

The African American Male-Basketball Player
Experience in Finland During 1974-1990: An
Oral- and Microhistorical Study

Pro gradu -tutkielma

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract <p>Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma on haastatteluista koottu mikrohistoriallinen katsaus Afro-Amerikkalaisten koripalloilijoiden elämään Suomessa 1970-90 luvuilla. Tutkielmassa käydään läpi kolmen Afro-Amerikkalaisen miehen tarina ja taustat heidän kotimaassaan vietetystä lapsuudesta ja nuoruudesta, aina Suomeen saapumiseen ammattilaiskoripalloilijoiksi. Tutkielman tarkoitus on selvittää miten Suomalaiset ovat vastaanottaneet Afro-Amerikkalaiset koripallopelaajat ja miten paljon rasismia he kokivat vuosien varrella, ollessaan Suomessa yli 30 vuotta. Tutkielma käy läpi myös sitä, millaista rasismia Suomessa on ollut ennen 1970-90 lukuja, sen aikana, ja sen jälkeen, sekä esimerkkejä siitä, millaista rasismia Suomessa syntyneet Suomalaiset tummaihoiset ihmiset ovat käyneet läpi.</p>			
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Table of contents

I. Introduction.....	4
II. Surviving America while being black.....	7
1. Where the journey begins.....	7
2. Childhood: social and cultural habits.....	10
3. Searching for identity in a restricted environment.....	13
4. Early experiences of being away from home.....	18
5. Politics, wars and popular culture in America: preparing to leave it all behind.....	21
III. Embarking on the journey to Finland.....	25
6. Finland’s true colors: what Finland can be for a black person on a bad day.....	25
7. Finland: arriving to the unknown.....	31
8. Surprises and peculiarities of the new country and culture.....	32
IV. The creation of a legacy in Finland.....	35
9. Putting in the work.....	35
10. Being a star amongst stars.....	39
11. Finnish politics and economy from an American vantage point.....	42
12. Adapting, or assimilating?	45
13. Disappointments along the way	47
V. Conclusion.....	50
Sources.....	51

I. Introduction

This thesis examines the life and experiences of three African American professional basketball players, Bernard Harris, Ervin Latimer and Larry Pounds, in Finland in the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s. The basis for the research comes from my own experiences with racism in Finland as a person of African American descent. In order to compare and contrast the experiences of African American men in Finland in the 1970s and 80s, to my own in the 1990s and 2000s, the following research questions were used as guidelines during the creation of this thesis: what kind of backgrounds did African American men come from in the United States, before coming to Finland? What were Finnish attitudes towards black people like in the 1970s and 80s? What kind of racism did African American male basketball players face in Finland, if any? What was the impact of the African American male on the Finnish society in basketball as well as the community he lived in?

Previous Research

Previous research on this topic is very limited. Aside from old newspaper articles, sports magazine interviews, the Finnish basketball association chronicles and a couple television documentaries, the research made on African American basketball players in Finland is rare, to say the least. This thesis offers a new, microhistorical viewpoint to the lives of African American male basketball players in Finland in the 1970s and 80s, because of the interview approach used as one of the research methods. It enabled me to get very close to the experiences of the three men who were interviewed for this project, to understand their views and opinions clearly, and to give a voice to part of Finnish and American culture and history that is less often heard from.

Thoughts and Discretions

The literature and secondary sources used in this thesis support a narrative that I created in a conscious effort to find out the differences in the treatment of African Americans in Finland during different time periods in the past. The interviewees themselves did not have any agendas or ideologies that they wanted to bring forth. They were simply kind enough to tell their stories and give their input on the themes and the narrative that I created around this thesis. The narrative of racial issues and dichotomies, as well as the interpretations, claims and conclusions made in this writing are strictly of my own creation. The words and testimonies of the interviewees should not be taken out of context, nor misconstrued in a negative way.

History is an art (or a science) that strives for objective critical analysis, however, the truths presented in this writing are highly subjective due to the nature of the primary sources, which in this case are interviews. When reading the interviews, and this writing in general, the following themes and ideologies must be kept in mind: what is the past?¹ A definition of the past can be created in many different ways. For some, the past is a linear chronology of events, while for others it can be an interaction of cultural developments and changes in attitudes, ideology and tradition within timeframes that overlap or exist as separate entities.² In this thesis history consists and is formed through what the interviewees describe it as. On the other hand, history within this thesis can be considered as the combination of testimonies, research material and historical sources by which this text has come together³ Historical realities⁴ are many, and this is a subjective interpretation of the subsequent timeframes, by people who lived through them.

Research Methods

The main research method used in this thesis was that of interviewing. Interviewing, as a method has its strengths and weaknesses just like any other research method. Self-

¹ Paul 2015, 18.

² Paul 2015, 18-19.

³ Paul 2015, 18.

⁴ Paul 2015, 19.

ensorship, pressures of the interview event itself, and countless other variables play a part in what type of information comes about during the interviews.⁵ In other words, when human beings are put under a spotlight and they are conscious of the fact that they are being recorded and documented, the words spoken and events described come out in a very different way in comparison to those during a casual discussion.

In this case a half-structured interview method was used. This means that all the interviewees were presented with the same set of questions, which the interviewees then answered freely, in their own words, without any specified options for the answers. The greatest obstacle in the creation of this thesis was doing justice to the appearance, personalities and characters of the men interviewed for this project. There is only so much that a written text can convey to the reader, no matter how skilled the writer is. Therefore, the full experience of the captivating presence of the men in this story cannot be fully transmitted to the reader. However, I will introduce the interviewees in the next paragraphs, and try to paint a picture of these three wonderful men.

Getting to Know the Interviewees

Bernard Harris came to Finland in 1980. Already back then, he must have been quite a sight and experience for Finnish people, with his physical frame of 208cm, a bright smile and a booming laughter. Harris is an impressive, stylish and well-mannered sight, and his low bass voice speaks clear, considerate and wise words. Harris, currently, is a community leader, traveling across the country to speak to different audiences in efforts to reduce bullying, racism and hate speech in schools and workplaces. Harris also organizes free basketball camps for immigrants and children with low-income backgrounds.

Ervin Latimer, who arrived in Finland as early as 1974, speaks with a gentle, yet experienced tone in his voice. In his eyes one can see wisdom and relentlessness. Currently Latimer runs his own bistro and diner, with customers finding themselves sometimes

⁵ Abrams 2010.

coming back, not just for the food, but the conversations and advice on sports and life in general that Latimer likes to dish out along with his meals.

Larry Pounds is an embodiment of greatness and his tall and strong posture along with his facial features let on his wise and polite character. Pounds first came to Finland in 1976. People around him immediately fell in love with his positive energy, which can be felt in his presence even today, and his words of wisdom and laughter always make the people around him feel good about themselves. Currently Pounds is getting ready to retire after working for the city of Kotka as a manager of the local sports complex.

All three men were a pleasure to work with, and the interviews were conducted with lots of laughter and positive energy, while reminiscing the past. My only hope is to do justice to the great personalities of the three men, while telling their stories in order to find answers to my research questions.

II. Surviving America while being black

1. Where the journey begins

The story for the three African American men, Bernard Harris (1950), Ervin Latimer (1952) and Larry Pounds (1953) begins in Virginia, South Carolina and Mississippi, respectively. All three lived in small towns on the outskirts of bigger cities. Harris was the only child, while Latimer was one of eleven. Pounds had two brothers and a sister.⁶ The timeframe of their births brought all of the three men into a world that was rapidly changing in all facets of humanity. Three or four generations ago their family members were slaves. After slavery, their parents had to live through Jim Crow laws and other restrictions on human rights.

Sorting through the aftermath of the great depression of the 1920s and feeling the shock of WWII were difficult things for anyone to handle at the time. The parents of these

⁶ Bernard Harris, Ervin Latimer and Larry Pounds' interviews Feb.-March.2019, Interviewer Cedric Latimer

three men had to go through those experiences while also fighting a war at home, fighting for their rights and fighting for survival in a country that regarded them as less than human.

Between the late 1880s and 1930s was open season for African Americans to be lynched for unthinkable reasons, with no penalty of law for the perpetrators of these acts.⁷ Their parent and grandparents lived through those pressures and threats on their lives as well. On the other hand, the three men were also born into a time of hope, change (although for the most part change was achieved only by enduring extreme injustice) and the realization of civil rights for black people. The ugly past left a mark on Harris, Latimer and Pounds, but the future would mold them into resilient citizens of the world, whom all shed the physical and psychological boundaries imposed upon them by their country of origin.

In Harris' home state of Virginia in the 1950s African Americans were making big strides in fighting for their human rights. Virginia was entangled in racial injustice and inequality just like the rest of the country, but it was one of the more progressive ones in the Deep South in terms of reform. In 1928 an anti-lynching bill was passed and the Ku Klux Klan had less influence in Virginia, than it did in most other southern states.⁸

Fear of race mixing was a definite agenda for white Virginians, as was the limiting of where African Americans could live and go to school. Housing covenants and other forms of restriction on socio-economic advancement of African Americans were the standard by which the society lived at the time. Public schools had been segregated for over half of a century up until 1954, a year during which the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court put an end to segregation in public schools. Different states around the country were reluctant in observing the law when it came to integrating the public schools. Appeals were made in such vast amounts that concrete acts of integration were in some cases delayed for years after the official ruling.⁹

Latimer's South Carolina had been, and was one of the poorest states in the whole country. In 1952, the birth year of Latimer, South Carolina amended its state constitution,

⁷ Waldrep 2006.

⁸ Heinemann 2007, 330-350.

⁹ Heinemann 2007, 330-350.

allowing for public schools to close their doors in order to avoid integration. Unlike Harris' Virginia, South Carolina was a bigotry power-house, with deep-seated traditions of racially motivated killings well past the times of slavery. The last documented lynching of a black person in South Carolina occurred in 1947, which was considerably late for such a gruesome act in America.¹⁰

Pounds' Mississippi was no stranger to racism, bigotry, exploitation and killing of black people either. Mississippi, along with South Carolina, was part of a concept called the Deep South, which was a term used to describe states in America that were most dependent on slavery and plantations. Another name for the Deep South was Cotton States, due to the fact that cotton was the biggest cash crop, or source of income, in those states. In the 1950s and 60s sharecropping still existed as an alternative form of slavery, created in the wake of the emancipation proclamation, and particularly in Mississippi it was one of the few ways for black people to earn a living. However, industrialization of agriculture in America created a void in employment and jobs performed by humans in that field of work. Sharecropping became outdated, leaving many unemployed and unable to care for their families. Due to the harsh conditions, people headed to other states looking for a better life. This phenomenon was known as "leave or starve" in Mississippi. For the Pounds family, a move to California was inevitable, as black communities in Mississippi crumbled. Infant mortality in Mississippi for black people was the highest in the whole country at 55.1 per 1,000, paradoxically occurring during the baby boom years of the 1960s.¹¹

As we can see, Harris, Latimer and Pounds were all born into very unstable times in their respective states. Their parents in particular took the brunt of racial injustice, but as the three men developed into adolescence, their own experiences of racism and social constraints loomed ahead.

