034 Vallejo St.
San Francisco, CA 94133

Brown & Allen/Strong in the Struggle

Dear Robert:

Enclosed is the final printout of your manuscript with all the copyediting changes (that you agreed to) incorporated. The next stage is typesetting. At that point we will need any photos that are to be included in the book, which I believe is still under discussion. Once you and Dean have worked out the photo situation, the manuscript and photos will be sent to the typesetter to lay out in book pages.

If you have any changes to be made to the manuscript as it stands now, please write them directly on the manuscript and the typesetter will incorporate them into the pages as she lays out the book.

I should tell you that I am leaving R&L; my last day in the office will be Friday, June 9. (I will be doing a bit of travelling and then moving to Boston where my husband will start graduate school in the fall.) It has not been determined yet which production editor will take over this project, but I don't anticipate any problems. Please do return the manuscript to my attention before you leave on your trip. My assistant, April Leo, will make certain it gets to the new production editor (who will also be in touch with you soon).

If you have any questions please give me a call.

Best regards,



Karen Johnson

Brown and Allen, *Strong in the Struggle*
Copyediting stylesheet

WORD LIST

cross-examination
dockworker
grass roots (n.)
Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union but culinary
workers union
screwman
slowdown (n.)
stower
Taft-Hartley law
vice president

ACRONYMS

AFL American Federation of Labor
ADNIP African Descendant Nationalist Independence
Partition Party
CIO Congress of Industrial Organizations
ILA International Longshoremen's Association
ILWU International Longshore and Warehouse Union
IWW Industrial Workers of the World
NLRB National Labor Relations Board
UPWA United Packinghouse Workers of America

NUMBERS

March 26

TYPECODES

<a> a-head
<break> text break
<byline> byline
<ca> chapter author
<cn> chapter number
<ct> chapter title
<di> dialogue
<nl> numbered list
<pa> part author
<st> sidebar title
 unordered list

GENERAL REMARKS

Periods and commas go inside quote marks.

Names that end in s form the possessive in the usual way,
e.g., Hopkins's.

Attach prefixes to nouns and adjectives per *CMS*.

There is no comma between two elements of a compound predicate that are joined by a coordinating conjunction.

Include a space between initials used to begin a name.

Dangling participles are right out; where I found them I suggested a rewording.

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

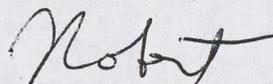
6 June 2000

Dear Karen -

Yellow tabs indicate pages on which I made corrections/changes
(marked in red).

Dean should have all he photos.

Good luck to you in Boston.



Robert L. Allen

P.S. I would like to receive a set
of gallegys when they are ready.

Reeds

F.M.2

Strong in the Struggle
Black Labor Activist
My Life as a Militant Unionist

Lee Brown
with Robert L. Allen

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Fm9

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challenges that have shaped Lee Brown's life. The melding of these two black men's voices allows us to appreciate Brown's life and evolution and reminds us 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 his civic life. 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.

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 whom Lee both admired and spent time with. Lee refused to answer the committee's questions unless 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.

Reeb

FBI

<ct>Acknowledgments</ct>

A debt of gratitude is owed to the late Vincent Hallinan for first suggesting that this autobiography be done and to Tom Dunphy and the late Grace Oliver Brown for drafting earlier versions of the text. Thanks also to Patricia Scott for suggesting a collaboration between Lee Brown and Robert L. Allen in writing the present version.

For their patient assistance in locating documents and newspaper accounts, we thank Eugene Dennis Vrana, librarian of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union in San Francisco; the librarians of the New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Branch; the archivists of the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Louisiana, New Orleans; and the archivists of the National Archives, Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Texas; and the staff of the San Francisco Labor Archives at San Francisco State University. Our thanks to Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and her staff for help in expediting the release of FBI documents under the Freedom of Information Act.

Marcy McGaugh diligently transcribed many hours of taped interviews, and we thank her.

