"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
John Allen attended San Jose State College from 1939-1941. He was active in multiple sports, including football, basketball, and baseball. In 1939, Allen “broke the color barrier” as the first Black member of the Spartan baseball team. After hitting above .300 during his college sports career, he received the Outstanding Athlete of the Year award for 1941. After graduation, Allen was inducted into the San José State Hall of Fame. He went on to play semi-pro baseball with Oakland’s California Eagles. He also worked as a postal worker for the Berkeley Post Office, and from there went on to have an over 30-year career at the Paper Box Corporation in Oakland. Allen passed away on November 2, 1997.
John Allen is a welcome addition to the San Jose State College basketball team.
While already excelling in baseball and basketball, John Allen gains recognition on the football team as well.
John Allen leads "the scrimmage attack" as a fullback.
La Torre Yearbook

1939

John Allen is pictured as member of the baseball team.
Knights Hold Formal Dinner

Eight “Squire” neophytes will be formally initiated into the Spartan Knights, honorary service fraternity, Thursday night at Tiny’s. A dinner will be served at 6 o’clock, according to “Duke” Mannie Silva.

“Squires” who will formally become Knights are Johnny Allen, Usher Tucker, Gus Covello, Mert Crockett, Bill Johnston, Jus Lundquist, Walt Mazzone, and Don True. Gus Covello is in charge of the entertainment program provided by Squires.

Date for the Knight snow party has been set for March 1 and 2, tentative site of which is Badger Pass in Yosemite.

Spartan Daily

February 7, 1940

John Allen is initiated into the Spartan Knights honorary service fraternity.
Johnny Allen has been one reason for the little success San Jose State’s basketball team has enjoyed. Allen, considered by many to be the equal of Lloyd Thomas, former Spartan guard captain, will be seen in action tonight against the Athens Club.
Spartan Daily 

April 16, 1940

John Allen is one of two Spartans named to the All C.C.A.A. basketball team.

TWO SPARTANS NAMED ON CAGE TEAM

The official All-C.C.A.A. basketball squad released last week by Secretary Don Follet lists two Spartans on the first team.

Captain Gus Kotta, midget forward, and Johnny Allen, whose stellar work at the guard position pulled San Jose through many tough games, are the two Spartans honored.

The championship Santa Barbara Gaacho team also placed two men on the mythical squad. Larry Brewster at forward, and Tom Guerrero, guard, were the Santa Barbara men named.

All-American Milton (Milky) Phelps of San Diego State college received first team rating at the center position.
John Allen scores for the Varsity team off of a pass from fellow Black Spartan Aubrey Minter in a football game against Spartan Alumni.
LETTER WINNERS ANNOUNCED

ALLEN, PRESLEY
Johnny Allen and Don Presley, San Jose’s outstanding negro athletes, were the only ones to be given letters in three sports. Allen played end on the football team, guard in basketball and performed as first baseman on the baseball nine.
Presley was running guard in football, heavyweight in boxing and weightman on the track and field squad.

Spartan Daily
May 29, 1940

John Allen is listed with fellow Black Spartan Don Presley as the only student athletes to letter in three sports.
John Allen is pictured as a member of the football team.
La Torre Yearbook

John Allen is pictured as a member of the basketball team.
John Allen is pictured as a member of the baseball team.
### Baseball Statistics

**Johnny Allen, Bill Donnelly, Cyril Taylor Lead Spartan Nine In Batting Average**

Johnny Allen, third baseman, of San Jose State college's very successful baseball team, has attained the baseball team's best batting average. According to official statistics, Allen has played every inning in 18 games and hit the ball at a .319 clip. He has made the most hits on the team, 26 in 79 tries, and has scored 15 runs, and leads the team in stolen bases with five.

**Terry Good**

George Terry, who lately shared the first basemen, has the fastest batting average for the season, and has only taken part in seven games. George has batted 0.340 for 17, has scored four runs, batted out a double and home run for a .471 average. Ray Cresolo rates the distinction of being a hitting pitcher, possessing a .462 average in five games. Cresolo has hit safely six times in 14 tries, and has scored four runs.

All of Sparta's hurling staff hit the ball hard this year. Tony Nasimodo has a .333 average in six games. Pete Filipe a fair .287 in nine games. Jack Baine a good .400 in four games, and “Lefty” Stabbersmith a far from mediocre .277 in four games. Other Spartans to end the year with fair batting averages were in the midst of which Sonia Barba, Fresno, and San Diego.

The games will be played only if their results have any direct bearing on the final outcome of the closely contested CCAA race which takes place in the midst of which Sonia Barbara, Fresno, and San Diego play.

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**Spartan Daily**

April 25, 1941

John Allen attains the baseball team's best batting average.
La Torre Yearbook

1941

John Allen is pictured as a member of the football team.
La Torre Yearbook

1941

John Allen is pictured as a member of the basketball team.
John Allen is pictured as a member of the baseball team.

La Torre Yearbook

1941

John Allen is pictured as a member of the baseball team.
John Allen (seated at the left end of row 3) is pictured as a member of the basketball team.
An update on alumni who are serving in World War II includes information on John Allen, stationed locally as a test pilot and starting a family.
Spartan Daily

April 15, 1997

John Allen is featured as the student who “broke the color barrier” on the San Jose State baseball team.
Above: Johnny Allen poses for a basketball photo. Allen played guard for the basketball team from 1939-41. Classmate William Moulden said Allen was a strong basketball player. "He was a very good basketball player. He played guard for the team and was one of their top players."

Left: Allen played end for the San Jose State football team from 1939-41. In 1939, the team went undefeated with a perfect 13-0 record. While playing football at SJS, Allen injured his knee which later required a full knee replacement.