¹⁰ Rogers 1994, 136-140.

¹¹ Mitchell 2014, 366.

2. Childhood: social and cultural habits

Childhood for Harris, Latimer and Pounds by most standards would be burdensome and tragic. Yet, while born into a tough situation, it was simply a case of "when you don't see much else, you don't know much else,"¹² for all three. Pounds' father left the family two years after they moved to California; Larry was 12 years old at the time. Harris' father died of a heart attack when Bernard was 13. Latimer's mother passed away when Ervin was 17 years old, and a few years later his father passed away as well, leaving Latimer to look after his now 9 siblings (one of Latimer's two older brothers was deployed to Vietnam and never returned).¹³

Heartbreak and sadness in the minds of these young men was inevitable, but they all found a way to cope with the stress and agony. They had to. Their families needed them and showing any weakness would have been detrimental to the family members around, who looked for support, guidance and direction in them.

As for social encounters and interactions, Harris grew up in a very homogenous community. In Harris' experience "growing up in times of segregation, you don't really understand it so much as a small child, as a young kid you don't pay so much attention to it, and it doesn't slap you in the face, because everyone around me was black, all my cousins, my family and everyone really."¹⁴ This was often the case for young African Americans growing up in the 50s and 60s. They did not come into contact with white people, or even see them, due to not having the opportunity to go outside of their communities or due to the dangers of racial tensions and injustice, which forced black people to try to steer clear of the whites.¹⁵

In Latimer's perspective "at that time, during the 1960s, you didn't really hang out with people other than of your own race."¹⁶ Latimer's family lived in a community that had white people in it, but the distances in rural South Carolina were so vast, that very seldom did he come into contact with them. Pounds, who had moved to California at the age of 10,

¹² Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹³ Bernard Harris, Ervin Latimer and Larry Pounds' interviews Feb.-March.2019, Interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹⁴ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹⁵ Rothstein 2017.

¹⁶ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

"never really came across white people that much, I mean they were there, but my community was just black and Hispanic for the most part."¹⁷

When discussing the social encounters within their communities, and the singularity that none of the men really encountered white people in their youth, a level of nonchalance and indifference could be sensed. The three men had grown up in an environment that either made a conscious choice to stay away from white people, or an environment where white people just were not present. Therefore, it did not occur as anything strange in the minds of these gentlemen.

Religion was a cultural and social aspect that held great value and importance in black communities. For Harris, no mention of religious practices arose, but for Latimer and Pounds, there was an indication of church culture. Both were raised into Baptist Christianity and both remember going to church quite often.¹⁸ In African American culture, the church, and in this case the ideology and culture of the Black Church holds a special place in the social sphere of African American life.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Black Church stood as the stronghold of the Black Community, fighting for equality and economic self-sufficiency and challenging its body to be self-determined and self-aware. The Black Church also served to offer large doses of spiritual centering to offset the rather racist aggression by unyielding provocateurs of hatred. From its very emergence during slavery, the Black Church was a response to the systematic and obstructive oppression at the hand of those with political power and economic means.¹⁹

Schools and the learning environment for all three was very homogenous as well in terms of demographics. All of them went to predominately black schools during their elementary- and middle school years. Although the federal court order of integration of public schools had stood for a decade already, no white children attended the same schools.

¹⁷ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹⁸ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹⁹ Price 2011, 13.

In this case the option of integration was not possible, due to the fact that white people did not live in the same area or just refused to enroll their children in the black schools. Whites and blacks kept to themselves and created boundaries around each other, despite the possibility for integration. Latimer, for example, commuted to an all-black school two hours away from his home up until high school.²⁰ Another example of conscious efforts for creating boundaries between blacks and whites were restrictive housing covenants that limited where blacks could live.

From the 1940s all the way to the late 60s racially restrictive housing covenants were one of many reasons keeping African Americans out of new and high-end housing developments that were increasingly being built all over United States.

The Federal Housing Administration's justification was that if African-Americans bought homes in these suburbs, or even if they bought homes near these suburbs, the property values of the homes they were insuring, the white homes they were insuring, would decline. And therefore, their loans would be at risk.²¹

Housing covenants were made by property owners and buyers, agreeing to certain terms on who could own and buy the property. In this way legal agreements were made that prohibited whites from selling their houses or land to African Americans. As a result, blacks were legally being rounded up and forced to live in specific areas, which is why we see Harris and Pounds, for example, not having considerable experience of white people early on in their lives.²²

While living a life of exclusion and inability to explore in their childhood years, Harris, Latimer and Pounds were getting ready to attend high school. For Harris and Latimer this would be the first time attending school with someone who was not African American.

²⁰ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

²¹ Rothstein 2017.

²² Brooks and Rose 2013, 48.

3. Searching for identity in a restricted environment

For African Americans in the 1950s and 60s, identity and equality were becoming increasingly important. For the past 400 years, identity, the very essence of modern humanity, had been taken away from African Americans. Their identities had been stripped down, molded and shaped into feelings of self-hatred and shame by white slave owners. For the first time, with the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, black communities in America felt like they were ready and able to change the system they lived in. In Latimer's opinion, the reasons for increased hope in the black communities was due to some of the most important legislative decisions in American history:

here's what you have to understand about where I come from. I was maybe 14 or 15 years old when they made a law that said that black people were equal to whites and everybody else. I mean, think about it, my parents or anybody else in my family wasn't even allowed to vote until then.²³

Latimer is referring to the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* as well as the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*. Three years later the *Fair Housing Act of 1968* was enacted, giving African Americans a better chance to own property and have options in terms of where to live.²⁴ The 1960s were a turning point in American history, which Harris, Latimer and Pounds got to observe, understand and grow up with.

Identity is something we all search for. Some of it is given to us and some of it is earned. Before Latimer's birth, his family had become somewhat prominent in their own community by the standards of the current timeframe. In this sense Latimer was given some of his identity early on. Latimer tells the following story with slight sense of irony and amusement in his voice;

²³ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

²⁴ Greene 2010, 81; Brooks and Rose 2013, 3; Rogers 1994, 136-140

At one point in time, Larimer's owned as much land as the whites living alongside them. My grandparents' family, were a people who owned their own, and I mean, plenty of it. Your great grandmother was part Native American, part white, with a touch of black. Your great grandfather was blue-black.²⁵ They were able to buy many acres of land in that area, because the white people who sold the land to our family, thought that my grandmother was white, and that my grandfather and the rest of the family were just working for her. It was this thing called "passing." In other words, if the color of your skin was light enough or looked white enough, you would pass as such, and in that way you were given certain privileges that other blacks didn't have.²⁶

In Latimer's opinion, because of his family owning land and having a business in that area, white people would not try to create problems for him as eagerly as they would for other blacks, who were not as well established in the community financially. "We never took that status for granted, and always kept our heads down, working hard and staying humble. My parents shielded me from white people, so that there wouldn't be any problems."²⁷ Latimer's family was aware of the fact that they were not immune to racism, prejudice and white oppression. Therefore, his parents did their best to keep their children out of harm's way.

In his teenage years Latimer was increasingly becoming aware of the social and cultural restrictions around him. Despite his family's efforts to shield him from racial injustice, Latimer recalls being chased by the police with his friends. The police would intentionally try to harm them, and in one instance they killed one of Latimer's friends, making the instance seem like the young man had committed suicide.²⁸ Latimer's reality was gloomy, but basketball offered an environment where he felt like he belonged. It gave him a chance to escape the reality for a moment.

What gave Latimer a sense of self, was the status symbol of being a basketball player. Latimer began playing basketball in middle school, "but it was hard to set yourself

²⁵ Latimer is referring to his grandfather's skin-tone.

²⁶ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

²⁷ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

²⁸ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

apart, because all the other black kids were just as good, if not better than I was."²⁹ High School was a different story. Latimer now attended a mostly white school, that for the first time saw blacks attending. Latimer quickly developed to be one of the best players on the team, and with success and accomplishments on the court, came fascination, admiration and acceptance off the court.

Going to an all-white school was mentally tough, I mean they would pretty much give you grades just so you would graduate and get out of their sight, and it showed, it had an impact on me, because the teachers were so dismissive and clearly just didn't care about us. Basketball definitely gave me a status amongst the other kids at the school, but it was almost like a form of slavery. What I mean by that is, that as long as I brought in the wins, and the fame that came with the success, they were happy. I was like a status symbol for them, something that gave the school a chance to advance their sports program. I was in a bubble. Protected by my status. I didn't get any hassle from the whites at my school due to the fact that I was an athlete.³⁰

Harris faced integration for the first time in high school as well. It was a culture shock for him, due to the fact that he had never really been around white people before.

I remember the first day, when you know... I think it was in 1965 or '66, they started to integrate schools, which meant that I was previously going to an all-black school. We had to change and be bussed to this all white school. So... I can remember, like the first day, or the day before school started, I was crying like a baby, because I didn't wanna go, I didn't know what it was, I didn't know what it meant, I didn't know what I would be facing.³¹

Once adapted to his new environment, just as in Latimer's case, Harris found himself in a somewhat positive situation.

²⁹ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

³⁰ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

³¹ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

It actually turned out for me to be a good thing, because when I changed schools, I was always taller than everybody else, and everyone kinda bugged me about playing basketball. I didn't really want to play basketball at first, because I had skinny legs, and I didn't wanna wear short pants. But once I got to the white school, the principal of the school was also the basketball coach, and he talked to me and encouraged me to give basketball a try. After the first year I started to like basketball a bit more. I made a huge improvement by my sophomore year. After that I ended up being one of the best players in the state. I think because I played sports, and I was the biggest star at my school, I didn't have a lot of problems with racism. I didn't run into those type of problems, because I was protected. In America I feel like there is a system where, once they know you can play a sport, they build you up, you know, and make sure you are protected.³²

In his early childhood, Harris was not aware of racism due to the fact that he lived in a very racially homogenous environment. The transition to a new predominately white high school put things into a new perspective. Harris became much more aware of his surroundings and the inequality and socio-economic disparity between African Americans and whites.