Finally, we want to thank Hasinah Rahim, Doris Ward, the family of the late Rose Robinson, Dr. Arthur Coleman, Harold Treskunoff, the Richardson family of Marcus Book Stores, Dr. David West, Jill Rothenberg, ^{Dean Birkenkamp} and Janet Carter for their support and encouragement.

<sig>-L.B.

-R.L.A.</sig>

and his wide-ranging interests. His collection includes books on labor history, black history, ancient African civilizations, religion, socialism, economics, biography, and philosophy.

We do our interviews
~~In the kitchen we talk,~~ sitting on two folding chairs at a ~~Formica~~ ^{the} kitchen table. The table is usually cluttered with a big bowl of fruit in the center, papers scattered around it, and various canned and bottled goods from the welfare department on the table and the floor. He offers me a bottle of ginseng soda. I take a second bottle from the refrigerator for him.

He is a man who delights in good food, though he seldom gets out to restaurants now. A good cook, he enjoys occasionally preparing a favorite dish—savory goat stew—for the pleasure of friends. Each week he looks forward to two meals at a local community center, hoping that they might satisfy his appetite as the trade union struggle fed his spirit.

He believes in dressing to make an impression whenever he leaves his apartment. That means wearing a three-piece brown ~~pinstripe~~ ^{striped} suit with gold watch and chain in the vest pocket, five or six pens and reading glasses in the coat pocket, several buttons on the lapels, including Africa/Black USA unity pin, NAACP lifetime membership pin, and Local 2/HERE button (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union). On his head he sports a black leather fez with a map of Africa outlined on its front in green, yellow, and red. He uses a walking cane and wears brown boots. He impresses one as a man who thinks well of himself and is not hesitant to make known his views.

He would stand with me by his side, looking over his land, and say to me, "One day this land will be yours." I looked up to him for guidance, wisdom, and knowledge.

In the house grandfather had this long table. I ain't seen no table like that in a long time. Every morning we had our breakfast at this table. He sat me at one end of the table and he sat at the other. He would say a prayer before eating. Now I don't understand this, but in those days they had steak for breakfast. I don't know how they did that; maybe they kept it smoked or something. I know we ate meat and eggs. I remember we ate good. I think I had more than any kid around there, good food, toys. I was the only kid living on the farm. It was just me and my grandfather and Aunt Hannah before she died, and later Aunt Betsy.

My grandmother's name was Hannah. I called her Aunt Hannah. I don't remember her too good. They told me she was a Seminole Indian who came from Florida. She was tall with long black hair that hung to her waist. Aunt Hannah didn't talk very much to anyone but everyone loved her. She was a kind lady.

Those years I lived with my grandfather was the happiest time of my childhood. He was my first teacher.

My grandfather had three sons: Bab, Bud, and Bruce Brown. Bruce Brown was my father. My father was a light-complexioned man and very tall, at six feet seven inches. He wore size fourteen shoes.

Before I was born, my father changed his name to Joseph Brown because the law was after him. Years later I got the story from my sister-in-law, Henrietta, who was married to my half brother, Pete Robinson. She told me that my father and his brothers was robbing the ^mlittle mixed trains, trains that had one coach car and the rest of them was freight. These mixed trains used to run between the little towns in Louisiana. She once

showed me a picture of one of my uncles with a red handkerchief tied around his neck. All three of them was riding together on the train like they was Wild West outlaws. When my father came to New Orleans, he decided to change his name to Joseph, and that's what it says on my birth certificate.

My father was killed when I was very young. On his way to work on the coal boat one morning in 1922, he stepped on a live electric wire that had fallen down on the ground during the night after a terrible thunderstorm. He was killed instantly. I didn't really get to know my father. Little do I know about him, except what I was told.

My mother was born in Bolton, Mississippi. Her name was Janie Davis. ^{Like} I said, I was born at the old Charity Hospital in New Orleans. When I was small, my mother received some money from my father's death. She used the money to open a little store. Then she got hold to another man for a while, but he slicked her out of her money and she lost the store and became mentally disturbed. So my grandfather came and got me and took me to live with him at the farm.

