



Black Spartans (1907-1948)

Curators

Carli V. Lowe, University Archivist
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Artist

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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 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

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



Lucy Turner (Johnson) was the first Black woman to attend and graduate from SJSU, 1905-1907, when it was known as the California State Normal School. Originally from San Antonio, Texas, Johnson and her parents moved to Julian St. in San José in 1898. After graduating from the Teacher's College, Johnson married and she and her husband Charles moved to Berkeley. She volunteered with the Red Cross, was the Chairman of Forestry for the California State Federation of Colored Women, and was active in Republican politics and at her church, Antioch Baptist. In addition, Johnson worked as a polling station inspector, and ran a volunteer group for GOP Aids in their new Berkeley Headquarters in 1957. She passed away on February 16, 1969.



Normal Pennant

June 1907

Lucy Turner Johnson is pictured with the graduates in her class.

RECORD CLASS LEAVES NORMAL

GRADUATES Number 118, More Than Any Previous Graduation—Dr. Charles R. Brown, of Berkeley, Makes Address—Gift From Senior Class to School.

YESTERDAY morning 118 graduates left the State Normal, 110 of whom were girls and a lively sight of the mass was. Dr. Chas. R. Brown, of Berkeley, delivered the principal address of the day, dealing with "Modern Education."

Brown talked has the Normal seen such an important day as the one when passed yesterday when, after a year of school carried on in a temporary building, with the aid back of last year's quakes, the institution gave diplomas to a larger number of students than ever left any institution in San Jose, or it is probable, in the State.

The exercises were held in the "open" hall, and the first results of the work of the new Normal were set forth in the temporary building which had served in making the year's school possible. The hall was decorated with wild flowers, ferns, and elm branches, and made a fit setting for the occasion.

One of the most interesting parts of the program was the singing of the Choral Club and the graduates under the leadership of Miss Tia M. Parker, the instructor in music. The work of yesterday was a fitting sequel to the singing of the songs of the graduates which have marked the progress rendered by the Normal people during the last half year.

Dr. Brown's Address.

The lecture of Dr. Charles R. Brown was the principal feature of the morning. The lecturer made much of the subject of "Modern Education," and treated it in a modern way. There is much of the personality of the man in the public speaking which cannot be transmitted in print, but the thoughts expressed represent the most advanced conditions along educational lines.

Brown was self-efficient, or individuality, in education. He declared that the days of book-work were past, that individuality, personality, and practical application were necessary for the truly educated man of the twentieth century.

Dr. Brown illustrated his points by a number of clever stories. To show the value of determination under the most adverse circumstances, he told the story of the three frogs, two of whom jumped into the milk can and were drowned, after giving up struggling when they could not get out alone. The other, however, kept up the fight until the milk turned to butter, thus escaping through his perseverance.

The speaker declared that the results of the world were for those who succeed there. The man who is not willing to do something never finds anything waiting for him. In order to demonstrate the forcefulness of the viewpoint, Dr. Brown introduced another fable, which he cleverly made applicable to his statement.

He brought to mind the proverb of the old red hen who found some grain and asked all the animals to plant it for her, but in vain. When harvesting time came, they would not reap it either, and both of the fables fell to her, as did also that of grinding the wheat into flour, and baking the flour into bread.

When the related proverb came from the oven, however, the animals were willing to help the hen to bake it, but were disappointed, as the bread went to the one who had brought it forth, the hen.

All of the points made by Dr. Brown were brought home by such or other illustrations, the plain, simple style of which made apparent the thought which the speaker desired to impress on his audience.

Speaking of the methods of education now prevalent, Mr. Brown became emphatic. "You cannot cram knowledge into a boy," he said. "Education must be assimilated. Experiment, action and use are necessary to bring the full value out of learning."

The student must get the knowledge for himself. He must learn it from personal contact, as it were, and not from the leaves of the book or the lips of the teacher. Education of the past is no more, in that the teacher is no longer the only factor. The student has become a man, and perhaps the most important quality in modern education, for upon his initiative and individuality depends the success or failure of the efforts of the instructor.

The speaker declared that the system of specialization now in vogue is the outcome of the fact that a living proof of the value of individuality is preparing a human mind. The old-fashioned idea of classical culture for all alike, or generalization, has failed away, and education now means that the student is to fit each student to that his peculiar talents are best brought into play.

The student of today requires an extremely equipped laboratory in order to successfully carry on his experiments, and a civil or military engineer, according to Dr. Brown, needs facilities, only his education represents the tools, and his field of work his laboratory.

The idea of Shakespeare that "All the world's a stage" was pronounced a fallacy. "The world is not a stage," said Dr. Brown. "It is in all respects the real thing. It is far truer to say of the world that it is a school house, wherein men and women are both the teachers and the taught."

During the speaker, there were on the stage President Maurice E. Duley, the Board of Managers, the Faculty of the Normal, Dr. C. H. Hagan, of San Jose, and Edwin K. Johnson.

Graduates Get Diplomas.

At the conclusion of the address, Principal Duley presented the diplomas to the graduates. As the students crossed the platform to receive their diplomas, the friends, relatives and parents who crowded the hall gave ample appreciation of their worth.