I remember segregation, when they had the two water fountains, one for white people to use, and the other for black people. I also remember that when you got on the bus, white people would sit in the front and black people had to get in the back. I was aware of the fact that I shouldn't be dating any white girls. Also, coming to the white high school made me see the differences in lifestyle. Once you see the white kids coming to school in the brand-new cars and motorcycles, you kinda realize how things really were.³³

While basketball introduced Harris to stardom and his hard work paid off, in Harris' opinion his mother was the greatest source of motivation, strong identity and self-confidence for him. "I knew that no matter what happened, she would always be there for me. No matter how bad things got, she always had my back."³⁴ Despite the racial injustices

³² Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

³³ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

³⁴ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

Harris faced, he still felt that having a strong mother at home and an environment of success and adoration at school made his childhood a good one.

Pounds accredits his sense of self-confidence to his high school coach, who would drive for an hour in the morning to Pounds' house to pick him up and take him to school. Early in the morning the two would practice for an hour at 7am before classes would start. Like Harris, Pounds was not too keen on playing, or working hard for his success at first. However, Pounds' high school coach would instill the work ethic into him. Always pushing Pounds to the limit, Pounds' coach made him understand that colleges and universities would not give him a scholarship to play and go to school for free, unless he was willing to do the work required to become one of the best.

I'll tell you a story about when I knew that I had become a pretty good ball-player. I had been invited to this high school all-star game, kinda like a showcase, and I was going up against a player that was ranked as the number one player in my area. Before this event I had a little bit of confidence in my skills and abilities on the court, so I wasn't too nervous about the game. Towards the end of the game I get the ball on a fast break, and I go up for a dunk, and I see the guy jumping with me to try to block me, and I just go up and dunk on him. Hard. And that's when I knew that I could be pretty good at this game. It made me feel like I had reached a point where people had to respect me on the court.³⁵

While Pounds was becoming a powerhouse on the court, outside of the basketball court the reality was still discouraging. Helping his mother make ends meet came with an added cost:

My mother worked as a housekeeper for this white family, and sometimes I would go help her after school, or just go meet her at the house she worked at, and walk home with her. Every time I walked through that neighborhood, the white kids would throw rocks at me and call me names. This was my first experience of white people, and those incidents really developed a deep disliking in my heart for those people.

³⁵ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

Pounds never let those incidents get to him. Instead, he stayed focused on helping his family and securing a scholarship to the University of Washington.

Harris received many scholarship offers to go play collegiate basketball as well. Harris felt like he needed to stay close to home, and picked the Virginia Commonwealth University. Latimer chose Erskine College in South Carolina for himself and all three went on to be outstanding student-athletes throughout their college years.

As we can see from the statements of all three men, basketball was the safe-haven that provided an escape from a grim reality. The escape from reality was bitter-sweet though, and especially Harris and Latimer recognized that white people sometimes accepted them only because of the value they had as athletes in promoting their schools. Did real respect and acceptance ever occur? Most likely not. This was the reality for most African Americans, even if they succeeded in something. In most cases, success would bring about more problems. Hidden or vivid agendas of racism and white oppression still dictated the lives of these three men.

4. Early experiences of being away from home

Going to college and the universities meant change of scenery for Harris, Latimer and Pounds. For the first time they were actively traveling to different cities and states due to playing collegiate basketball, in which schools competed against each other nation-wide. At the doorstep of the 1970s all three men embarked upon new challenges, away from their families and familiar surroundings.

The state of Washington was much like California, progressive and liberal compared to most others in the United States. Pounds was met by all the progressive liberalism he could handle on his first day at the University of Washington.

My first day on campus, I go to take all my stuff to the dorms. I walk down the hallway and open my door (mind you, I'm expecting to see either one of my teammates in there or

another black student) and there's a white guy in the room. I look at him, he looks at me, I close the door and start heading for the reception. I wanted to find out if there had been a mistake of some kind, and if I could change who my roommate was going to be. The thing is, I had never slept or spent the night in a same room with a white person before. I was really nervous and didn't really know what to think of the situation. They told me that nothing was gonna be done about the living arrangements, so I had to man up and just go in there. After a while we kinda got to know each other, and one day we went to get some breakfast at the cafeteria together, so I got to know him better. We became pretty good friends and I learned a big lesson out of that situation. I understood that the color of a person's skin does not determine who they are as a person. So, college for me, shed that attitude towards white people that I had earlier in my life because of the prejudice and racism I had to face from them.³⁶

Pounds greatly enjoyed his collegiate years thereafter, and accredits that time as some of the best years of his life. Being part of the basketball team created a group of friends around him right away, and other students recognized him around the campus. His education was paid for, and he was able to focus on his studies and basketball with a relaxed mind. Pounds' hard work in high school had paid off, and he was able to work on his craft with even more intensity and inspiration.

For Harris, the Virginia Commonwealth University was like a huge playground. He was immediately one of the best players on the team and enjoyed the admiration and friendship of his peers. In his four years at school, Harris built himself into an NBA draft prospect. The National Basketball Association is the most prestigious basketball league of all time. Harris was drafted by the Buffalo Braves in 1974, with whom he spent the next season before heading to the Philippines to play professional basketball.³⁷

Latimer's college experience was mired by a myriad of challenges. His family had lost their mother, and during his collegiate years his older brother would be lost in Vietnam and his father would pass away soon thereafter. Despite the external burdens, Latimer tried

³⁶ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

³⁷ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

to focus on his studies and basketball at the Erskine College in South Carolina as much as possible. At times even simple things proved to be a challenge:

In my first year of college I was in a quite free environment for the first time in my life. So, I figured it would be ok to have a white girlfriend. After a while my coach found out from someone that I was dating a white woman, so he pulls me to the side one day and says: "listen to me real close, Ervin, this is still a prejudice country, be smart, I don't want to have to cut you down from a tree."³⁸

Latimer's basketball coach is referring to lynchings that were still threat to black people in the Deep South. Hanging was the most popular way of lynching blacks in the southern states, and Latimer's coach wished he never had to see it happen to one of his players. Latimer's coach was simply being realistic. He cared about Latimer and was known to be a champion of African Americans as a white basketball coach. It was simply a suggestion by the coach, for Latimer to avoid unnecessary troubles. Despite the fact that college basketball had been integrated for fifteen years already, certain states and college campuses were still acting under unspoken rules, which were rooted in the southern bigotry. In order to get a more vivid picture of what life was really like in those American states where lynchings were part of daily life, we can take a look at the lyrics of an African American singer Billie Holiday. Her words in the song spoke the reality that black people had faced for centuries: "Southern trees bear strange fruit, blood on the leaves and blood at the root. Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze, strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees."³⁹

Another dramatic experience came about for Latimer on the basketball team's road trip, where the team stopped for lunch.

³⁸ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

³⁹ Holiday, B. *Strange Fruit*. Songwriters: Lewis Allan / Maurice Pearl / Dwayne P Wiggins. Strange Fruit lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.

In the 1960s it didn't matter what your status was, if you were black you had to go in through the back, and either stay in the back or take the food with you. But this was the 70s and things were changing. We were traveling as a team of one white coach, one white player and the rest of us players black. We stopped to eat at a diner, and my coach marched the whole team in. The manager rushed over to my coach and told him that we couldn't eat there. After they exchanged some strong words and opinions, my coach was able to stand his ground and the whole team sat down and ate. And I kid you not, the waitress that came to take our orders, cried while she served us.⁴⁰

After his collegiate career, Latimer fought against all odds and managed to be drafted to the Kansas City Kings of the National Basketball Association. Despite his efforts he was unable to secure a permanent spot on the team, which forced him to look elsewhere for a professional basketball career.

5. Politics, wars and popular culture in America: preparing to leave it all behind

The three young gentlemen were living some of the most exciting years of their lives while navigating through college in the early 1970s. At the same time all of humanity faced great challenges and change. The Cold War was a constant reminder of the power struggle between the leading military powers of the world, which the Helsinki Accords subsequently attempted to pacify later on. Women took to arms while fighting for justice and equality, creating a new narrative for themselves as capable protectors of their families from outside harm.⁴¹ *A Clockwork Orange* changed the world of cinematography and the Beatles shook the world by announcing their break-up. The Vietnam War created an ethical split in the United States, and the hippie movement became a formidable force within the younger generations at the time. Idi Amin forced the Asiatic Indian population out of Uganda in a military coup, putting colonial powers on notice. The Arab-Israeli conflict was ongoing, and the 1972 Munich Olympics served as a ghastly reminder of that, with Palestinians kidnapping and murdering Israeli athletes. The 37th President of the United States, Richard Nixon, found himself resigning from office in the midst of the

⁴⁰ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁴¹ Berger, D. 2010, 39.

Watergate scandal. The world was changing and moving closer to a modern era in its vices, with airplane high-jackings as a new form of terrorism.

For Latimer, Pounds and Harris, politics at the time were somewhat uninspiring due to the fact that so many African American leaders were being killed or otherwise silenced. With the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. all three men felt like a part of their identity had been torn away from them.⁴² Pounds recalls the Black Panther movement being present on his University of Washington campus, a political organization that originated in California, and was spreading throughout the nation.⁴³ The Black Panthers were a response to police brutality of the 1960s and 70s, which seemed to target especially the African American community.

The aforementioned world events were all ongoing or fresh in the minds of humanity at the time. Within that social, economic and cultural climate Harris, Latimer and Pounds received offers through their agents to go play professional basketball outside of the United States, in Finland. All three men had their own notions and predispositions as to what kind of a place they were headed to. For Harris the choice was easy:

Before Finland, I played professionally in the States, of course, and after that I went to Israel and the Philippines. I had been to Finland once before with the U.S. Basketball national team. We did a tour in the then Soviet Union. We toured in Moscow, Riga, Kiev and what used to be Leningrad. On the way back from the Soviet Union, we stopped in Finland to play the Finnish national team. That was my first experience of Finland. It was in June and the weather was nice. I remember going to the Helsinki Club at round 11pm and it was still light outside, and once we came out of the club like at 3am, it was still light outside, so that really made an impression on me and Finland just seemed like a nice really nice place. Those were the first memories of Finland for me. Seven years later⁴⁴, after the U.S. and Israel and the Philippines, I got a call from my agent and he said "how would you like, to go somewhere, where there are lots of pretty girls, and make some

⁴² Bernard Harris, Ervin Latimer and Larry Pounds' interviews Feb.-March.2019, Interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁴³ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁴⁴ Harris was in Finland with the U.S. national team in 1971 before arriving for his first professional basketball job in 1980.

money?" So, I asked him "where?" and he told me "Finland!", so automatically I told him yea, I can do that, I can go to Finland, it's nice, sunny and warm over there.⁴⁵



(Image 1.) Harris in his player portrait for the NBA team Buffalo Braves

Harris would later find out otherwise about the weather. Latimer was unable to secure a professional contract in the U.S. after graduating college, despite receiving a try-out period with the NBA's Kansas City Kings. He too got a call from his agent, urging Latimer to start a professional career in Finland.

