Exhibit Curators Statement

"Black Spartans (1907-1948)" represents ongoing research in SJSU Special Collections & Archives identifying documentation of Black experiences throughout SJSU history. This exhibit is the first of several installments.

Much of the information we have comes from the Spartan Daily student newspaper and the La T orre yearbooks. With too few exceptions, Black Spartans' stories are not told in their own words but from the perspectives of their majority white classmates. This is reflected in the language and focus of the articles; we invite you to read critically.

The Black Spartans featured in this exhibit pursued their educational goals while contending with institutionalized racism and other major crises of the 20th century: two World Wars, the influenza pandemic of 1918, and polio. Locally, "the deed to virtually every home in San Jose" included restrictions against Black and Asian residents known as "restrictive covenants" (Spartan Daily, February 16, 1948, page 2). On campus, blackface and minstrel shows were a regular part of student events.

"Black Spartans (1907-1948)" is an invitation to the community to join us in surfacing these stories, ensuring these histories are preserved and presented in a way that honors these students' lives. Contact us at special.collections@sjsu.edu to participate.

Carli V. Lowe - University Archivist
Kate Steffens - Special Collections Librarian

Artist Statement

The "Black Spartans (1907-1948)" exhibition is a homage to Black culture and history at San José State University and the Bay Area at large. Until recently, the significance of Black bodies in Bay Area history (as well as U.S. history) was overlooked. Unless it was associated with the struggles of civil rights leaders, athletes, or celebrity personas, the story of a graduate from a state school wasn't valued because we weren't part of the mainstream culture. As a Black Spartan myself, I was deeply connected to these individuals that started out just like me. I saw a reflection of myself and my community throughout the process of making these mixed media portraits and came to realize how important it is to know your history because it becomes a catalyst for knowing who you are.

My work explores the intricacy of identity and the role culture, tradition, and history play. These portraits are embodiments of our Black Spartans, they are visual representations of the colorful and captivating lives they led. Through this work, I hope to influence other artists and individuals to take part in researching and finding out the infinite layers of what it means to be Black. Our history is beyond our struggle. We are the blueprint.

Yeab Kebede
'22 Digital Media Arts
Lloyd Thomas attended San Jose State College from 1936-1939. He was a sportsman, playing both basketball and football. In 1937, Thomas traveled with his football teammates to Hawaii to meet up with their University of Hawaii counterparts. During the trip, he was part of a team that debated U of H student athletes and was noted as “an exceptional debater.” In 1938, Thomas was named to the junior All-American List as “one of the outstanding ends of the country in the small colleges and university division.” Also in 1938, Thomas and fellow Black students William Lewis and Don Presley performed the “Truckin’” dance craze of the time as part of the Spartan Revue. In 1939, Thomas was captain of the basketball team.
THE FRESHMEN basketeers deserve a mighty big hand for their noble work in upsetting the Gaelic babes in the preliminary tilt, and those five iron yearlings who represented Washington Square for the entire route, namely: Lloyd Thomas, Dale Laybourne, Ivor Thomas, Leonard Herman, and Sal Jio are slated for attractive futures as Spartan hoopmen.

Spartan Daily

January 17, 1936

Lloyd Thomas first gains attention for his skills in basketball as a Freshman.
La Torre Yearbook

Lloyd Thomas is pictured as a Physical Education Major.

1937


Center row: Lloyd Thomas, Charles Melbon, Steve Komnier, Adrian Rouyet, Henry Vasconcelles, Robert Bouke, Charles Smith, George Lindholm, Hamilton Hodgson.

Lloyd Thomas To Receive Award

Named Most Valuable In Bronco Game

Lloyd Thomas, lanky junior end on the San Jose State college grid squad, was named the most valuable Spartan player in the State-Santa Clara game by the coaches and downtown sports writers.

Although Thomas is not the spectacular type, he has been consistently good all season. He is probably the most deadly pass catcher on the team. He will receive a pair of new shoes from J. S. Williams, sponsor of the contest.