One morning later on my mother came to the farm to take me away from my grandfather. When we arrived at the hotel where she was staying, I cried and made such a fuss all night that she was asked by a lady if I was really her son. This lady thought my mother had stolen me. The very next morning my mother took me back to the farm.

Grandfather took good care of me. He used to tell people that he wanted to give me the best education that money could buy. Grandfather never hit me—he never laid a hand on me. He paid a lot of attention to me. When his buggy would roll, I'd be in there. He took me everywhere with him: to the stores, to meet white folks, to church on Sunday. People look up and say, "There

comes Uncle Lee—Big Lee and Little Lee." It seemed like people ^{me} ^{knowned} through him. We was so close; when they saw him they saw me.

Somebody else I remember was Aunt Pauline, who used to live around there with her husband, Uncle Bill. She was a kind of Creole and she didn't speak English. She wore a red handkerchief on her head and had red lips and wore a long dress. My grandfather and I used to pass her on the dirt road and she'd say "bo' jour," and I didn't know what the hell she was saying. I'd break and run. I didn't know she was just saying good morning to me. Her husband, Bill Rieta, fought in the Civil War, and he had a old long gun that I sometimes saw sticking out their window when I passed there. He musta fought in the Union Army. I know he didn't fight for the Confederates, staying around my grandfather, 'cause my grandfather was pretty militant.

One day some neighbor children and I was playing in my yard when suddenly I heard someone scream. Grandfather came out of the barn bent over, blood running down his leg. I don't know how it happened, but he cut his leg while working in the barn. Aunt Hannah came out of the house and helped him get into bed. Aunt Hannah doctored his leg day and night. A hospital that would treat black people was many miles away. Grandfather didn't realize how seriously he was hurt. Months passed; his leg got worse, and he still wasn't seen by a doctor. Things wasn't the same on the farm anymore. The neighbors would leave the house with worried looks on their faces. I soon realized my grandfather's leg wouldn't heal, and it kept getting worse. In the meantime, Aunt Hannah had taken ill and soon she died.

My grandfather hired a housekeeper to take care of us. The housekeeper's name was Betsy. I called her "Aunt Betsy." Later he married her. Little did I know at that time what heartbreak Aunt Betsy would bring to me. It wasn't long after that one night Aunt Betsy woke me up and told me my grandfather had died. I remember

Old man Gray was a member of the Screen Actors Guild. He was a tall fellow with gray hair. This was one reason he got to act in a lot of films. He was the one who would hire you and send you out to get jobs as extras in mob scenes, which is what they called scenes that had a lot of extras. They wouldn't use your name in the credits. You might be standing up, sitting down, whatever. They paid \$9.50 and a meal a day, which was pretty good. You might get one day, two days.

I actually got extra parts in two pictures: *I Walked with a Zombie*, with Darby Jones, and *My Heart is in Dixie*, with Clarence Muse. I was in a jungle scene in one and picking cotton in the other.

Old Man Gray told me where to buy clothes on credit. With new clothing and a few dollars in my pocket, I started acting the part of a movie star. I wore only pointed-toe shoes, triple A's. I would often be seen at the Dunbar Hotel, drinking only Tom Collinses. My hair stayed conked back; I only let women barbers fix my hair. I was as sharp as Dick was when his daddy died!

At Ella's Cafe on Central the people gave me a name, Kokomo, because of a jungle scene I got an extra part in. They'd say, "Here comes Kokomo." But this later got to be a problem. I had a girlfriend then named Mildred that I had met on the streetcar. She was married but her husband was in the service. One night I took Mildred to the theater to see *My Heart Is in Dixie*. When she saw me picking cotton, Mildred got real angry with me because she was embarrassed by the movie. She told me, "You should be ashamed to play in scenes that are so degrading to black people because you fight in the NAACP for better parts for black actors." When Mildred said this, I really felt ashamed and discouraged with myself. I thought I was a helluva actor, but I ^{wasn't} was nothing but a fool.

what would happen in court the next day. I thought to myself, this is my first time being in jail or in any trouble with the law and I shouldn't have been put in jail. I didn't make a phone call that day because I didn't know anyone to call.