I didn't have too many thoughts about Finland before traveling there. I just knew it was kinda like in the backdoor of Russia and that it was cold. People back home tried to tell me that there would be polar bears walking on the streets, but I knew it wasn't gonna be like that, I knew better than that. But in all honesty, I just looked at it as just another place and opportunity to go play ball. They were gonna pay me, so I had no problem with going there. Before I did leave to go to Finland, I went out and applied for a "regular" job. I just wanted to see what that piece of paper⁴⁶ could do for me. Mind you, my

⁴⁵ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁴⁶ Latimer is talking about his college degree.

grandfather had a 6th grade education, and my father did not finish high school. My grandmother was expected to raise the children and take care of the household, so she never had the opportunity to even go to school. My father, before he started his own business, was always told he didn't have enough education. So in one of my job interviews, first of all, the owner of the business couldn't believe I had even went to college, and he told me "well... well, I don't think you can work here, you see... you, you have too much education." There was always an excuse for making things more complicated for black people, I guess.⁴⁷

Pounds shared similar notions about coming to Finland as Latimer did in terms of being indifferent about the country or location, as long as he was able to play basketball professionally.

Latimer got to Finland in 1974, whereas Pounds arrived in 1976 and only stayed for a year. Pounds then headed to the Philippines and Mexico for a few years of professional basketball, before returning to Finland and solidifying himself as one of the greatest professional basketball players in the history of Finland. Harris was the last to arrive out of the three, in 1980, as mentioned before.

What type of place would Finland be for these three African American men? How would they be received by the Finnish people? Before answering those questions, a closer look at what Finland had been, and what it was in terms of understanding race, has to be taken. What were the social and political climates like in pertinence to immigrants and foreigners? An assessment of the way in which Finnish people saw themselves in the past and during that time-period, has to be made as well.

⁴⁷ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

III. Embarking on the journey to Finland

6. Finland's true colors: what Finland can be for a black person on a bad day

In order to understand what Finland could be for a black person in its most prejudice form, we must look at some of the cultural and social norms of Finns in terms of race and ethnicity in the past. Finnish racism is often swept under the rug, underestimated and downplayed by its perpetrators and others who might not even partake in racist behavior. The following themes must be evaluated objectively, despite their negative content and compared to the stories recounted by Harris, Latimer and Pounds, in order to see if the following themes were a reality for them as well. By no means is it suggested here, that all Finnish people are racist. The goal is to simply showcase peculiarities that a black person often has to encounter in the Finnish culture.

Finnish people had migrated to the U.S. in hopes of a better life for almost a century before African American basketball players ever arrived in Finland. The Finns who migrated to the U.S. wrote letters and articles about their observations of the new country and sent them back home to Finland.⁴⁸ Some Americanized Finns even wrote articles about "the negro and the Indian problem"⁴⁹, and in this way displayed understanding of the American racial hierarchy. Finnish people were not the most valued group of immigrants in the eyes of the Americans, and often Finnish newcomers settled in the poorest parts of town and in the ghettos of the cities they ended up in once they came to America.⁵⁰ Because of where they lived, once they settled in America, Finnish people were most likely in daily encounters with black slaves, black indentured servants, or free blacks, depending on the time-period. Finnish immigrants in this way became familiar with the ways in which white Americans treated black people in America. Many of the customs and habits learned in America were brought back to Finland by the returning Finns.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Kostiainen 2014, 244-5.

⁴⁹ Carl E. Waisanen was a Finnish-American scholar, who wrote an article on the problems that new Finnish immigrants faced when coming to America. Waisanen wanted to make clear that Finns were not to be compared to blacks or Native Americans socially or economically, in this way exhibiting racially prejudice ideologies. Jalkanen 1969, 199-207.

⁵⁰ Jalkanen 1969, 199-207.

⁵¹ Kostiainen 2014, 244-5

Ideologies of racial hierarchy and stereotypes were surely amongst some of the things that Finnish people brought back with them.

Even Akseli Gallen-Kallela, the most famous illustrator of Finnish culture, folklore and identity, was aware of and endorsed the ideology of "a white man's privilege"⁵². Gallen-Kallela describes in his memoirs himself trying to explain the concept to the native Kenyans during one of his hunting trips in Africa.⁵³ Gallen-Kallela made an expedition to Kenya in 1910 and even spent time with the American President Theodore Roosevelt, who happened to be in Kenya as well on one of his Safaris.⁵⁴ Gallen-Kallela did not spare the use of the word "nigger" in his memoirs, as he avidly described black Kenyans and blacks in general as a slow and lazy race, one which would surely be extinct in the next 50 years, in his opinion.⁵⁵ These ideas and depictions of black people by Akseli Gallen-Kallela were read and understood by some Finnish readers as such, at face value. If the examples of Africa and black people were negative and stereotypical like in Gallen-Kallela's case, then it is easy to see how some Finns could adopt the same beliefs after reading Gallen-Kallela's memoirs.



(Image 2) Finnish movie "Pekka and Pätäk" as niggers" had two Finnish white men acting in blackface.

⁵² Gallen-Kallela 1931.

⁵³ Gallen-Kallela 1931.

⁵⁴ Gallen-Kallela 1931.

⁵⁵ Gallen-Kallela 1931.

Before the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland had seen very few black people.⁵⁶ Only stories, letters and diaries from Africa and the United States, drawings, photographs and advertisements gave Finnish people some sort proof and understanding of black people's existence.⁵⁷ Lack of experience with black people left room for the imagination to create and enforce stereotypes.⁵⁸ The stereotypes observed by Finnish people in the aforementioned mediums of knowledge were often inspired and emulated through examples found in the United States.⁵⁹ ⁶⁰

Finnish missionaries traveled to different parts of Africa in the late 1800s and early 1900s, writing memoirs of their experiences along the way. Some of the memoirs were published and became part of Finnish literature. As religious leaders, their writings were taken at face value, and some of the writings being extremely racist, created and enforced stereotypes in the minds of Finnish readers who had never been to Africa, nor seen a black person.⁶¹

Many European cultures and ideologies minimalized the African continent and reduced it to just that: Africa. The nations within often went unmentioned, and a narrative of a "wild" and "savage" group of people, living in the jungles was created and maintained even after many African nations had established cities and socio-economic structures that paralleled those of Europe.⁶²

⁵⁶ Leitzinger 2008, 292-3.

⁵⁷ Kaartinen 2004, 38-44.

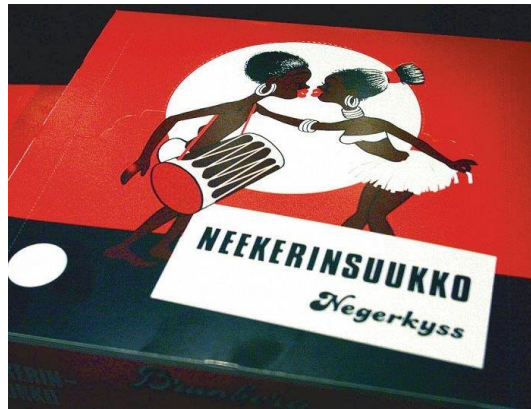
⁵⁸ Kaartinen 2004, 58-67.

⁵⁹ Kaartinen 2004, 93-99.

⁶⁰ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁶¹ Kaartinen 2004, 58-67.

⁶² Kaartinen 2004, 58-110.



(Image 3) Trademarked in the early 1950s, the "nigger's kiss" retained its name well into the 1990's. Afterwards it was changed to just "kiss."

Advertisements and trademarks in the Finnish trade and economy gave birth to concepts like the candy "neekerinsuukko," which translates into "nigger's kiss."⁶³ and some licorice products having blackface imagery on the candy wrapper with a character named "Laku Pekka," which translates into "black Pete."



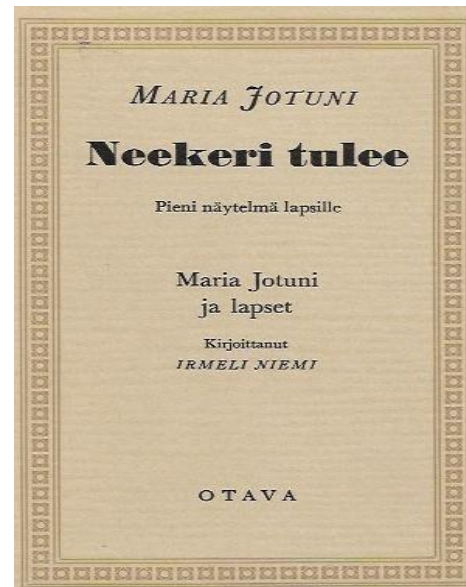
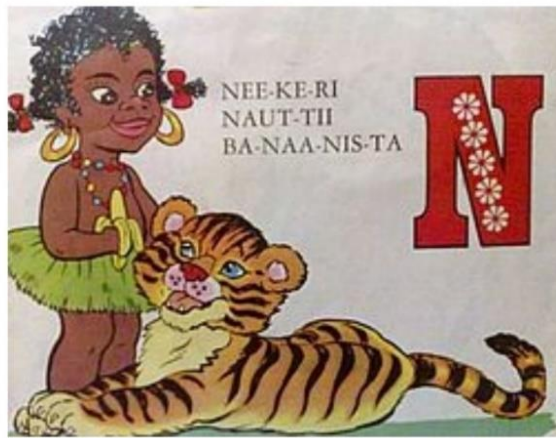
(Image 4 and 5) The advertising artwork for licorice candy in Finland.

The word "nigger" was readily used in Finnish school books and in imagery of different teaching methods of the alphabet.⁶⁴ A famous Finnish author, Maria Jotuni,

⁶³ Article "Makeasta Makeampaan" in an internet publication by Talouselämä. www-page, <https://www.talouselama.fi/uutiset/makeasta-makeampaan/25024c1c-d03d-3f49-8f4c-aa2ae7a38559> (accessed 25.04.2019).

