



By STANLEY G. ROBERTSON



Do You Remember When?

A nostalgic look at former days in Los Angeles:

Do you remember when the then National Football League champion, Cleveland Rams moved to Los Angeles and became the Los Angeles Rams, the first major professional sports team to make the move to the West Coast? You're a certified "Old Timer" if you recall that the year of the move was 1946, right after the Second World War.

There was no guarantee that professional sports of any kind, particularly football, would be a success in this town where the big rooting interest and sports dollar centered around UCLA and USC. Remember 1946? Black reporters were not allowed in the press box at the Coliseum, most National Football League teams were lillywhite, and, over 103,000 watched in the Coliseum in those pre-television days UCLA defeat USC for only the second time in history to gain a right to play in the Rose Bowl.

Remember some of those early Black Rams? Woodley Lewis, who played at Manual Arts High School here, Los Angeles City College and the University of Oregon before joining the Rams was one of the great defensive backs ever played on some of the great post-war UCLA football teams before joining the Rams. Like Woodley, Thompson was one of the nicest men you'd ever want to meet. He became a successful local business and civic figure after his playing days were over.

Remember Paul Younger, one of the first graduates of predominately Black colleges to make it big in professional football? Dick "Night Train" Lane, so christened by Ram end Tom Fears, because he played the record "Night Train" constantly in the training camp dormitory. Lane was also one of the great defensive backs ever to play. Then, there was the great Kenny Washington, drafted by the Rams long after his knees had gone and with his glory days at UCLA almost a decade behind him. He gave it a good try and occasionally, one saw the greatness that he once had before he hung them up for good...

Do you remember when, in a less populous Los Angeles, people had telephone prefixes (without area codes) such as Republic, Adams, Rochester and Newmark? When people gave their home locations as "three doors East of Wadsworth," "four doors West of Central" and "five doors from Denker"? When kids on a Sunday night would crowd into Currier's ice cream parlor on the corner of 27th and Western Avenue? When art deco streamlined trolley cars ran from 10th Avenue and West Jefferson, through the downtown area and ended up way out in some place called Huntington Park? When the hottest dance tune in town was recorded by a local band, Joe Higgins and was called "The Honeydrinker"? When touring bands of stars from the old Negro Leagues used to play against teams of white major league baseball stars at old White Sox Park or at Wrigley Field?

More Memories, Memories, Memories

Do you remember when it was a family ritual and a delight to kids, to go down to the Grand Central Market down on Third Street and shop for groceries? It was like going to Siam or India, to be dropped into the middle of all the exotic smelling foods, the strange collection of people representing almost every ethnic persuasion, and to be allowed the ultimate treat: to sample one of the exotic dishes which tastes even better in memory than they probably did at the time. Even the long streetcar ride home, loaded down with bags of food, seemed more than worth the excursion.

Remember when the disappearance of a little Black school girl, Dorothy Gordon, put fear in the hearts of all Black parents who warned their children against taking up with strangers? The year was 1940 and the Gordon Case was the most sensational of its kind in a less violent, more innocent time before television and explicit movies. In an exhaustive and intensive search for the little girl's whereabouts, the police turned up nothing as rumors and stories abounded about her disappearance. The little girl's ravished body was later turned up in a storm drain and it still remains an unsolved and baffling crime.

Remember when "afterhours" clubs were all the vogue in Los Angeles and, if you could get in, you just might run into some of the big names of Hollywood and the entertainment world "partying behind closed doors" in the Black Community? It was a time when racial mingling was not in vogue and such clubs became the regular meeting places and rendezvous for interracial couples. One of the most popular was "The Flame" over on West Jefferson.

When Hollywood's top stars turned out to entertain at the annual Black Shriner's benefit show? When two of the most popular and influential Black men in Los Angeles were both policemen: "Rocky" Washington and Walter Goodlowe? When Ish Evans owned a Westside bar which, it seemed, at any time of the day or night, you could drop by and run into top athlete or celebrity holding court? When Erskine Hawkins' "Tippin In," Louis Jordan's "Knock Me A Kiss" and "Outskirts of Town" were records playing on every jukebox along Central and Western avenues? When Daisey Reynolds' Flash Record Shop on Western Avenue was the hangout for the high school record buying crowd? When "Lovin'" John Dolphin was alive and promoting records, dances and radio programs out of his Dolphin's of Hollywood record store on East Vernon, "90 magic steps from Central Avenue" as he used to say?

Do you remember when, during the Second World War, white uniformed military personnel attacked Black and Hispanic kids wearing so called "zoot suits" which lead to the infamous "Zoot Suit riots" in this city? The year was 1943 and the city was swollen with defense workers, passing through servicemen and all kinds of hustlers attracted here to capitalize on the situation. There were countless "stories" about "suddenly rich" Black defense workers going into the most elegant downtown stores and paying cash for luxury items such as fur coats and jewelry. There were also "stories" about "certain days" being days on which "suddenly free" Blacks from the South "intentionally bumping into whites" on streetcars and in the downtown stores. There were many "rumors" abounding about "racial conflicts" over such things as "colored People not knowing their place" or "Southern Whites trying to bring back slavery." Most of these rumors proved to be unfounded but such rumors and the wartime tensions did lead to the establishment of organizations to bridge the racial barriers in the city.

Well, if you remember all of the above, then, obviously, you're much older than I!