The next morning a jail officer took me to the court room. I sat restless, waiting for my name to be called to appear before the judge. Finally one hour later, I stood before the judge with no attorney to defend my case, except myself. The two officers who did the arresting didn't appear in court. However, the judge carried on with the case. I explained to the judge that this was my first time in trouble with the law and the way those policemen was treating that man, it was plain police brutality, happening on the streets. I asked the judge for a suspended sentence. Since the judge didn't have much of a case, with no officers appearing in court to testify against me, the judge then gave me six months' suspended sentence with a lecture about how this interfering could have incited a riot. The judge said, "If you ever see something like you saw happen on the street again, you wait until you get to court and report it to the judge." When the judge got through talking, I started back toward the cell, but the judge called out, "The case is closed, you can leave."

When I was leaving the courthouse, two black detectives driving down Central Avenue offered me a ride, which I accepted. We got to talking and it turned out they were in the NAACP too. They said it wasn't right for the police to mistreat the brother but I should've waited until we got to court to say something. They said sometime you should keep your mouth shut and wait for the proper time. But I was talking about speaking up, about struggle, and they ^{wasn't} ~~was not~~ saying "amen" to that!

When the detectives reached the hotel where I lived and stopped the car, I got out of the car and thanked them for the lift. Our conversation was very interesting. This is when I

International was on the verge of being expelled from the CIO, and in New Orleans Local 207 was being red-baited and was facing a challenge from another CIO union for representation of the workers at the Flintkote plant.

Initially ILWU officials had refused to sign the anti-Communist affidavits demanded by the Taft-Hartley Act. This stance cost Local 207 an election among workers at the Flintkote plant in 1948. The company would not allow Local 207 to participate in the election because its officers had not signed the affidavits. But Local 207 still claimed jurisdiction. By 1949 Harry Bridges realized that the ILWU would continue to lose shops without access to the NLRB-sanctioned election machinery. Word went out to ILWU local officials to sign the affidavits.

The change did not help Local 207 in its struggle at the Flintkote plant. Fierce red-baiting and the defection of a shop steward to the rival CIO union led to a defeat for Local 207 in the election.

Over the following years more attempted raids ensued, but Local 207 hung on and even won occasional victories. Ironically, the local was beset by the problem of delinquent per capita taxes owed to the International, which had led to Dorsey's downfall. The International investigated and determined that there was no malfeasance or financial incompetence. Warehouse work was seasonal, and consequently the local's membership swung dramatically over the course of a year, reaching a high of eight hundred and then dropping to ⁴⁰⁰ four-hundred during off periods. Nelson sent the International an

Rec'd

<vrh>Strong in the Struggle</vrh>
<rrh>On the Road for the Union</rrh>
<cn>7</cn>

<ct>On the Road for the Union</ct>

In spring 1955, I was elected in the Local 207 membership meeting to travel with Brother Andrew Nelson as a delegate to the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the ILWU in Long Beach, California, from April 4 to April 8.

I went home to get prepared and threw a few clothes in my suitcase and some necessary union credentials in my briefcase; then I was ready to leave. Brother Andrew Nelson and his family came to my house to pick me up for the trip. Before we started toward Long Beach, Brother Nelson had to drop his family off at his father-in-law's house, located in a small town near New Orleans. Afterward, we started on our long journey in his old model Oldsmobile.

Sugarland, Texas, was our first stop. Unexpectedly, we were shocked when we saw hundreds and hundreds of black prisoners working on a farm. Those black men, wearing white prison clothes, were being guarded by white guards riding horses and carrying shotguns.