⁶⁴ Refer to Image 6 on page 25.

created a script for a theatrical play called: "Neekeri tulee!"⁶⁵ which according to the description on the front cover of the script was a "a small play for children."⁶⁶ According to British educator Kenneth E. Boulding, a large part of imagery and structures of images in an individual's mind come from school books. Everything we learn and the way in which we learn is laid down in childhood, and the images, presumptions and attitudes adopted during childhood, sometimes carry over for the rest of our lives.⁶⁷ Therefore, it can be concluded that some of Finnish racism was learned behavior.



(Image 6 and 7) Grade schools would use stereotypical imagery to teach children the alphabet. (Left) A school play designed for children named "the nigger is coming!" (Right)

While a specific degrading image of a black person was being shaped in the minds of Finnish people, an internal shaping of a self-image was taking place within the Finnish society. At the beginning of the 1900s Finnish people began creating a new sense of self-worth and identity.⁶⁸ A deliberate construction of a culturally homogenous Finland saw its people rushing to the magistrates to register under new, more Finnish last names in order to support Finnish nationalism and create a new sense of self. Some did it voluntarily, others were forced in fear of being ostracized by the society around them. In some sense

⁶⁵ Translates to "a nigger is coming."

⁶⁶ Jotuni and Niemi 1963.

⁶⁷ Boulding 1959.

⁶⁸ Tervonen 2014, 137-162.

Finnish people went through a similar phase of re-creation of identity in the form of nomenclature as did African slaves upon their arrival to America. Obviously the two events happened in a different context, but a parallel between the two can be drawn.

In the 1800s some French and German scientists placed Finnish people into the Mongolian race category.⁶⁹ Later on in the early 1900s the categorization became so troublesome for some Finnish scientists that with the help of the Swedish, the Finns launched scientific research program devoted to removing Finns from their current classification.⁷⁰ Finnish scientist measured, photographed and documented the differences between the shapes and sizes of Laplandic and Finnish skulls and facial features, in hopes of proving that only the Laplandic people were of the mongoloid origin, and that the Finns living in southern parts of Finland were part of the Caucasoid race.⁷¹ Some Finns were so fixated on meeting the requirements for being of the Caucasoid race, that ethnic cleansing became a valid ideology for them.⁷²

Finland, inadvertently or on purpose, had been a racially ignorant and intolerant country for a long time before Harris, Latimer and Pounds landed at the Helsinki airport. A case could be made for the Finns, in terms of them following the trends and traditions of the current global timeframe. Still, we have to keep in mind, that following the lead of others, who knowingly violate human rights, does not make such actions acceptable nor does it justify them. All of the racist, ignorant and unequal concepts, stereotypes and enforcement of "otherness" of black people existed in Finland well before the 1970s. Was Finland ready to bring in multiple black athletes to live and coexist in a society that had barely finished creating and defining its own identity? Were the black athletes ready to handle what awaited them in Finland, especially when taking their own racially unjust past into consideration?

⁶⁹ Isaksson and Jokisalo 1998, 45-112. Kostianinen 2014, 78

⁷⁰ Jokisalo 1996.

⁷¹ Isaksson and Jokisalo 1998, 137-162, 142-152; Jokisalo 1996.

⁷² Jokisalo 1996.

7. Finland: arriving to the unknown

Harris, Latimer and Pounds headed to Finland with an open mind, content in having a job opportunity that enabled them to earn a living while doing something that they loved.

Despite his previous stop in Helsinki in 1971, Harris felt like he did not know what type of situation he was arriving to in 1980. Harris' destination was Turku, a big city by Finnish standards.

I didn't go pick up a book and read about Finland before my departure. Most people just told me to bring a lot of heavy clothes for the cold weather, but I told them "naw man, I've been there before, it don't get cold like that over there..." boy, was I wrong. There were days when the snow flakes were so hard, that when they hit me in the face, I thought someone had thrown a rock at me. I was looking around like: "who threw a rock at me?" Obviously, sitting on the plane, you start thinking about what the level of competition will be, what type of apartment will I live in, and things like that. I knew that if I didn't like it, I didn't have to stay, I could always leave if it wasn't a good situation. After dealing with the horrible weather I said to myself I would never ever come back to this country, but I made a lot of friends in Turku, and over time, the weather didn't bother me anymore and I felt really comfortable living here.⁷³

Latimer recounts his first moments in Finland with amusement. As a first-time professional player, Latimer was expecting things to be very serious and business like. His airplane touched down in 1974, and he was met by one of the staff members of the Tampereen Pyrintö basketball club.

The plane lands, at that time it was just one small terminal at the airport. I get my one bag, and I'm met by a guy named Eki. The first thing he says: "do you want a cigarette?" the second thing he says: "do you want to go get a beer?" and I'm thinking to myself like "whoa, is this guy serious?" So, I ask him "wait a minute, is this a trick?" and the guy goes "no, no, no, no, it's completely fine, what do you want to have? A beer?" We get in

⁷³ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

the car and start driving towards Tampere, and this is in October, and I'm looking at all this ice. The new language didn't cross my mind so much, because Eki spoke perfect English.⁷⁴

Pounds touched down in 1976, and was met at the airport by a former player of the basketball team Kotkan Työväen Palloilijat, Timo Toikka, who was one of the all-time greats of Finnish basketball. Toikka had retired a few years earlier, and was part of the management on the basketball team from Kotka.⁷⁵

I remember landing in Finland, it was September, a clear day, wasn't even that cold, and this guy Timo Toikka was there to meet me. All I remember is this guy speaking Finnish to me the whole way to Kotka. I mean, he just wouldn't stop, just kept going on and on in Finnish, and I was just kinda like "yeah, aight, whatever."⁷⁶

8. Initial surprises and peculiarities of the new country and culture

The first weeks upon arrival were spent learning and observing the new culture and surroundings. Turku, Tampere and Kotka are thematically and culturally distinguishable cities with their own dialects and traditions. The one thing that all three men brought up first, however, was drinking. "I never understood how Finnish people could get so drunk",⁷⁷ Latimer recalls. "What surprised me was how much alcohol Finnish people could drink and still they'd be able to have a good time considering how drunk they were,"⁷⁸ adds Pounds. Harris recounts his experience first experiences of Finnish culture in the following:

The thing that surprised me the most was how much alcohol people drank here. I had never been around a situation where people drink so much. I had never been in a situation where, going to a restaurant or a night club, 90% of the people there were drunk. That

⁷⁴ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁷⁵ Timo Toikka's profile on Wikipedia. [https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timo_Toikka_\(koripalloilija\)](https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timo_Toikka_(koripalloilija))

⁷⁶ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁷⁷ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁷⁸ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

was one of the things that struck me as very odd, but in a funny way. The one thing I was disappointed in was the lack of professionalism of some of the Finnish players, because they would get drunk a lot during the season, and I just wasn't used to that. The drunks in the club didn't affect me, but the guys on the team not being professional were a disappointment.⁷⁹

A custom or a tradition that still remains in Finland to this day, for the most part, is that American players are given their own apartment, free meals, and in some cases their own vehicle to get around with. For modern day basketball players playing in Europe, that is the minimum requirement. Often a free internet connection, utilities and furniture are provided to the specifications of the athlete as well. The apartments are usually very spacious, and in some cases one player can have a three-bedroom apartment all to her or himself. The 1970s and 80s weren't much different, except for one distinct part. Communication. Once the players left their homes in the U.S., they sometimes went through the whole season without any contact with their families back home. The internet was not in public consumption yet, and in some cases there was not even a possibility for a long-distance phone call. For Latimer, the first weeks were a pleasant, but a lonely surprise

I stayed in a hotel, I got picked up, taken to practice. I was driven to a restaurant when it was time for me to go eat. So, I was comfortable. The one thing that I appreciated a lot was that everything that was promised to me, I received. I was able to trust the management 100%. The other side of the coin was the fact that outside of practice, I had absolutely no one to talk to. Like I said, I was driven to practice and to the restaurant, but that was it. Those were the only activities for me during the whole day. I asked the management if I could go to gym in the mornings, but their response was: "practice is 5 o'clock and that's it," so pretty much for the first two or three weeks I did not leave my room because I had no idea where I was or where I could go, so I was hesitant to go out on my own. Luckily there was a team nearby in Pispala, which brought in an American player as well. We practiced in the same facility and I was able to have someone to talk to.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁸⁰ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

At the time during the 1970s, only one foreign player was permitted per each team. Not knowing the language and the surroundings in addition to not being able to move around at will, created a sort of a vacuum of loneliness around some of the players. Pounds described his first weeks in Finland in a following manner:

The first few weeks were kinda frustrating for me, because my teammates didn't really speak English so good, and I just didn't have anyone to talk to. It was just practice once a day, go home, come back the next day. It was like two or three channels on TV and I didn't understand anything they were saying, so yeah, I got really homesick and even thought about leaving, but looking back on it, I'm glad I didn't.⁸¹

For Harris, who had played in the NBA and in other big leagues abroad, professionalism was of utmost importance. The Finnish Basketball Association had only been around for 32 years at the time of Harris' arrival, and teams were still getting used to having foreigners join them after the decision was made in 1972, to let foreign players play in the Finnish league.⁸² Handling the contracts, expenses, errands and everything else that came along with acquiring an American player was challenging for some teams. Frustrations arose for Harris in his first weeks as well.

The first people that I met in Turku, were the managers of the team, and that started out right away with a disagreement, pretty much on the first day I got there. Before I came, we had agreed that they would have my contract ready for me. But when I got here, I was told that we would have a game already the next day. So, I said "oh yeah, we do?" and they said "yeah." I told them that I didn't have my contract yet, so the guy says "well, you can sign it after the game," to which I replied "no, I'm not playing until I get my contract, because if I play and I get hurt, you guys are gonna release me." So, the manager tells me "no, no, no, you can trust me." I tell him "listen... I don't know you, you don't know me. I'm not playing until I get a contract. You can send me home if you want to, but I'm not

⁸¹ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁸² Vasara, 1990, 263.

playing without a contract." So, the next morning they came to me with the contract... That was my first experience with the "you can trust me" aspect of the business.^{83 84}

Food was another culture shock initially for many Americans as well. For Pounds, karjalanpiirakka was the new experience. Latimer thought he "was being fed tree bark when they brought me this stuff called "hapenkorpu".⁸⁵ Latimer was talking about hapankorppu, of course, a Finnish staple and a variety of rye-bread. For Harris, lanttulaatikko (turnip casserole) was the favorite. All three men recall cooking and making food at home quite substantially, despite the free meals available to them at the sponsoring restaurants. The experience of sauna was inevitable. None of the men took a liking to it, but with the encouragement of their teammates it became an occasional event.

