

# Opinion

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 30, 1998

## Tom Bradley's legacy

**A**gree with him or not during his 20 years as Mayor of Los Angeles, it was difficult not to like and respect Tom Bradley. Always dignified and gracious, he was that rare politician who actually listened to people. Although he fought sometimes fierce political battles and faced harsh criticism, he seemed utterly without malice or resentment.

"We should celebrate his life rather than mourn his death," Peter Ueberroth told us Tuesday. The Newport Beach businessman worked closely with Mayor Bradley on the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles and in the rebuilding following the riots that erupted in 1992 when Rodney King was acquitted.

"In this day and age of wondering about the character of elected officials of both parties," Mr. Ueberroth continued, "Tom Bradley was a leader whose character was never in question. He told the truth, even when he knew you wouldn't like it. And he was totally gracious to every person he met."

"He was not so much an African-American mayor as a great mayor who happened to be African-American," said L.A. County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, a longtime friend and political ally. "Everybody could identify with him and

he was a great ambassador abroad for the United States."

The sharecropper's son and grandson of slaves who went on to become a track star at UCLA, then a policeman, then a political leader, sometimes had more faith in the capacity of government to do good than was warranted. "He was an honorable man of a bygone era," commented Shawn Steel, a Los Angeles attorney and treasurer of the California Republican Party, "the last of the big city New Deal Democrats."

The rebuilding of downtown of which Mr. Bradley was so proud drove some people from their homes. The Metro Rail project he championed has proven to be a white elephant. He lost two gubernatorial races to George Deukmejian and his last years in office were marred by the uprising, financial troubles and increasing political restiveness.

But the 1984 Olympic Games were a triumph that just might have saved the Olympic movement by proving the event could be financed privately. He maintained respectful contact with all factions and groups in a city with no shortage of them, working with quiet urgency for consensus. He earned the respect of those who knew him well and represented Los Angeles with a face of dignity and calm confidence. Not a bad legacy.