America at 250: Library Programming on Black Americans in the Founding Era

A Survey

Aaron Wilson, MLIS

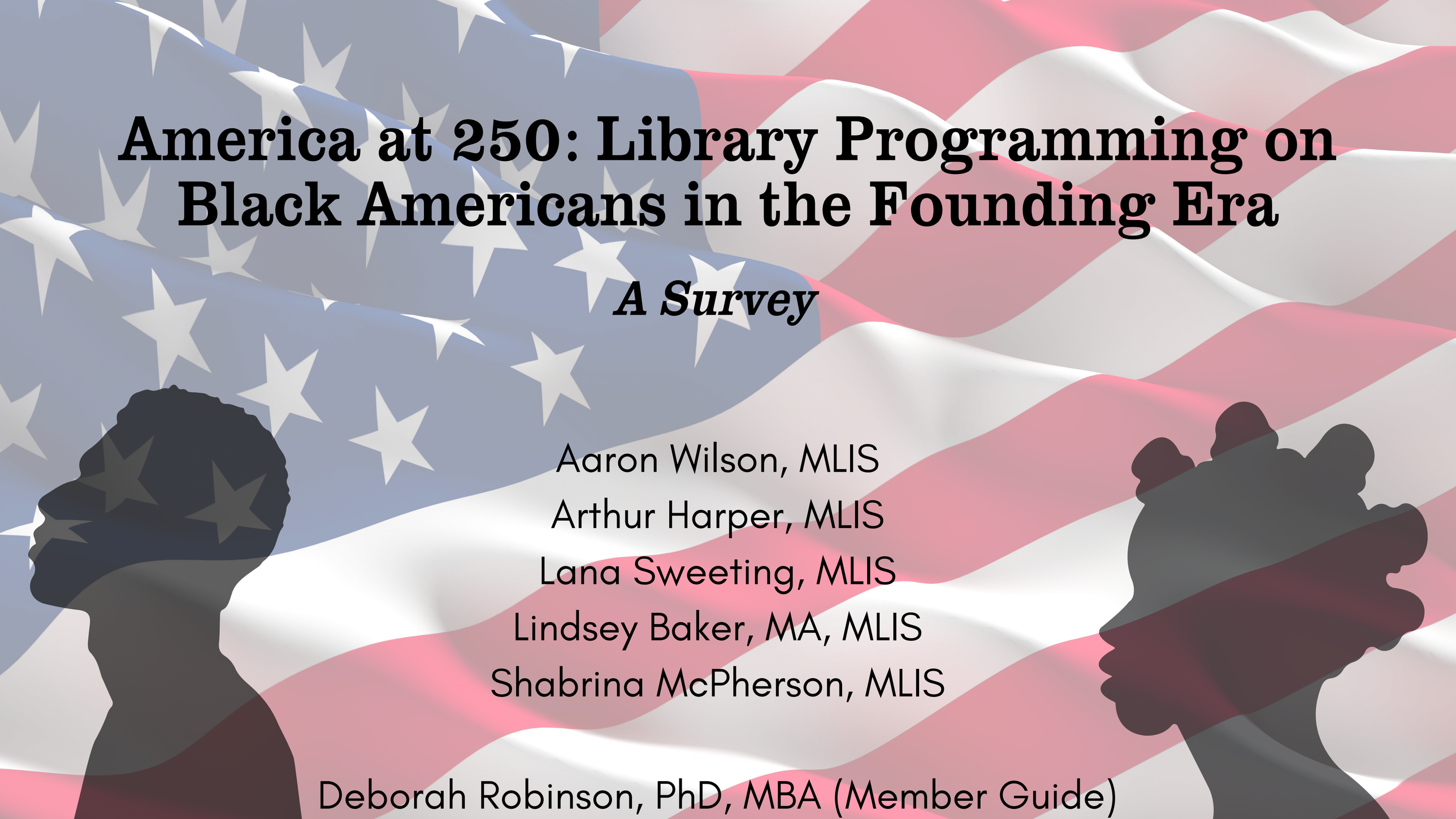
Arthur Harper, MLIS

Lana Sweeting, MLIS

Lindsey Baker, MA, MLIS

Shabrina McPherson, MLIS

Deborah Robinson, PhD, MBA (Member Guide)





Agenda

- Introduction & Background
- The Toolkit & Timeline
- The Themes
- The Programming
- Survey Results

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The Toolkit

- **Preface**
- **The Semiquincentennial**
- **Timeline**
- **Documents of the Founding Era**
- **Themes**
- **Programming Suggestions**
- **General Program Considerations**
  - Accessibility of Content
- **References**

Timeline

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March 5, 1770: The Boston Massacre

Pivotal event in the lead-up to the American Revolution. British soldiers fired upon a crowd of American colonists killing five.



"Boston Massacre, March 5th, 1770" by John H. Bufford based on a drawing by William L. Champney, ca.1856 Boston

December 16, 1773: The Boston Tea Party

American colonists boarded ships owned by the East India Company and dumped tea into the harbor in protest against the Tea Act.