In behalf of the class of 1907, Miss Mary Bradford presented the school with a token of the class spirit, and gave, she said. "Although it has been



M. E. DULEY.
President of the San Jose State Normal School.

the custom of past classes to give to the school some fragment of sculpture which might adorn the walls of the assembly hall, yet in the new building the sculpture will be so different that each a gift would not be appropriate to the new work in the building. The class of 1907, therefore, gives its token in a different form, and it gives the pleasure to present it to the school."

Prof. Duley received a mysterious looking envelope from the speaker which, as a matter of fact, contained a check for \$100, and slipped it into his breast pocket without letting the audience into the secret.

Miss Edith White, Vice President of the Student Body, made the response thanking the class of 1907 for its gift, and promised its forethought in the selection of a gift which might be used to great advantage in some form of decoration when the new Normal should be built.

During the closing section by the Frabbling Orchestra, the graduates trooped out onto the lawn, where picnic benches were established, and after dining about on the green, met their friends and received congratulatory notes upon their graduation.

The diplomas were contained in tin the names of teachers, which makes them easy to carry about from place to place, and handsome, as well as are valuable.

Many floral pieces were received as mementoes by the graduates, and a large crowd filled the lawn to show their good wishes on the departing students.

Miss Lucy Turner, one of the class of '07, is the first colored girl to graduate from the Normal. She has earned her course with credit, and the authorities have given her a strong recommendation as a teacher. She was formerly a student of the San Jose High School.

The program for the morning was as follows:

Overture, Frabbling orchestra; cheer, Normal school students; address, Dr. Charles R. Brown; presentation of diplomas, President M. E. Duley; section, Frabbling orchestra; song chorus, class presentation to school of class gift, Mary Bradford; response, Edith White, Vice President of the student body; song, Normal school students; section, Frabbling orchestra.

Those graduating from the Normal this June are:

List of Graduates.

Graduates—Gladys Anna Anderson, Edith Anna Anderson, Ed. May Baker, Anna J. Baldwin, Rose Anna Baumgartner, Coraella Harvey, Rose M. Brown, Charles M. Brown, Margaret May Brock, Edith Brown, Mary Anna Bradford, Margaretta May Bradford, Ellen Teresa Brown, Mary C. Brown, Cecelia Brown, Mae Burke, Virginia B. Clark, Ella Rose Clark, Lemuel E. Clark, Helen Martha Clark, Jack Cheno, Mercedes B. Cloney, Marion Clinton, Cleopatra Mary E. Cullen, Edith Marion Cullen, Esther L. Eulogues, Ella O. Davis, Helen M. Dawson, Elizabeth Mae DeWard, Marion Low DeWard, Edith V. Dunn, Grace Duvall, Margaret V. Dyer, Margaret I. Elliot, Annie Abbott Elsworth, Georgia Zanatta, Fisher Jennie Fitzgerald, Ruth May Fisk, Jack James O. Garrison, Ethel J. Gill, Florence Mary Gilchrist, North Gendring, Frances O. Gooding, One Lauretta Grayson, Frank Leslie Hall, Arthur J. Hamilton, Frances Leland Hawthorth, Myrtle A. Hendon, Mildred C. Hollister, Edgar Robinson, Herbert A. Jones, Minnie Le Jones, Ella Elizabeth Klemmeyer, Hilma Marie Koch, Mary Louise Ladd, Lorenia Vina Lawson, Grace O. Lewis, Edwin Eugene Lewis, Georgia Alice Little, Josephine M. C. Little, Florence M. Little, Gilda E. Lovell, Helen M. Lyon, Jessie Mae Donald, Josephine Milroy, Ethel Caroline McIntire, Thos. Madison, Edith Della McMillan, Mary M. May, Leda O. Mayers, Maebella Mayberry Metzger, Sadie V. Milham, Eleanor Montgomery, Robert Anne Moore, Gertrude Barbara Moran, Maude Irene Morrice, Ella Augusta Nelson, Ned Newman, Grace Nichols, Lillie M. Nicholson, Pearl Grace O'Brien, Edith Paul O'Brien, Harriet P. Park, Frances A. Peters, Ella M. Plummer, Letitia Prather, Maude Blanche Pomeroy, Lela Donna Pomeroy, Adelaide M. Roberts, Evelyn V. Rosta, Georgia M. Rose, David, Phyllis Mae Russell, Maebella A. Shaw, Anna Marie Schlegel, Ruth Louise Smith, Rose Bonaventura Martin, Hamilton Southwick, Ger

trude M. Stewart, Alice E. Stockton, Hilma M. Swanbom, Vernie K. Swending, Roy Burton Thompson, Una Elaine Thompson, Ethel May Tucker, Lucy M. Turner, Daisie Estella Travis, Leah A. Vile, Adelma A. Walters, Carlotta Janey Wallian, Cella Blanche Watrous, Cecil Margaret Watkins, Marion Whitmire, Alice O. Whittemore, Ava E. Wilkin, Elizabeth Maurics Woodhams, Ellen Young.

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San Jose Mercury News

June 22, 1907

In a year when a record number of students graduate from the San Jose State Normal School, Lucy Turner is noted as the first of the school's Black students.

Descendants of Simon Turner



