"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 Torre 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

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
The University Archives has records of a student named **Irving Smith** on the track team in 1942. We also have records of a track athlete named Bill Smith, sometimes called Billy Smith. SJSU Athletics has records of a student named Bill I. Smith on the Track Team in 1942. If we are correct to assume that Bill I. Smith and Irving Smith are the same person, then it appears that he attended San Jose State College in 1942. He was a member of the track team and received a Service Award for Track in May of 1942. Smith may have also been a member of the campus Forensic Squad and participated in debates and speeches as part of that club. He was called into service with the Army Reserves during World War II. In 1946 the Spartan Daily reported that Bill Smith was married and working in Southern California.
From the Sidelines

BY WILBUR AGE

Track Chatter

San Jose State college track records are not definite this year as the three leading record-breakers on this year’s varsity track team will make one more attempt to better the old marks now on the records tomorrow afternoon in the interfraternity track meet.

The three who will attempt these new records are Thelmo Knowles, Willie Steele and Bill Smith.

Knowles, already holder of the 800 yard dash record at 2:15.9, will attempt to make it three when he runs the 100 yard sprint and the mile run. As another man on the relay team, Knowles turned in an unofficial time of 10.8 in the quarter mile but has yet to run the mile this year.

Smith, currently the possessor of the 100 yard dash, high jump and broad jump records, will attempt his fourth mark when he enters the 220 yard dash.

Steele, who set a new record at 21 feet 6¼ inches, just one jump before Smith established the new record, will try to better it tomorrow. On a foul jump, Steele also has hit the 21 foot mark.

Cuarin Cooches, Spartan hurdler, will also be among those seeking records tomorrow although he is competing for the Delta Theta Omega fraternity. Cooches unofficially established a new high hurdle record when he turned in a 1:14 mark in the Fresno Relay. However, because he placed only third, the mark did not count.

Cooches will also attempt the 220 yard low hurdles tomorrow. He has not as yet attempted the low hurdles to any extent this year because of his bad leg early in the season.

Smith, Knowles And Steele Will Attempt To Break School Records In Annual Meet; DTO’s Are Favored

Willie Steele, Bill Smith and Thelma Knowles, record-breaking colored track men this year, will attempt to better their marks tomorrow afternoon on the local cinderpath at 3:45 o’clock in the annual inter-fraternity track meet.

All three will compete unattached. Steele and Smith will make one more try at the broad jump mark, which is now at the

20 foot mark. Smith will also try the 220 to try and better the

school mark. He will not attempt the quarter as one would in order of pushing him to any fast time. Knowles will attempt to set new records in the 400 and mile. He’s peaking up for the favorite event, the half mile.

Smith is currently held in the

200, but has not been tried since

high school so he has been concentrating on the 100, broad jump and high jump.

Knowles, although never officially listed in a 100 this year, put
to better times than any other

record holder while matching the

school mark.

Smith has the best broad jump mark in the nation this year at 21

foot and also has a mark of 21

foot 6¼ inches.

Steele, who has already posses

sion of the high jump for two straight years, will be attempting to win for the third straight year in an effort to keep it permanently in his lap. Steele also has little difficulty in retaining their crowns.

Their male boys line with those

Cooches, are hurdlers, who should

do well after the University

100 yard high hurdles and the 200

yard low hurdles.

Cooches figures, running up

last year, won their placing on Dick

Knowles, who had lost his back the same

year. He should be favored in comparing

with him, if he is equal to his

unofficial marks and one only hope for the entire team is

bubbling up in their total.

All competitors have had little workouts but are not expected to post fast times.

The P. K. teams will be in charge of the meet and will handle the offering nation.

All entries must be turned in to

Spider of Some Other

town early today.
Spartan Daily

June 11, 1942

Bill Smith travels to New York for the National AAU meet.
Irving Smith is pictured as a member of the track team.
La Torre Yearbook

Billy Smith is pictured in action competing in the high jump.
Bill Smith listed as one of three AAU champions coach Bud Winter is depending on for the success of his track team.
Billy Smith, “the greatest loss” to the track team, is called into service by the Army Reserves during World War II.

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**Spartan Daily**

March 18, 1943

**Spartan Daily**

March 29, 1943