September 5 – October 26, 1774: First Continental Congress

Meeting of 56 delegates from 12 of the 13 colonies held in Philadelphia after the Parliament of Great Britain passed the Intolerable Acts and blockaded the Boston Harbor.

April 19, 1775: American Revolutionary War Begins

The Battles of Lexington and Concord in the colony of Massachusetts mark the official start of the war.

The Themes

Each of the provided themes in the toolkit include:

- Informative Facts
- Discussion Questions
- Additional Resources

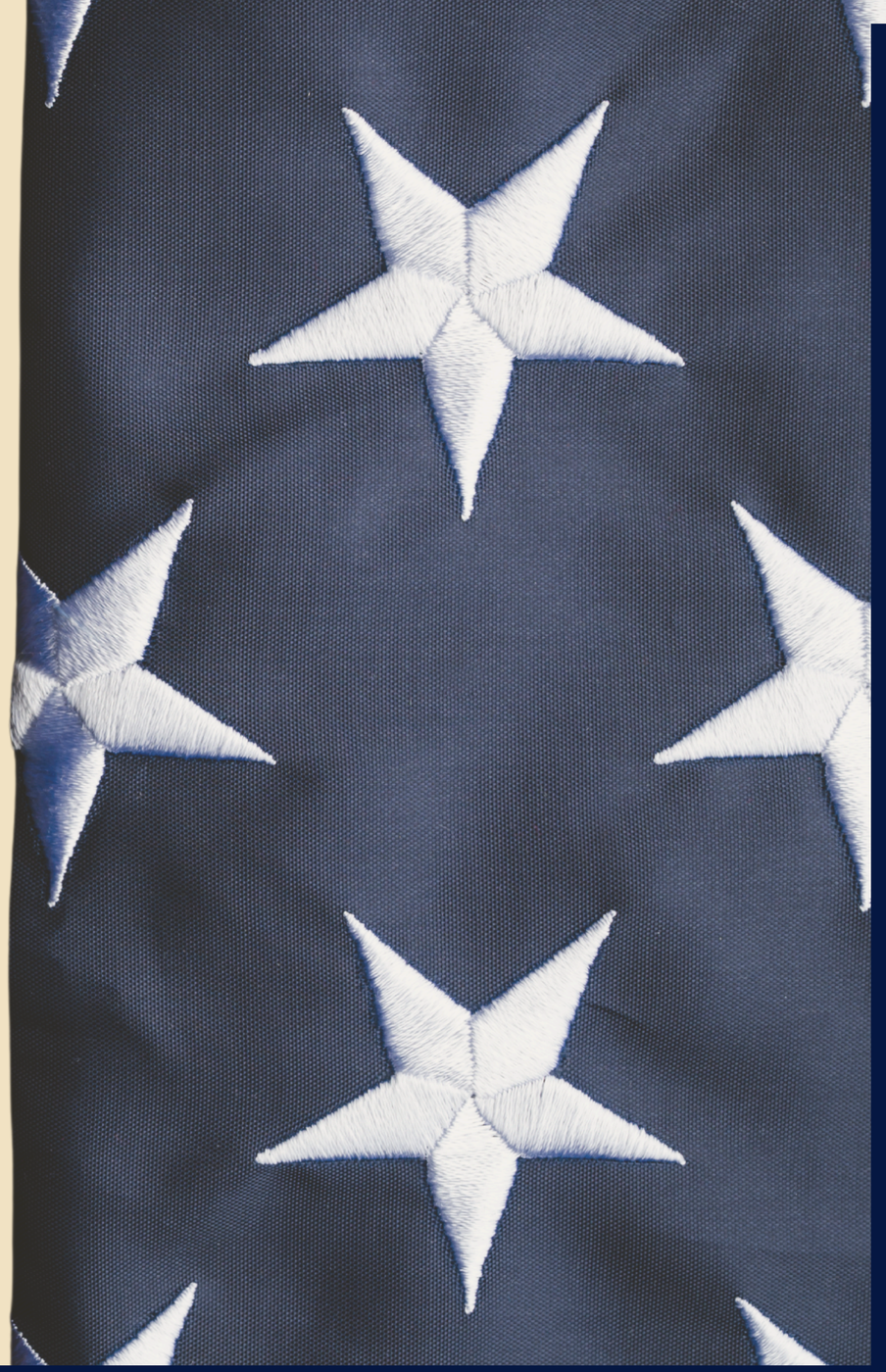
Themes:

- Ideals of the Founding Era
- Writing and the Arts
- Black Military Service During the Revolutionary War
- Life in the Colonies
- Slavery and Resistance

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Ideals of the Founding Era

- Jefferson's original draft included a passage condemning the king for the slave trade, but delegates from South Carolina and Georgia—who wanted to continue importing enslaved people—forced its removal.



Writing and the Arts

- Born in 1753, Phillis Wheatley was the first African American author with a published book of poetry. Her book,“Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral”, is a key part of African American literature today.