Spartan Daily

November 16, 1937

Lloyd Thomas is named “the most valuable Spartan player” in a football game against Santa Clara.
While in Hawaii with the football team, Lloyd Thomas represents San Jose State in a debate competition, “claiming the lime-light as an exceptional debater,” arguing in the affirmative for college athletes to “be subsidized by their schools for services rendered.”
Lloyd Thomas is pictured among the Lettermen.

La Torre Yearbook

1938

Lloyd Thomas is pictured among the Lettermen.
La Torre Yearbook

1938

Lloyd Thomas is pictured as a member of the football team.

Jack Hilton, No. 14, Spartan halfback, misses a pass against Redlands University in the Armistice Day classic at the Spartan Stadium. It looks like interference by the Redlands man.
Lloyd Thomas is pictured as a member of the basketball team.
Lloyd Thomas participates with fellow Black Spartans William Lewis and Don Presley, performing “truckin’” in the Spartan Revue.
CAGERS DUMP PACIFIC IN OVERTIME

Spartan Daily
January 17, 1938

Lloyd Thomas’s skills bring “ecstacy” to the crowd in a close basketball game against College of the Pacific.
Locals Roll Over Santa Clara Five In 42-39 Victory

Coach Bill Hubbard’s Hoosiers Outplay League Leaders to Even City Series

Playoff in Auditorium February 21

Staters Grab Early Margin As Gus Kotta Leads Scoring

By Jack Marsh

Friday Night, Municipal Auditorium.—Pardon me while I go absolutely nuts over this San Jose State college vs. Santa Clara University basketball game tonight, in which our Spartans blazed the Broncos 42-39 and right out of the undisputed lead in the Northern California Intercollégiate Basketball Conference.

If this isn’t a good basketball story, it’s because I’m beside myself. I’ve just finished watching San Jose State college beat the team that beat California, that beat the Olympic club, that beat U.C.P., that beat St. Mary’s, and was counting using in the middle of an 11-game winning streak.

FAST BREAK

Tonight Bill Hubbard’s new combination sh o t t e d the Broncs by the sheer speed of its fast break and accurate passing when Santa Clara’s defense was weak.

We led them all the way until the first of the second half, when Giannini squirmed through twice to tie the count at 19-all. Here ensued the fastest bit of exchange scoring in Stata caps history, in which the ball responded to the fast breaks of both teams and ended up with 16 points in three minutes to its credit—eight points to the Broncos and eight points (Continued on Page Three)

Lloyd Thomas gives “the finest exhibition of defensive and offensive guard play you could ask for” in an exciting basketball game against Santa Clara.
Lloyd Thomas is named among the “five cagers who have been mainly instrumental in bringing San Jose the league championship.”
Spartan Flanker
Defensive Ace
Of ’38 Season

Spartan Daily
Well Deserved By Thomas

The Spartan basketball quartet, Thomas led the Washington Square Boro in a bid for conference honors. He was also named to the All-Conf.

December 8, 1938

Lloyd Thomas is picked for the “Little All-American” football team by Associated Press sports writers from across the country.
Lloyd Thomas begins the 1938 school year as captain-elect of the basketball team.
Lloyd Thomas is pictured in action on the basketball court, wearing San Jose number 11.
La Torre Yearbook

1939

Lloyd Thomas is pictured as a member of the football team.
La Torre Yearbook

1939

Lloyd Thomas is pictured as captain of the basketball team.
Lloyd Thomas is pictured in action preparing for a basketball game against St. Mary’s.
BASKET BY "BULL" LEWIS CINCHES DING-DONG BATTLE FOR SAN JOSE IN CLOSING SECONDS OF FIGHT

BY PONY SWENSON

A bunch of the boys were keeping it up at Spartan Pavilion last Friday night and the result was a ding-dong, four star basketball thriller which saw Bill Hubbard's San Jose cagers edge out the College of Pacific 51-49 in an overtime Northern California Conference contest.

Beating the Tigers gained revenge for the loosing handed the Spartans just a week previous by the Rockies team, and evened San Jose's conference record at one win and one loss.

"BULL" WINS IT

Boss Bill's boys found revenge hard to get, and the two teams put on a seesaw overtime period which kept the near-capacity crowd on its toes from the starting whistle untilbury "BULL" Lewis dumped in a basket in the last five seconds of play to clinch the game for the local hoop team.