IV. The creation of a legacy in Finland

9. Putting in the work

Harris, Latimer and Pounds took the Finnish basketball league by storm. Once the men got to their 3rd and 4th seasons in Finland, they had already established themselves as some of the best players in the league. As in high school, the bubble of sports stardom was beginning to form around them. The Finnish basketball community welcomed them with open arms.

The Finnish Basketball Association made a decision to bring in American players for the first time during the 1972-73 season.⁸⁶ The first female professional basketball player came to Finland in 1980, and ever since, foreign women have played professional

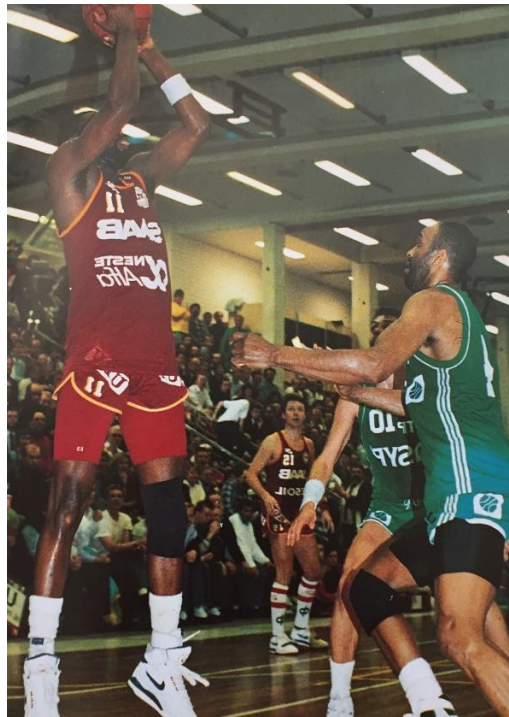
⁸³ In professional basketball all over the world, instances of teams cheating players out of a contract because of not being happy with their performance was a regular occurrence. Especially in Europe at the time, teams did not know what kind of a player they were getting until the person showed up at the airport. The "blind date" aspect of professional basketball lasted well into the late 1990's in Finland, due to lack of communicational technology. That is why Harris was so adamant about receiving his contract before playing.

⁸⁴ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁸⁵ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁸⁶ Vasara 1990, 263.

basketball in this country as well. Only a handful of those women have stayed in Finland after their careers, but all of them impacted the level of play in Finland greatly.⁸⁷ The reasoning for the reformation of letting foreigners play in Finland, according to the 40th anniversary publication of the Finnish Basketball Association, was that American players "raised the level of Finnish basketball, bringing a faster pace to the game, giving Finnish basketball a more international image, at the same time attracting a bigger audience to the games."^{88 89}



(Image 8) Pounds (right) playing in the 1989-90 finals.

For the Finnish basketball audience, the American men were a pleasure to watch, as they recorded unseen statistics in points, rebounds and assists. For the basketball association the Americans were a product, a marketing trick and a way to keep people interested.

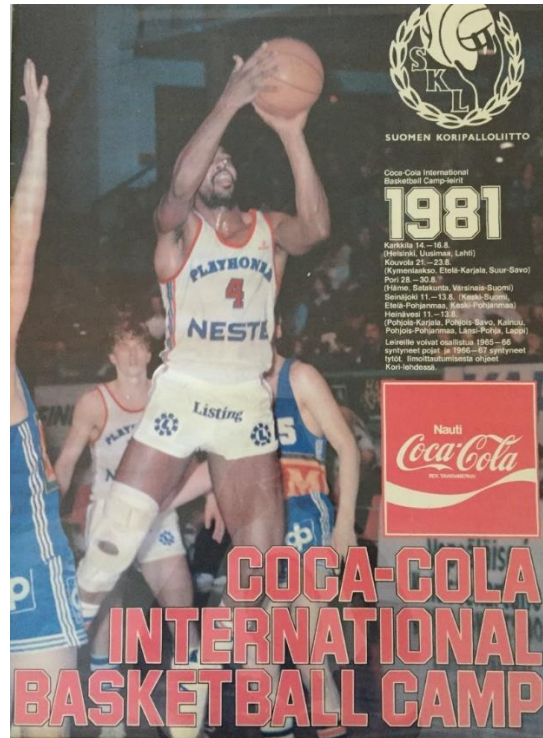
Not every Finnish basketball influencer was thrilled about having the Americans in Finland, however. Arguments were made on behalf of disgruntled basketball critics, that

⁸⁷ Vasara 1990, 265.

⁸⁸ Vasara 1990, 263. "nostamaan otteluiden tasoa, tuomaan vauhtia peliin, antamaan kansainvälistä ilmettä suomalaisille koripallokentille ja tätä kautta myös keräämään lisää yleisöä sarjaotteluihin."

⁸⁹ Vasara 1990, 263-4.

having Americans on the court made the game senseless, for the simple reason that at times the Americans were the only ones scoring the ball. Another argument was that the Americans alone decided the games with their overwhelming skill-sets, impacting the game too much, leaving the Finnish players in their shadows much too often.⁹⁰ In the late 1980s, some critics were even of the opinion, that "the foreigners are no longer valuable in terms of attracting a bigger audience; they're just an ordinary part of daily basketball."⁹¹



(Image 9) Latimer on a poster of a camp endorsement organized by the Finnish Basketball Association.

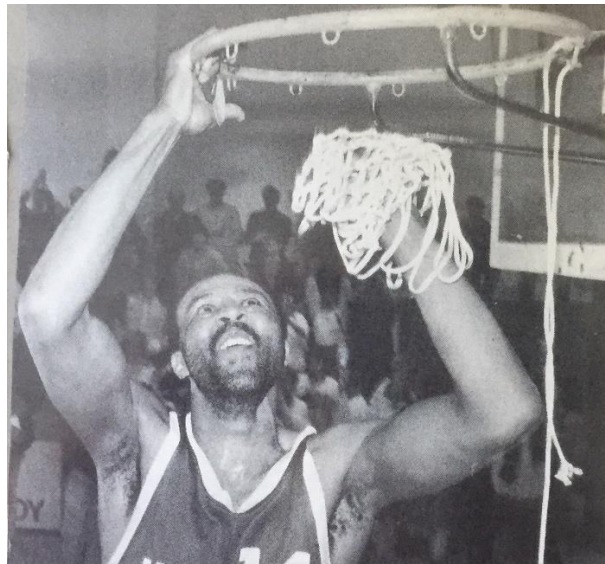
Some professional clubs did not have the needed expertise or know-how to run a basketball team like a business. The expenses caused by hiring and bringing in American players were so high that some teams ran into trouble with handling their own economy. Some teams even filed for bankruptcy due to unforeseen expenses caused by hiring American players.⁹² Financially Finnish basketball leagues have always been unstable. The 1970s, 80s and 90s were a wild and uncontrolled time period financially for all the teams in

⁹⁰ Vasara 1990, 265.

⁹¹ Vasara 1990, 265. "ulkomaalaisilla ei myöskään enää ole arvoa yleisön kerääjänä; he ovat jo tavanomainen osa maan koripalloelämää."

⁹² Vasara 1990, 265.

the Finnish league. Sponsors came and went; money was made and lost. Yet, the love for basketball never diminished in Finland, and the amount of active licensed basketball players in all age groups for girls, boys, men and women in Finland climbed steadily from 8000 to 13,000 through the 1980s.⁹³ By 2019, the figure has climbed close to 20,000 licensed players throughout the country.⁹⁴



(Image 10) Pounds cutting down the net after winning one of four championships during his tenure with KTP.

The tides of opinions would keep turning amongst Finnish attitudes toward American players, but Harris, Latimer and Pounds kept at it through the years, all of them recording a double-digit careers in years played. Harris played his last professional basketball game at the highest level in Finland at the age of 52.⁹⁵ Latimer was the top scorer of the entire league once, in 1978⁹⁶, while Pounds led the league in scoring during four separate seasons in 1977, '86, '87 and '89, with 37,2 points per game being his highest scoring average out of the four high scoring seasons.⁹⁷ All three went on to win at least one

⁹³ Vasara 1990, 211.

⁹⁴ The Finnish basketball association.

⁹⁵ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

⁹⁶ Latimer went on to play for 5 different teams during his 15 year career in Finland. He played in Tampere only during his first year in Finland.

⁹⁷ Vasara 1990, 328.

or more Finnish national championships at the highest level, and all three are regarded as some of the best players to ever play the game in Finland.



(Image 11) Pounds (right) is considered to be the best American player to ever play the game in Finland.

As the careers of the three men matured, so too did their status as recognizable celebrity athletes. Their faces covered the sports sections of every major newspaper, every week, multiple times a week, for over a decade. The trio became fan favorites, some for their charismatic character and style of play during the games, others for their burning passion and competitiveness on the court.

10. Being a star amongst stars

Breaking old- and reaching new records in any sport is fun to watch. As Harris, Latimer and Pounds kept creating their own basketball legacies and setting new records in Finnish basketball, other stars and celebrities around them took notice. Harris was a well-known figure in Turku by the end of the 1980s and new acquaintances and connections were made.

Because I was in Turku, I think that Matti and Teppo were pretty hot at the time. Then I had a chance to meet Ilkka Kanerva and Kike Elomaa as well. I met Ilkka Kanerva through Keijo Kettunen, whose family owned Turun Sanomat at the time, which was a big sponsor for our basketball team. Those were the celebrities that were around and stick out in my mind. Turku was always a great city to me, Turku definitely took care of me, so you'll never hear me say anything bad about that city.⁹⁸

Pounds remembers Juha Vainio being the big star in Kotka, but other than that no names of Finnish celebrities came to his mind. After all, Pounds has an outdoor sports and recreation park named after him in Kotka, so it is safe to say that he might have been the biggest celebrity in his city.



(Image 12) Latimer (top left) and Harris (top right) as teammates on the Tapiolan Honka basketball club.