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Black Military Service During the Revolutionary War

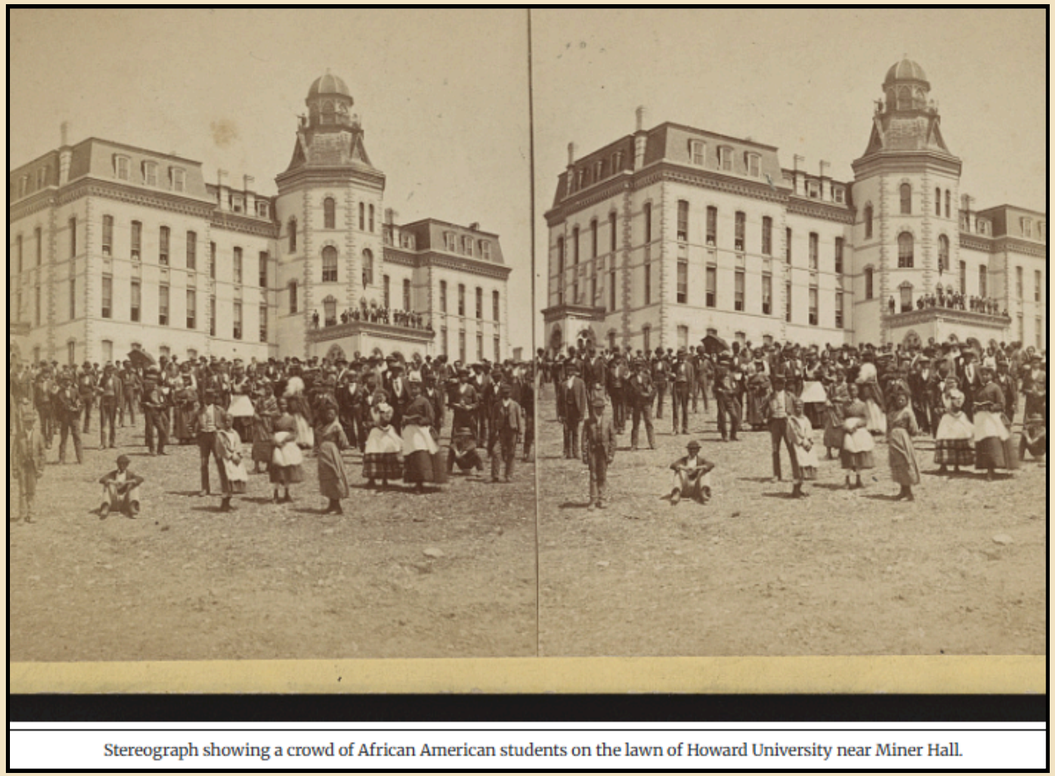
- The first integrated unit of Black American, Indigenous American, and white soldiers was the Rhode Island Regiment who served from 1778 to 1783 (“From Slaves to Soldiers”, 2019). By enlisting under the Slave Enlistment Act of 1778, enslaved people were promised they would “be absolutely free,” (Amore).



Soldiers in Uniform. by Jean Baptiste Antoine de Verger created between 1781-1784. From the Library of Congress, “The watercolor, which appears in the journal, shows the variety of soldiers fighting for American independence, depicting, from left to right, a black soldier of the First Rhode Island Regiment, a New England militiaman, a frontier rifleman, and a French officer” (Library of Congress, n.d.).

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Life in the Colonies



Stereograph showing a crowd of African American students on the lawn of Howard University near Miner Hall.

Howard University's Original Seal

- Education- Prioritized for many formerly enslaved people.
  - Fisk University
  - Howard University
- Legal Feats - Freedmen's Bureau
- Religion - African Culture and Christian Worship

Slavery and Resistance

- Enslaved women and men often engaged in the act of truancy. In this act of truancy, enslaved people would leave from plantations, for a few days to weeks, to break from the harsh conditions imposed upon them. This act of truancy gave them autonomy over their own bodies and their labor (Camp, 2002).