Both ball clubs staged a scoring duel during the first half that saw the Spartans pull away at the end of the period to hold a 22-18 intermission lead. Kotts and Allen with six points each paced the locals during this time.

At the start of the second half, the Hubbard crew put on a "nosebleed" attack that stripped the Spartans to hold at 38 on three baskets in a row by Gus Kotts and one by John Allen, all within three and one-half minutes of play.

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(Continued on Page Two)

BASKETBALL

(Continued from Page One)

The locals continued to click and held a 35-22 margin before the Tigers began to come into their own again — thanks to McWilliams who threaded the hoop for six points to lead a C.O.P. rally that narrowed the gap to 35-34.

At this point Hubbard injected Webb Anderson into the lineup, and the ex-fresh ace provided the necessary stimulus to shoot the Spartans into a 42-35 lead with his pair of field goals and one each by Capt. Thomas and "Bull" Lewis.

Then the pesky Mr. McWilliams went back to work and popped in eight points in less than five minutes while all the Spartans could muster was a charity toss by Anderson. McWilliams' last bucket came with 15 seconds to go, which sent the game into the overtime.

McWilliams, with 20 points, coped high scoring honors.

SAN JOSE (51) C.O.P. (49)
Bendelich F. Higgins Anderson F. McWilliams
Thomas C. Dunlap Allen G. Hoffman
Terrill G. Adams
Scoring Subs: San Jose—Doyle (5), Kotts (12), Pyle (2), Lewis (4), C.O.P.—Kelley (5), Avery (2), Doyle (8), Dahl (1).

Spartan Daily

January 16, 1939

Lloyd Thomas leads the basketball game to a win against College of the Pacific.
Spartans Win 57-49 Over Visiting Mexico University Hoop Five

RODRIGUEZ CAPTURES HIGH POINT HONORS WITH 20 DIGITS

A last scoring flourish enabled Bill Hubbard’s San Jose Spartans to ruin the University of Mexico’s “goodwill” debut here last night by routing the foreigners, 57-49.

The Spartans got off to an early start and maintained a lead over the Mexicans until four and a half minutes before the end of the game when the invaders tied the score, 43-43.

However, the Hubbardmen applied the pressure at this point and with Kotta, Thomas, and Bendich all taking turns threading the hoop, the Spartans were going away at the finish.

RODRIGUEZ SHINES

While the Spartan attack was spread out, the Mexicans relied mainly on Senor Angel Rodriguez to do most of the scoring, and the sharpshooting visitor looped in seven field goals and six charity tosses to register 20 digits, top scoring honors of the game.

Hubbard’s crew took things easy during the first stanza and leaped into a 28-23 half-time lead with no Spartan in particular doing the heavy work. During this time, Senor Rodriguez was taking care of most of the scoring chores for his quintet.

SIESTA HELPS

The Mexicans found their between-halves siesta to their liking and came back after the intermission to slowly but surely whittle away at the five-point lead the Spartans had run up.

Captain Jose De Leon, who spent most of the first half on the bench, was Rodriguez’ chief aid during the Mexicans’ rally. El Captain sneaked behind the Spartan defense to drop in three field goals and caged a free shot for a seven point total.

Charley Bendich had another active evening with seven field goals and a total of 14 points.

The southpaw are collected three buckets in the first half and bagged the remaining four during the Spartans’ late scoring spree.

Captain Lloyd Thomas had a profitable second half, scoring 10 digits, and registering 12 for the entire game. Gus Kotta rang up eight, Webb Anderson contributed seven and John Allen six to figure prominently in scoring roles for the Hubbardmen.

Spartan Daily

January 20, 1939

Lloyd Thomas leads the basketball team to a victory against University of Mexico.
Lloyd Thomas, Spartan cage captain, is shown making a vain attempt to stop another Bronco score in last Saturday nights 59 to 27 shellacking. Bob Ayers is the Santa Clara man tipping in two points for the Mission team. Charlie Bendelich, 3, is in the background.

—Photo courtesy Mercury-Herald.

Spartan Daily

January 20, 1939

Lloyd Thomas is pictured in action in a disappointing game against Santa Clara.