While Harris was partying with politicians and fitness models, and Pounds was claiming his throne as the king of Kotka, Latimer ventured off to the world of clothing and fashion. In his spare time Latimer was designing basketball shoes for the Finnish sporting goods manufacturer Karhu. Latimer was given artistic and stylistic freedom over his own shoe model with Karhu, which he then endorsed and played in. During the off-season of

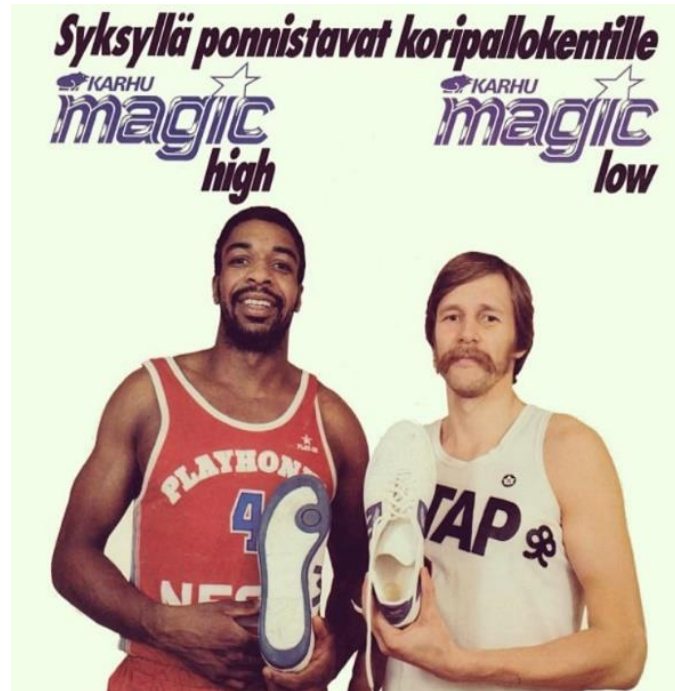
⁹⁸ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

basketball, in the summertime, Latimer also developed his own fast food business, which opened many doors for him all over Finland. Through his work ethic and hunger for success off the court, Latimer made lots of new friends.

I met a bunch of celebrities. One of my best friends was a SM-Liiga hockey player Peter Pippingsköld. I met Lasse Viren through a surgeon, Pekka Peltokallio, who operated on both Viren and myself. Through my food business, which I started in the early 80s, I met a lot of new people as well. I mean, we had our own food stands in Helsingin Jäähalli, Kauppahalli, the Olympic stadium, Helsingin Messukeskus, Kaivopuisto, and we also took a food truck to the Kotkan Meripäivät and Pori Jazz. We were catering to all the big events, and I had a product that no one else did; the Corn Dog.⁹⁹ So, for example at the 1983 track and field world championships Carl Lewis would come over and buy a bunch of corn dogs, and throughout the World Championships we got to know each other. We had a food stand in Helsingin Jäähalli, and I basically watched Teemu Selänne grow into to a star while working there. I became well acquainted with Teemu and the other hockey stars of Jokerit and HIFK. Matti Hagman the true hockey legend was one of my old buddies as well. But the greatest thing ever was when we worked the Olympic Stadium during a Tina Turner concert, and I got to meet her. I also got invited to the American embassy for many years in a row for 4th of July celebrations and there were all kinds of politicians, business owners, actors, movie directors there, you name it, they were there. One year we rented out Seurasaari just for a 4th of July party and it was packed with Finns and Americans. I mean... I met so many people, that I've forgotten half of the people I came across, to be honest.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ A corn dog is a sausage, usually a hot dog, on a wooden stick, which is then coated in a thick layer of cornmeal batter and deep fried. It originated in the United States and is commonly found in American cuisine.

¹⁰⁰ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.



(Image 13) Latimer in an endorsement for Karhu sporting goods with his own signature shoe design.

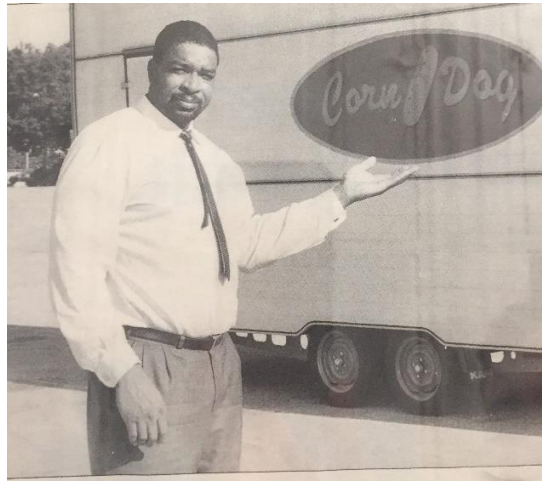
11. Finnish politics and economy from an American vantage point

The 1980s were a busy chapter in the Finnish economy. It was a period of economic growth in many sectors, solidifying Finland's status as a welfare state. In politics, a new era was ushered in, as President Kekkonen stepped down and gave way to newly elected Mauno Koivisto. Finland was a confident and a determined nation, due to the upswing in the economy, which would later come to an end in the 1990s. Harris, Latimer and Pounds all lived through this time period in Finland and especially for Latimer, who started developing his fast food business in the beginning of the 1980s, it was perfect timing, which almost turned into disappointment in the 1990s.

I was able to go into business due to strong support from Finnish people who saw that my work ethic translated from the basketball court to work life. People like Heikki Wala¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Heikki Wala is a Finnish basketball coach who coached Latimer in Uusikaupunki in the 1980's. Wala was a savvy business man, one of the pioneers of creating successful business models in Finnish professional basketball.

and the management at HOK¹⁰² were a vital part of my success. Once they saw that I had a good product, they always introduced and recommended me to new people and customers. We invested a lot of money into the business and what really made me pay attention to the economy was the recession in the early 90s, because the banks called in all of our loans and I almost lost everything that I worked for outside of the basketball court, in terms of creating a future in Finland. That's when I left to go to Estonian, in like, 1993, was it? But yeah... that's a story for another time.¹⁰³



(Image 14) Latimer was able to start his own fast-food business with the support of his Finnish and American friends he had met during his basketball career.

Back-tracking a bit, Latimer describes his notions and overall awareness of politics and economy in Finland in the 1970s and 80s.

It's sad to say this, but at that time I didn't pay attention to the economy and politics at all. I should have, definitely should have done it more, I should have gotten involved more, especially in politics for the sake of the minorities. But the reality for me at the

After his career in basketball as a coach and a general manager, Wala served as a United Nations peacekeeper in Bosnia for two years in 1994-96. Heikki Wala's Wikipedia: https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heikki_Wala

¹⁰² Helsingin Osuuskauppa.

¹⁰³ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

time was, that I was making money and enjoying my basketball career; I was comfortable, and in that kind of lifestyle it's easy to ignore certain things around you.¹⁰⁴

Politics in a foreign country, with a strange language can be troublesome to follow. For Harris it was all about the "markkas."¹⁰⁵

The markka, as a currency, was kinda rough, because the value of it wasn't that high. I always made sure I was on point with the exchange rates so that I was getting the right amount of dollars in my salary. I wanted to make sure I wasn't cheated out of any money. Another thing I remember is things being really expensive here in Finland. I probably wasted a lot of money in those days, on stuff I could have saved money on... taking a lot of taxis when I could have walked... man, when you're young you just don't think. I remember I got my own car in my second season in Turku. I would drive the car to the club. Park the car in front of the club, and leave the motor running. I'd be in the club for like two hours, left the engine running so the car wouldn't be cold when I got back. You know, that type of stuff. Now when I think back on it, I shake my head. But when you're young, you do silly stuff like that.¹⁰⁶

For Pounds, the practical things in the Finnish economy impressed him the most:

I didn't pay so much attention to the politics and the economy in Finland, but the one thing that I remember really appreciating about Finland was the cheap, or in most cases free healthcare. I remember calling my friend back in the States at the time my wife was expecting our first child, and my friend's wife was expecting a child too. So once the babies came, I called my friend again and told him how cheap it was in terms of medical bills for child birth in this country, you know. 'Cause I couldn't believe it... It cost me and my wife like 100 dollars in medical expenses. So I was talking to my friend and he

¹⁰⁴ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹⁰⁵ Markka was the Finnish currency up until February of 2002, when Finland switched over to the Euro.

¹⁰⁶ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

told me it cost them like 10,000 dollars to have the baby at a hospital. So those type of things really stuck out to me in terms of the Finnish economy.¹⁰⁷

12. Adapting or assimilating?

With Harris, Latimer and Pounds having spent the better part of 1970s and 80s in Finland, a whole new network of friends, business partners and loved ones had developed around them. Finland was becoming a second home to these hard-working gentlemen, but it did not necessarily constitute absolute assimilation to the Finnish culture.

I always felt more American no matter how long I had been in Finland. And most importantly I felt like I was an African American man, before anything else. I didn't want to be considered as just a basketball player. I'm a black man, not just a basketball player... In terms of cultural habits, I don't think I picked up any Finnish habits during my years here. I have great respect for the Finnish culture, especially for the fact that Finnish people are so honest and trustworthy. My teammates along the way helped me learn Finnish, they always invited me over for dinners and get-togethers. The moment that made me really proud, was when I got my Finnish citizenship in 1987 and the city of Kotka suggested that I hoist the Finnish flag up the flagpole by the sports arena that day.¹⁰⁸

A sense of accomplishment could be heard in Pounds' voice as he recited his story about learning the language and becoming a Finnish citizen. Pounds became exceptionally fluent in Finnish, which in popular opinion globally is one of the hardest languages to learn. For Harris, learning the language was a matter of working hard at it, in order to be able to acquire his Finnish citizenship.

¹⁰⁷ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹⁰⁸ Former professional athlete Larry Pounds' interview 12.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

I did well in school, so learning Finnish was just a matter of putting in the time to get it. You can't learn too much Finnish at the club, so I knew I had to stay focused while learning the language and going through the passport application process... I don't think I assimilated to Finnish culture much. I don't think I have any Finnish habits that I can think of. I don't watch a lot of Finnish TV, I don't listen to Finnish radio. I speak English at home, I speak it to my daughter...but to think of something Finnish that I do...the Sauna! I do go to the Sauna from time to time. I don't go in the cold water or the snow, 'cause you probably wouldn't be talking to me right now if I had done that... in all honesty, to me it's not about finding differences between the cultures, I just live life, and try to be the best possible positive influence to the people around me.¹⁰⁹

Although the 1970s and 80s did not see a huge surge of immigration to Finland, it was slowly starting to increase due to global events. In Latimer's opinion it was important for a foreign person to apply for a Finnish citizenship in order to establish him or herself in this country.