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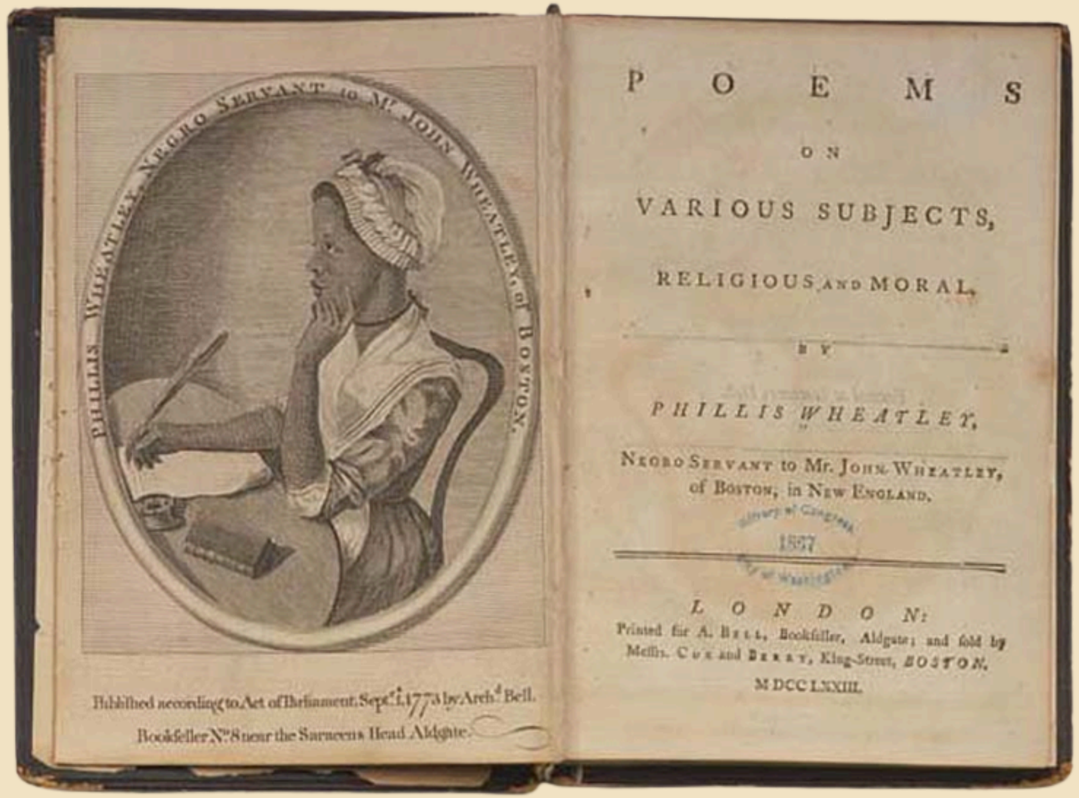
The Programming

Programs:

- Trivia/Jeopardy-Style Game
- Book Groups
- Community Conversations
- Invited Community Panelists
- Program Adaptations



Accessing the Toolkit



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BCALA Toolkit & Resources

The Toolkit

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The Merch











Button Designs can be found on the BCALA website.



Usage of the Toolkit: How far did we reach?

