

# BETWEEN THE COVERS RARE BOOKS

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## *The Earliest Known Image of the Earliest Organized African-American Women's Basketball Teams*

*[Portrait photograph]: Spartan and Olympian Black Women's Basketball Teams*

\$5000

Albumen photograph on thick card. Approximately 7¾" x 5½". One tack hole at top, edges slightly rough (possibly trimmed but seemingly without much loss of image - just touching the hair of the uppermost in the picture) overall very good or better. A richly-toned image of 20 well-dressed African-American women and two men (presumably coaches). The women have banners reading "Olympian", "Spartan", and "Jun[ior?]" and hold a basketball that is painted "S.H.S. B.B.T. '07". Each of the women has a letter sewn onto her blouse, either an "O", "S", "J", or "I", presumably indicating that they are from Olympian, Spartan, Junior[?], or the unidentified "I" team (possibly the Independent Pleasure Club team from Orange, New Jersey, another pioneering women's team).

Presumably this is a group shot of several black women's teams, and as near as we can determine predates any other images of black women basketball teams by three years. According to the website "The Brooklyn Game" (<http://thebrooklyngame.com/brooklyns-first-basketball-team/>): "Brooklyn was home to a historic basketball first, way back in 1906, when the the Smart Set Athletic Club of Brooklyn, an African American social and sports organization, launched the first formally organized and independently run all-black basketball team... [they] played their first game in 1907 as part of a dynamic all-black Olympian Athletic League." The article also mentions: "Like many Black Fives Era men's basketball teams, the Smart Set Athletic Club had a sister team called the Spartan Girls Athletic Club. The Spartan Girls were one of America's first all-black women's basketball teams."

According to the Black Fives Foundation, dedicated to the history of African-American's in basketball: "...the very first all-black female basketball team — the New York Girls (1910-1914), champions of New York and New Jersey in 1910! There were dozens of other early African American women's teams, including the Spartan Girls (1910-1914)...".

This image pre-dates their starting date for the team by three years, as well as pre-dating the first image of the team by the same amount of time. We can find no mention of any earlier clubs, although obviously the Olympian, Junior, and the unidentified "I" club would also qualify to share that honor. [\[BTC#395536\]](#)