

# L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

By STANLEY G. ROBERTSON

## Do You Remember When?

The 1952 Olympic Trials were held at the Coliseum. The city was alive with the talk of the big event and a former Jefferson High School star, Marvelous Mal Whitfield, fresh from 30 combat missions as an Air Force gunner in Korea, did what the skeptics said he couldn't do: qualify for the team. And, one of the poignant sights of the two-day event: Billy Anderson, the stepson of comedian Eddie "Rocheester" Anderson, missing out by a stride on making the team in the 110-meter high hurdles.

It was revealed, after the senseless slaying in the early 1950's of former Duke Ellington trumpet star Al Killian, that a Negro had never been given the death penalty up to that time in California for killing another Negro. Killian was brutally murdered in a So. Maple Ave. rooming house by a crazed man who had been convicted in 1927 and again in 1940 for two separate killings. On both occasions, he had been paroled for "good behavior."

That afternoon in 1943 when white students at John C. Fremont High School went on the rampage because a Negro student, Robert Summerize, started attending classes there. Although the event was never mentioned by the city's daily press, a "dummy" of the Negro student, with odious racial epithets attached, was "hung" on the school grounds with a warning issued to other Negroes who might have ideas of attending the school. Summerize later transferred to Polytechnic which was then located at the corner of Washington and Grand, where Trade-Tech now stands.

## And Do You Remember Also?

When the greatest jazz bass player of all times, Jimmy Blanton, died almost in obscurity here at Olive View Sanitarium, at the age of 21 on July 30, 1942. Blanton, who had revolutionized the bass fiddle and made it truly a jazz instrument during his brief stay with the orchestra of Duke Ellington, contracted tuberculosis and died while really just approaching his prime. His last permanent stand with the Ellington group was as a member of the band which supplied the music for the Duke's great local stage show, "Jump For Joy," which showcased the talents of many a great one, including Ivy Anderson and a then unknown young beauty named Dorothy Dandridge.

What a turmoil the Negro Community here was in over the still unsolved brutal rape-murder of 9-year-old Dorothy Gordon. The small child disappeared on Good Friday of 1940 while on the way home from rehearsal for an Easter play at a neighborhood church. Her body was found in an old wash a month or so later after one of the greatest manhunts ever recorded here. In spite of the appearance from time to time of "hot leads," the killer still remains at large and the case listed as unsolved on the police books.

The "Disneyland" of the 1940's, "Ken Murray's Blackouts." Just as people today shepherd all visiting friends on a tour of Disneyland, back in those days "Blackouts" was a must. The variety show, which held sway at the old El Capitan Theatre on Vine Street in Hollywood, now the scene of ABC's "Hollywood Palace" telecasts, featured probably the first integrated hit show around these parts. Co-starring in the extravaganza with the buxom and busty blonde, Marie Wilson, was Negro dancer and comic, Peg Leg Bates. One of the never-to-be-forgotten scenes was Bates being escorted on stage in his "captain's chair" by a bevy of beauties.

## Can You Recall?

The first great, truly integrated jazz club in Hollywood, Billy Berg's on Vine Street. In the early days of "Bop" and the progressive school, you could hear the bands of Billy Eckstine, Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, and more. It was also the first entertainment spa off the Eastside where interracial couples were accepted without question or stares. Before then, mixed couples were only welcomed in Negro clubs and some of those — because of the fear of police retaliation — frowned on such.

When Roy Loggins, now a successful caterer, was one of the town's few Negro disc jockeys. Strangely enough, Roy was more popular among the Mexican-American community than he was among Negroes and was presented a plaque on stage at the now demolished Paramount Theatre by Bandleader Lionel Hampton for his work in combating juvenile delinquency.

The Big Bands that used to come to the Elks and the Shrine. For a buck you could attend a dance and hear the music of groups like Count Basie, Jimmy Lunceford, Lionel Hampton, and Andy Kirk. At the time, Negroes weren't admitted to Earl Carroll's, which later became the Moulin Rouge and the site for the "Queen For A Day" broadcasts, and The Palladium, which until 1947 did not lift the color bar.

That time less than 20 years ago when Los Angeles High School elected its first Negro student body president, Sherrill Luke, now a practicing attorney, I believe. At the time, shortly after the war, the school still had a small Negro population and it was a real milestone. Luke later went on to become the first Negro student body president at UCLA.

## You May Still Remember

These years when the Inter-Fraternity Basketball series was held first at the 25th Street YMCA and later at Patriotic Hall. The talent wasn't as celebrated and the crowds not as big as today but there was no lack of enthusiasm. Many a frat man with more of a paunch than he likes to admit, can recall his younger, leaner days and the great fun provided by these games. And, many a matron recalls when as a young girl she couldn't make up her mind about whom to root for.

The bygone years when a great holiday outing was an Easter picnic to Lincoln Park, a church Sunday school picnic, with all the homemade ice cream and pound cake you could eat, out at Brookside Park in Pasadena, and an end of summer Labor Day journey out to the beach at Santa Monica. Those were the years before the places of amusement became overly crowded and the young people too sophisticated and blasé for such pedestrian endeavors.

The songs you danced to or hummed. You couldn't go a block without hearing Avery Parrish's "After Hours," Lil Green's "In The Dark," Jimmy Lunceford's "For Dancer's Only," Johnny Hodges' warm horn on Ellington's "Things Ain't What They Used To Be," Joe Liggins' "The Honeydriper," Basie's "One O'Clock Jump," Roy Eldridge and Anita O'Day on Krupa's "Let Me Off Uptown," and so many, many more.

## The Final Reel

Well, if you can remember all of those, dearie, you're much older than I!