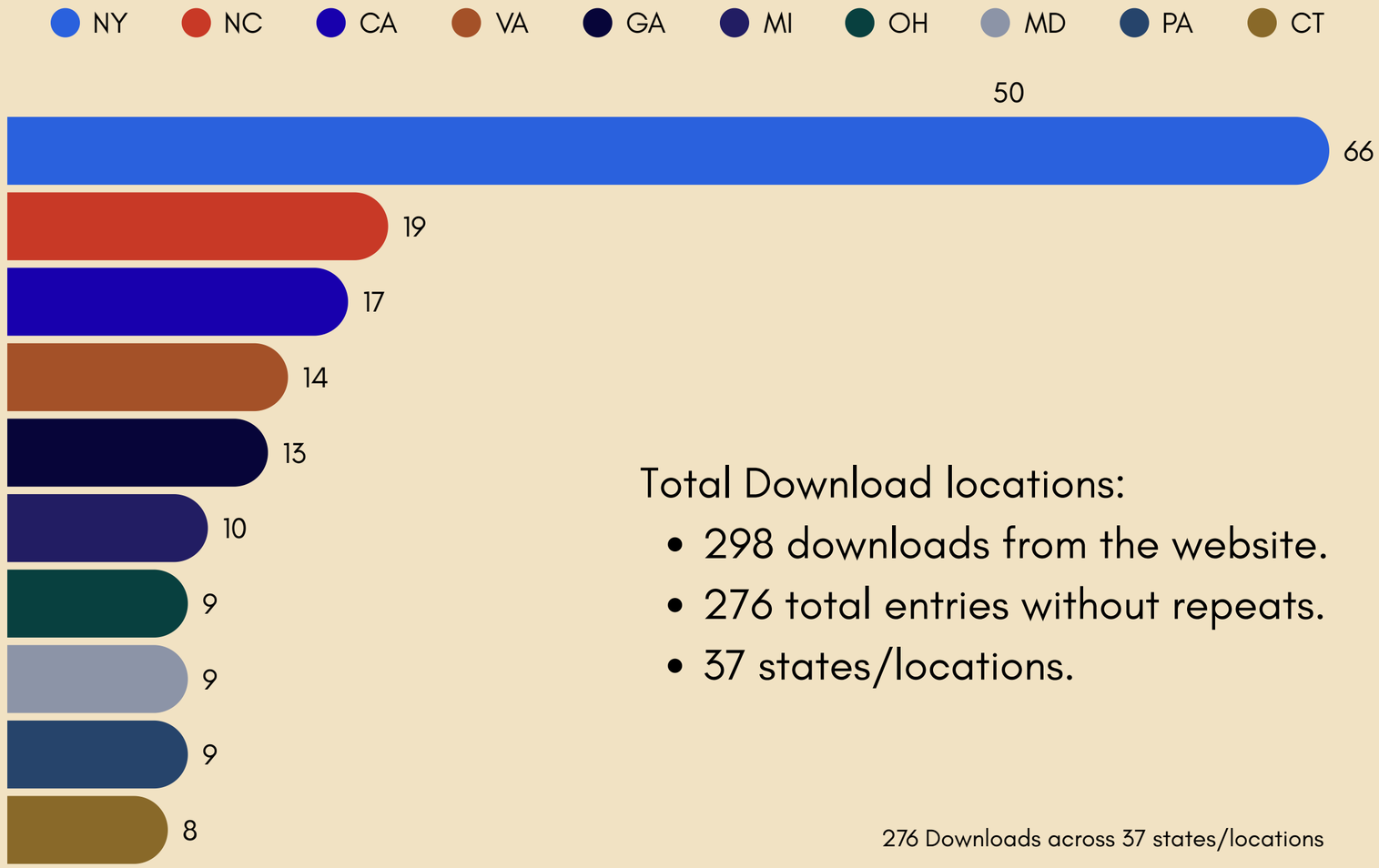
New York State
with the most downloads

66

Total Participants

24%

of total downloads



Total Download locations:

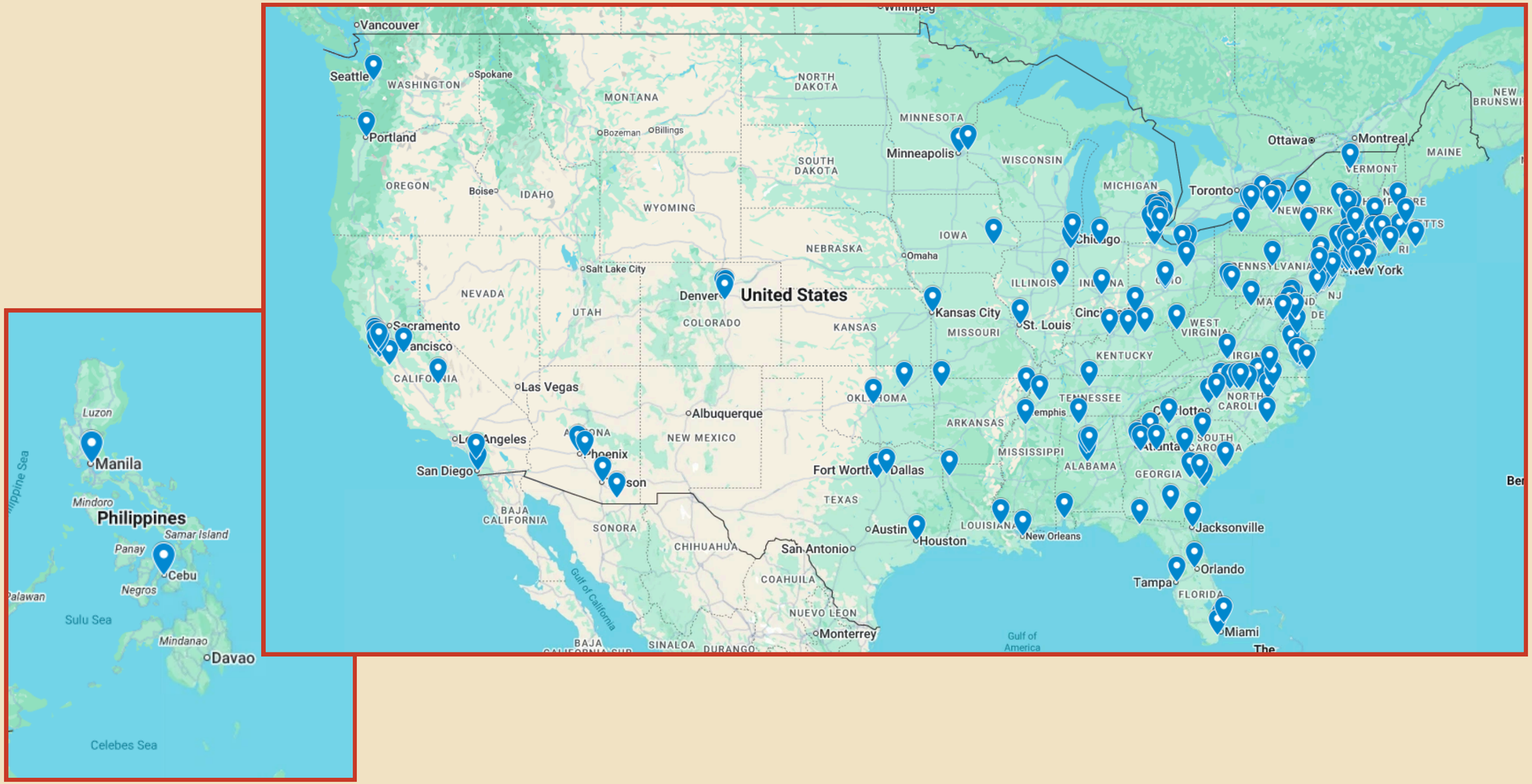
- 298 downloads from the website.
- 276 total entries without repeats.
- 37 states/locations.