I saw it as a necessity. I really wanted to do business, and I figured I'd do business on Finnish people terms, so that I could negotiate with them in their language. I felt like speaking Finnish would put people more at ease, and there wouldn't be any misunderstanding on their behalf if I could communicate to them in their own language. I applied for a Finnish course in the mid-1980s and pretty much everyone around me helped me and supported me in learning the language... In terms of assimilation, I don't think it was ever possible for me to completely assimilate. I simply made enough adjustments to be comfortable about the situation I was in. In my experience Finns were always quite introverted, and it was hard to establish a real friendship with anyone, unless I really took the time to get to know the person. People were always willing to go out and go get a drink, but talking about real things and problems, the reaction was usually "hei kuule, älä jaksa, emmä jaksa kuunnella," or along those lines. People didn't seem to want to talk about personal things. So I just adjusted and accepted the fact that I shouldn't push the issue of trying to create friendships...I don't think I picked up any Finnish habits during my time here, and I don't mean it in a bad way, it's just that I know who I am and most Finnish traditions or habits just aren't a part of me.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Former professional athlete Bernard Harris' interview 22.2.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹¹⁰ Former professional athlete Ervin Latimer's interview 3.3.2019, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

13. Disappointments along the way

Finnish attitudes toward black people have been everything and anything between love and hate over the last seven decades. A great example of this was given to me by Zawde Berhanu, a native of Ethiopia, who arrived in Finland in 1952. Mr. Berhanu was invited to Finland along with another Ethiopian man, by a Finnish priest, who was fascinated by the stories in the bible about the Ethiopian people. Mr. Berhanu was first taken to the small town of Kiukainen, where he worked in a leather factory, learning Finnish little by little. After, he would move to Espoo, become an engineer at the Helsinki University of Technology, which eventually led him to work as a city planner for the city of Espoo, designing many of the popular Helsinki and Espoo suburbs.¹¹¹

According to Mr. Berhanu in the 1950s, 60s and 70s he never ran into another black person, but also was never maliciously targeted by Finnish people in terms of racism or discrimination. Quite the contrary, Mr. Berhanu, who remembers often going to the local “lavatanssit” (a Finnish outdoor event, with a wooden stage, where people came to dance and mingle), was the subject of great fascination and admiration. Mr. Berhanu learned to speak fluent Finnish, and in his opinion, Finnish women were always fascinated and drawn to him, and Finnish men wanted to get to know him, but were often too shy, and only spoke to him when they were drunk. Mr. Berhanu recalls only one instance, where the parents of his Finnish girlfriend at the time, were opposed to him dating their daughter, but even then, nothing disrespectful was ever said directly to Mr. Berhanu.¹¹²

In Mr. Berhanu's opinion, the Finnish attitudes toward black people were learned from Americans, and from things that they read in the news and books, or saw in the movies and heard on the radio. According to Mr. Berhanu, the attitudes toward black people changed in

¹¹¹ Mr. Zawde Berhanu's interview 19.9.2018, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹¹² Mr. Zawde Berhanu's interview 19.9.2018, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

Finland in the 1980s, when more of black people started arriving in Finland, partly due to the refugee situation, that brought many Africans to Finland.¹¹³

As for Harris, Latimer and Pounds, instances of racism occurred for the three men within the basketball domain of their lives here and there. However, the consensus between the men during the interviews, for the most part, was that none of the men individually faced any blatant racism, aside from an occasional "nigger" being yelled at them at the games or in the night-life here and there, which according to all three men did not have an effect on them, because they refused to empower the racist incidents, and chose to ignore them instead.¹¹⁴

As for my own experience, as a person of color, well, I was born right into the turn of the tide in terms of Finnish attitudes toward black people, in 1987. From my earliest memories in kindergarten, I can remember other kids asking me "are you a nigger?", or the old man in the swimming hall asking me "were you dropped in a barrel of tar?". I have been called, or heard the word "nigger" mentioned around me every year of my life to this day in Finland. In elementary school the names for me by white Finnish kids were: "lakupekka," "kurakikkeli," "tuhkamuna," "kikkarapää," and "mutakuono," to mention a few. For the most part, I was just a "fucking nigger" to my white Finnish counterparts. Once a woman ordered her German Shepherd to attack me when I was 9 years old, biting into my leg through my jeans, leaving me bleeding. The dog was never put down. In another instance in elementary school, during recess, I was beaten up by a group of high schoolers and left bleeding in the ditch. When I went back to class, my teacher simply told me to "shake hands and make up during the next recess," making it seem like I was somehow at fault for getting beat up by a group of racist kids. I have also been spit on by a Finnish man in the middle of the street, after which he told me to "go back to Africa." If I had a dollar for every time a Finnish person told me to go back to Africa, I would be a wealthy man. In middle school, a skinhead pushed me down to the train tracks in Kannelmäki, whilst a train was coming to the station. Luckily, I was able to get up and get out of the way in time. I jumped to the other side of the tracks and the skinhead man was

¹¹³ Mr. Zawde Berhanu's interview 19.9.2018, interviewer Cedric Latimer.

¹¹⁴ Bernard Harris, Ervin Latimer and Larry Pounds' interviews Feb.-March.2019, Interviewer Cedric Latimer.

screaming after me: “I will fucking kill all you niggers.” Once, at the age of 10, my mother took me on a cruise ship to Sweden, and I went to the men's room, where a young man, upon seeing me, proceeded to lift me up by my throat and pinned me against the wall. He was so angry that he was shaking, and spit came out of his mouth as he told me that “my country is no place for niggers.”

I could easily write another master's thesis simply on Finnish racist behavior, based upon my own experiences. I bring up the above-mentioned instances simply to show how bad Finland can sometimes be to a person of color. To my surprise, the experiences that Harris, Latimer and Pounds had with racism, were much milder, and not nearly as prevalent as my own.

Could it be, that the status of a star-athlete somewhat shielded the men from brutal racism that other black people have faced in this country? All three men felt like they were always respected and treated fairly for the most part during their forty-plus years in Finland. They all had great friends, spouses and new family members around them, most of whom were white and Finnish, who treated them with the utmost love and respect, proving that most Finns never had a problem with African American, or black people in general.¹¹⁵

Finland was a place where Harris, Latimer and Pounds were able to bring many of their dreams to reality, and much more. The country had given them memories and experiences that most people will never have the opportunity to have. Harris, Latimer and Pounds paved their own way, worked hard to set records and reach new heights in their careers. They were fortunate enough to have great Finnish people supporting them and believing in them during their journey. Harris, Latimer and Pounds broke the shackles of American racism and did not let Finnish prejudice phase them. They were lucky enough to have spouses in their lives who understood how strong they had to be, in order to support their men through the good and the bad.

¹¹⁵ Bernard Harris, Ervin Latimer and Larry Pounds' interviews Feb.-March.2019, Interviewer Cedric Latimer.

V. Conclusion

During their time in Finland, Harris, Latimer and Pounds have accomplished a lot. Most importantly, they have been able to settle down in Finland as productive citizens, start families and create friendships that will last them a lifetime. Their own childhoods were tainted by racism, and systematic oppression. Overcoming their situations in the United States made the men tough and resilient, and hard work enabled them to travel the world while playing the game that they loved. Finland can be a tough place for a foreigner, and racism in this country can be blatant and in-your-face. However, it was not experienced by Harris, Latimer and Pounds in the same way that I had to experience it, for example. Finnish people treated the three men exceptionally well for the most part, respected and loved them. Many Finnish people today consider these African American men just as Finnish as they do themselves, and even call them by endearing Finnish names (Larry Pounds' nickname in Kotka, for example, is Lauri). African Americans seem to have been well respected by Finns in the 1970s and 80s.

The next step to this research would be comparing the experiences of Africans and African Americans in Finland, in order to see how much nationality and the status of the culture one comes from affects the way a person is treated. The other theme to examine, would be that of how much the status of being an athlete and a celebrity affects being shielded from racism, in comparison to other blacks who do not have a similar elevated status in society. Far too little research has been conducted on racism in Finland in general, and while the modern-day fact is that black and mixed race Finnish people exist, and they exist in large numbers, it is still a reality that many white Finnish people choose to ignore. As a person of color, having been born in Finland, I am just as Finnish as any white Finnish person. I should not be complemented by other Finnish people about my "awesome language skills for an immigrant" at the store, nor should I be looked at as a foreigner simply because of my appearance. Finland still has long ways to go in terms of racial and cultural equality, and in 2019, that is a sad thing to realize.

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Heikki Wala, coach and manager to one of the teams Ervin Latimer played for. https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heikki_Wala (accessed 25.04.2019).

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Song lyrics

Performed by Holiday, B. *Strange Fruit*. Songwriters: Lewis Allan, Maurice Pearl, Dwayne P Wiggins. Strange Fruit lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.

Pictures and photographs

Image 1

Photo credit: NBA Photos. <https://www.nba.com/photos/archive/> (Accessed 27.04.2019).

Image 2

Photo credit: Elonet Kansallisfilmografia, <https://www.elonet.fi/fi/elokuva/117452> (Accessed 27.4.2019).

Image 3

Photo credit: Niklas Hellman. *Oikeinkirjoitus on kivaa?* Blog post. <http://tarkkuutta.blogspot.com/2018/03/neekeri-suukko-vuosi-2018-tassa.html> (Accessed 27.4.2019).

Image 4

Photo credit: Username "Ron" in a blog *U.S. Slave*. <http://usslave.blogspot.com/2012/03/finnish-candy-with-racist-twist.html> (Accessed 27.04.2019).

Image 5

Photo credit: APU Magazine 1978. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/478929741608241357/> (Accessed 27.4.2019).

Image 6

Photo credit: *Paletin Uusi Aapinen*. Paletti Oy, 1972. <https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiedosto:Neekeri-nauttii-banaanista.jpg> (Accessed 27.04.2019).

Image 7

Photo credit: Jotuni, M. and Niemi, I. *Neekeri tulee: Pieni näytelmä lapsille*. Helsinki: Otava, 1963. https://www.google.com/search?q=neekeri+tulee&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS702US702&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjwoemxfDhAhWSwsQBHepqDoAQ_AUIDigB&biw=635&bih=451#imgrc=Oc_aDblluyLr6M: (Accessed 27.04.2019).

Image 8

Photo credit: Vasara, E. *Koritalkoot: Puoli Vuosisataa Järjestäytynyttä Koripallourheilua Suomessa 1939-1989*. Helsinki: Forssan Kirjapaino Oy, 1990.

Images 9-14

Photo credit: Riitta Luoto's personal photo collection.