Brother Nelson and I discussed why so many black men was in prison. One of the main reasons was being black; another reason was that they didn't have proper representation in courts. We knew what life was like in this racist, Jim Crow, discriminating society; seeing all those black prisoners made us more determined to carry on our fight for freedom for the poor workers.

We didn't sit there too long in the car cause we knew the guards would get suspicious of us; they was liable to say that we was trying to break somebody out.

<vrh>Strong in the Struggle</vrh>

<rrh>Prison and Release</rrh>

<cn>10</cn>

<ct>Prison and Release</ct>

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 concurrently. You only have to serve three." They sent me back to the parish prison there in New Orleans, and I stayed there until they came and 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 jail they didn't allow me to see no one, even when I went to the shower. They would clear the dayroom 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 because 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.

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 began to learn that vegetables was similar to humans. They had to have 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 took it up and completed it, and I received a certificate for vegetable growing. I also took up general education, and I got my diploma. [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.]

stable

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 appeals court ruled that Judge Skelly Wright had made a 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, gave me some shoes (new shoes), new hat, and gave me, I think it was either \$75 or \$100. The chief classification and parole officer, I think his name was Mr. Anderson, he

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 took 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 ^{one hundred dollars} ~~\$100~~. Another friend gave me ^{ten dollars} ~~\$10~~, another one gave me ^{twenty-five} ~~\$25~~. 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 said, "My name is Sam Daniels, the business agent here, and I learned that you was looking for me. Would you please step into 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 traveling card. He said, "You're a union man."

"Yes, sir, I am. I have 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."

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 a regular job. And I had two off days each week.

After I had been 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. I introduced myself to him, and we started 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 ~~[sic]~~ Committee and I refused to cooperate with them. 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 was from the culinary union—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, a sister who was a leader in the party. She seemed very nice. I would go to meetings where I would

needed was a little guidance in the right direction. If somebody has a little spark and you develop it, it 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 don't have 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. 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 enough to be falling out on her job. Grace got a statement from her doctor saying that she wasn't drunk. She was suffering from seizures and taking a medication called Dilantin. [Dilantin is a drug commonly used for management of seizures in patients with brain cancer.] 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.

} *italic*

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, who dress in 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~~ ^{no} 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 Grace and I was together I was involved with the Communist Party and the ADNIP Party. I was interested in any organization I thought could help

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, including an article that was published in the *People's World* newspaper on May 19, 1984.

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My wife, Grace, helped me start off writing after I retired. She encouraged me and 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} weren't getting down to the grass roots. 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 were sometimes printed in other publications like the *Sun-Reporter* newspaper and *The Black Scholar*.

<a>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 wrote that was published in the *New Bayview News*, May 28, 1981.

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<a>The NAACP

published in the *People's World*, November 7, 1981, and reprinted in the *New Bayview News*, December 1, 1981.

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I continued to be active in the antiapartheid movement, and 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'm also proud that I helped provide security when Alfred Nzo and Nelson Mandela came to the Bay Area. I got to meet Nzo but not Mandela.

In an article that *The Black Scholar* published in the 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.

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<a>"Doctor of the Working Class"

I have worked in many organizations and have 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 so 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. [Lee

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<vrh>Strong in the Struggle</vrh>

<rrh>Looking Back, Facing Forward</rrh>

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<ct>Looking Back, Facing Forward</ct>

My grandfather always told me that god helps those who help themselves. That told me something—that you had to help yourself, that you didn't have to look up, since there ^{wasn't} ~~was~~ 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 grass roots get to fighting each other. The problem is 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 the experience of fighting for freedom. I learned that the workers wasn't getting complete freedom and justice. We had to combat racism and fight for better working conditions, jobs, upgrading, health needs, and housing.