276 Downloads across 37 states/locations

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The 26 locations not shown in the chart are: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia.

Downloads by Region



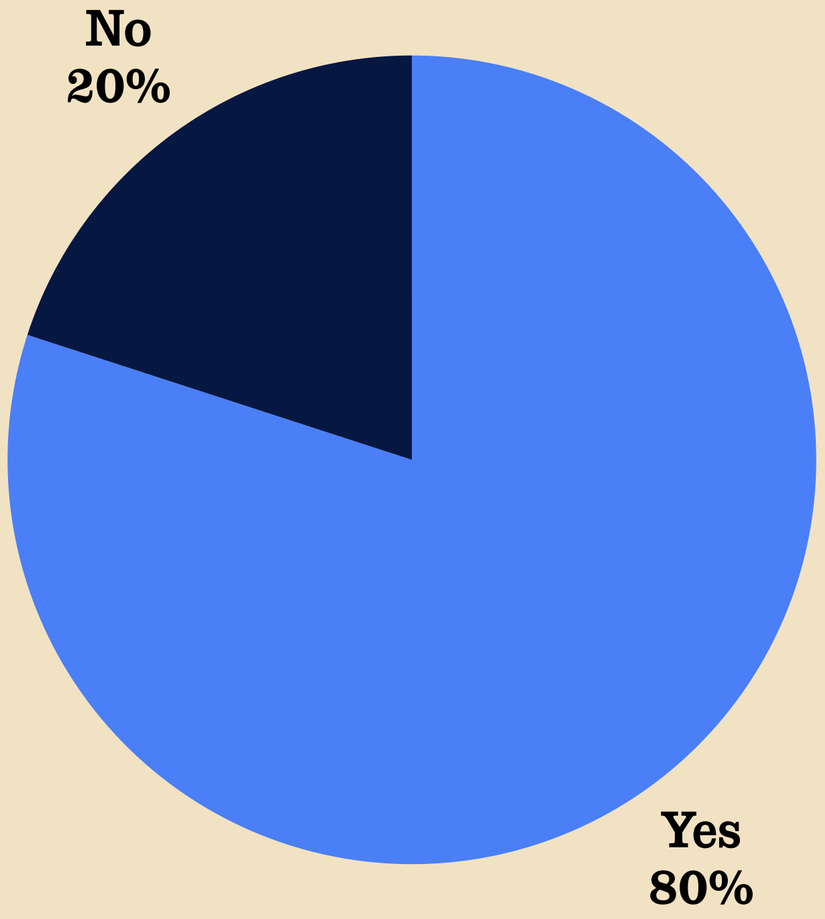
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Survey Questions

1. Did you use the America at 250 Toolkit to help create programming at your institution?
    a. Yes - Go to Question 3
    b. No - Go to Question 2
2. Could you briefly tell us why you did not use the America at 250 Toolkit?
3. What part(s) of the America at 250 did you use? (check all that apply)
    a. Documents of the Founding Era,Timeline, Themes, etc.
4. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience using the Toolkit?
5. Approximately what is the percentage of the Black population in your institution's service area?
    a. Under 3% Black, 3% - 25% Black, More than 25% Black
6. What best describes the area where your institution is located?
    a. Rural, Town, Suburban, City

Results

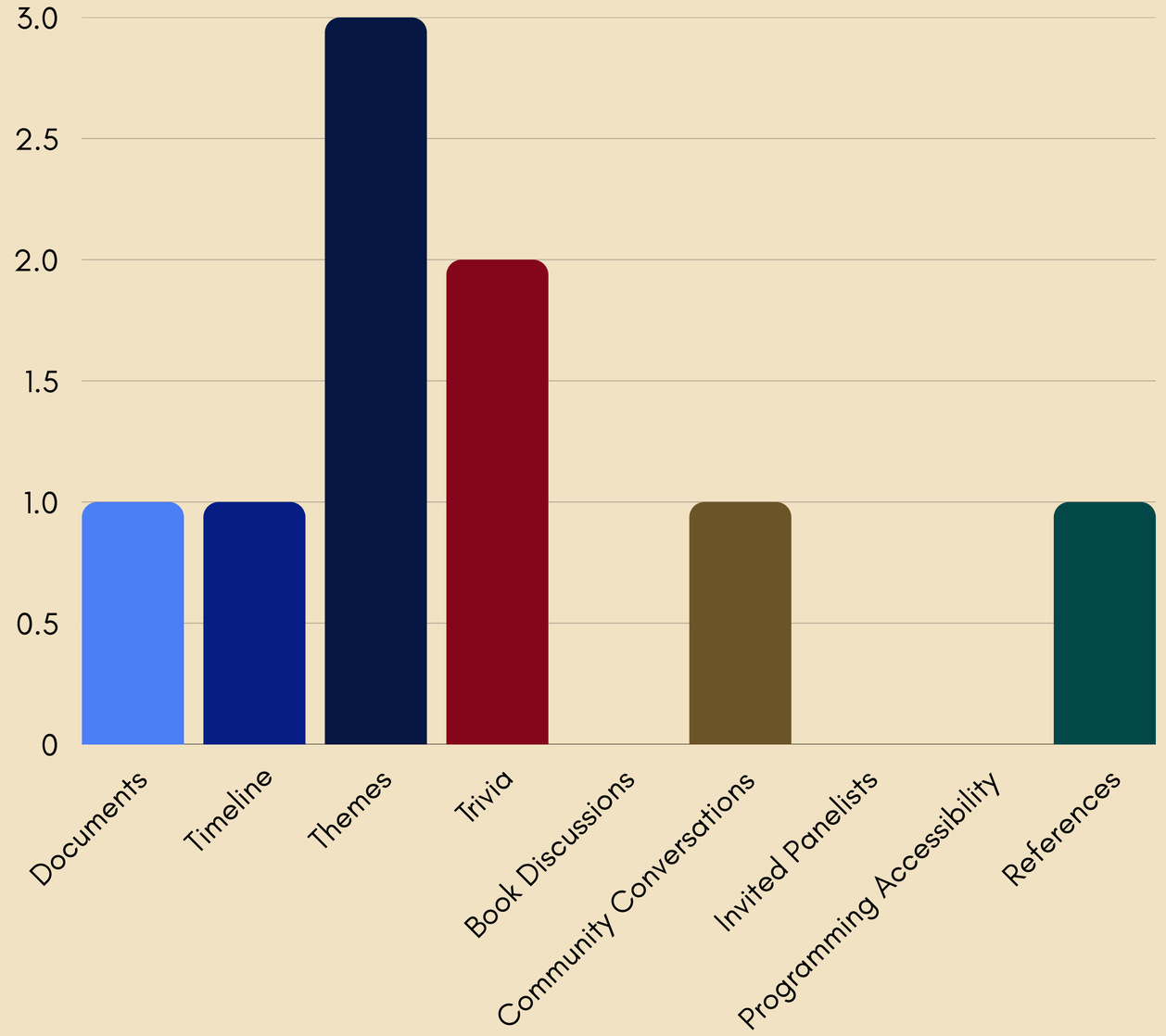
Did you use the America at 250 Toolkit to help create programming at your institution?



Results

What part(s) of the America at 250 did you use? (check all that apply)

a. Documents of the Founding Era,Timeline, Themes, etc.