I learned that to build any organization you have to fight for issues. 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 merging the hotel and restaurant workers unions in San Francisco back in the 1970s; 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

When they called me before the Un-American Activity *fsic* Committee, I think they was trying to use me against the ILWU. Maybe they figured I was a weak man who 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 into the briar patch. I was at home. You'd be surprised at the people you meet in prison from the left. We were discussing Marxism and 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, or 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, an Afro-American who was 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}~~he~~ 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 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.

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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 it's gonna take to build the movement for socialism. You got to get some people

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 years that young Lee lived with him.

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 might 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 exploitation and mistreatment. 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 attended school only 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 after someone shot the white man. Later Brown would reunite with Tot in Galveston and be introduced to the labor movement.

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

establish the right to associate and visit each other's homes and attend meetings or demonstrate together regardless of race, color, or creed. To me this was a victory for the working class 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 came years later, when he was living San Francisco (he had moved there to find work following his release from prison): he felt that the party and the trade unions were capitulating to racism. A significant incident for him 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 event, but to Brown it was symptomatic of a deterioration of political consciousness and militancy in the party. That deterioration was ~~also~~ reflected, in Brown's view, in the party's failure to stop the AFL-CIO merger and in 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 the importance he attached to opposing racism in practice and not just on paper. ~~Get insert from 9a~~

His attraction to forms of black nationalism reflected both his continuing interest in the problem of black unity and freedom and his sometimes doubt about the Communist Party. He made it clear that his attraction to the Black Muslims owed less to their religious doctrine and more to the fact that the Muslims taught 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 African Descendant Nationalist Independence Partition Party came during a period when he was disillusioned with the Communist Party and had been fired from

Afterword/page 9a, INSERT for p. 9

Brown concluded that the party's leadership had retreated from the struggle to build a strong antiracist left center in the labor movement.

his job at the Jack Tar. The ADNIP Party, through the Black Security Guards, provided him with work and a sense of organizational activism on behalf of the black community.

~~On one level~~ Lee Brown saw no ^{fundamental} contradiction between being involved in black nationalist groups, trade unions, the Communist Party, and the NAACP. He asserted that he was always interested in anything that would help working-class black people and, in his mind, all of these organizations offered possibilities for improving the lives of black people. ^{For example,} His involvement with the NAACP—an affiliation that continued throughout his life—^{grew from} suggests a powerfully felt commitment to being part of a struggle specifically aimed at gaining civil rights in the present society. ^{At the same time} He brought to the NAACP a militancy and concern for working-class issues that had informed his trade union and party activism. These interventions 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 Communist Party program, 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 leadership may be all too common, but this does not negate his commitment to the struggle for racial equality and socialism.

For Lee Brown it is his sense of "the people" that grounds his commitment. "I have dedicated my life in the service of poor people," says Lee Brown. "I got faith in the masses."

Reeds
This section follows awards section.

<ct>A Note on Sources</ct>

The primary sources for this autobiography were a series of interviews that Robert L. Allen conducted with Lee Brown between 1994 and 1999, as well as earlier texts prepared by Grace Oliver Brown and Tom Dunphy. The personal files of Lee Brown contain a wealth of source materials, including letters, articles, leaflets, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, books, copies of speeches, and official documents of various kinds.

The prologue is excerpted from the published transcript of the hearing by the Committee on Un-American Activities of the House of Representatives, February 15, 1957 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1957).

The chapter entitled "Black Workers on the New Orleans Waterfront," is based on material in John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans, 1860-1880* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973); Daniel Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labor, and Unionism, 1892-1923* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); and Philip S. Foner, ed., *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* (New York: International Publishers, 1974). The history of Local 207 is drawn from a master's thesis by David Lee Wells, "The ILWU in New Orleans: CIO Radicalism in the Crescent City, 1937-1957" (Baylor University, 1979).

Material on the trial of Andrew Steve Nelson and the transcript of the trial of Lee Brown were obtained from the National Archives, Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Texas.

Other published sources that were helpful in understanding the background of the story were Ann Fagan Ginger and David Christiano, eds., *The Cold War against Labor*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, Calif.: Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, 1987); Jean Damu,