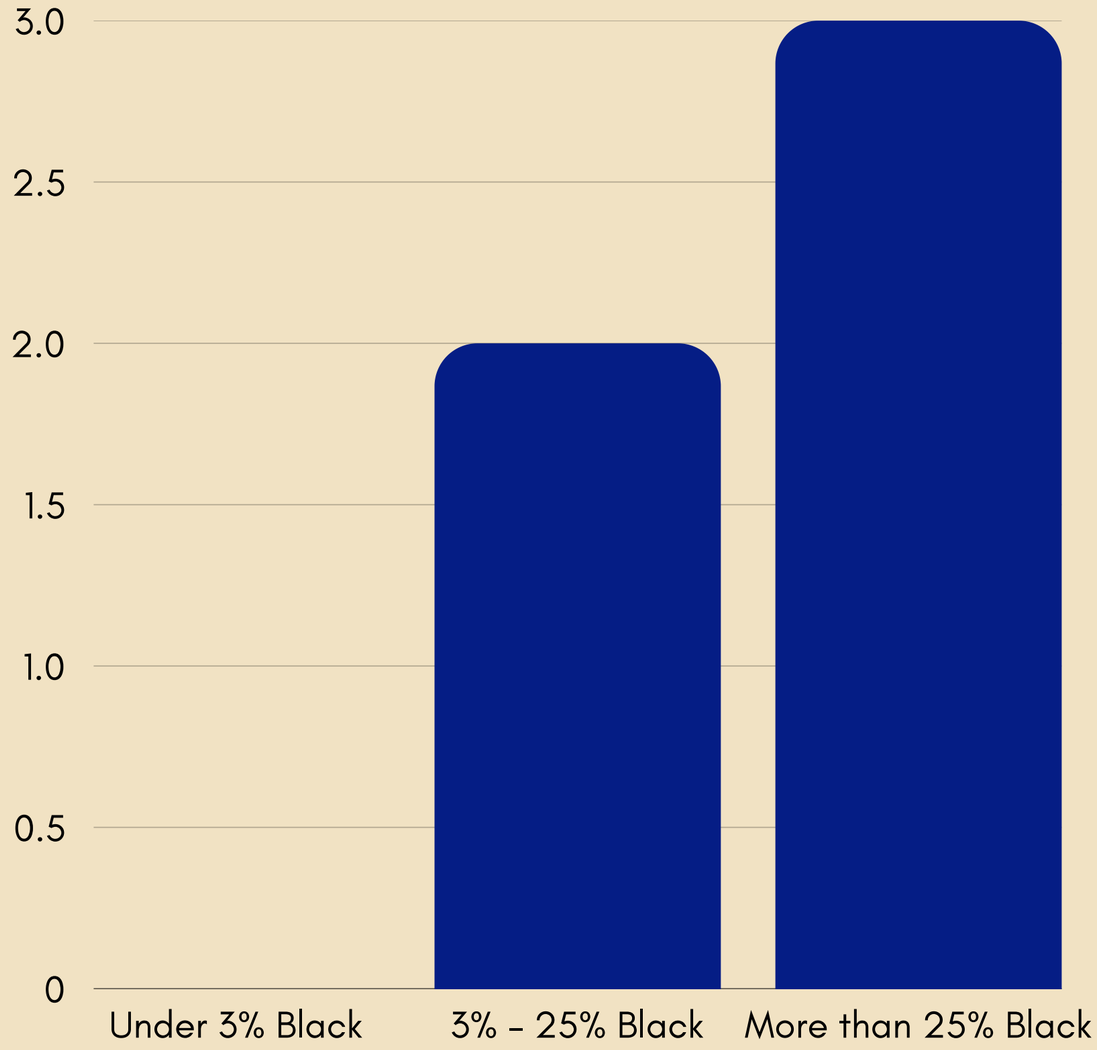


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Results

Approximately what is the percentage of the Black population in your institution's service area?

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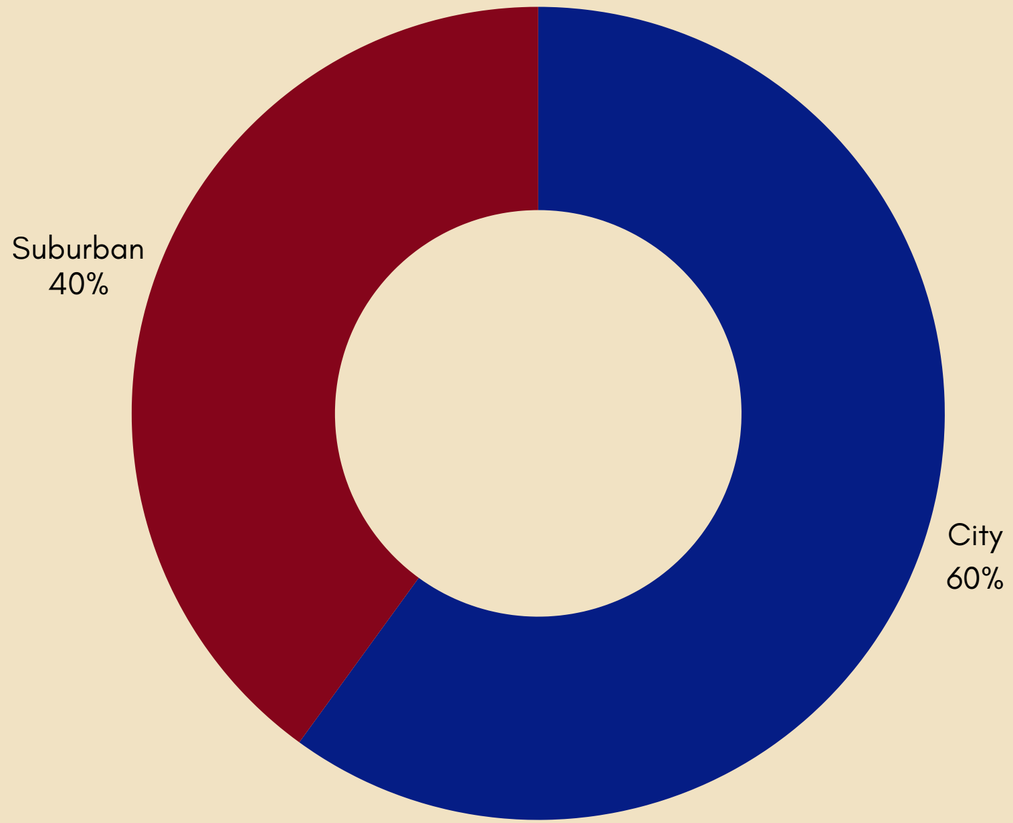


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Results

What best describes the area where your institution is located?

a. Rural, Town, Suburban, City



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Results

Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience using the Toolkit?

"This was a great project **that truly highlighted African Americans** contributions to the early founding of this country."

"It helped me to get **community conversations** started."

"I used the graphics for a continual book display. The **graphics drew the interest of many** customers that checked out books from the curated display."

"We promoted the Themes section of the Toolkit in our weekly newsletter sent out to our subscribers (about 500) on July 4, 2026. The Toolkit **fit well with our monthly theme.** The Toolkit was **a valuable resource for our readers**."

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Contact Us

- Email us at: black250toolkit@gmail.com
- If you use the toolkit at your institution, be sure to let us know!
- When posting on social media use #black250toolkit or tag @BCALA



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** full reference list can be found in the toolkit*

Let's Play Trivia!

Scan the QR code or go to:

play.genially.com

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The Future of the Toolkit

- If you're planning to use the toolkit for programming in the future or Black History Month, scan this QR code so that we can connect with you about how you used the toolkit!



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