

Representations of Black History in Archives: Completing a Collection Analysis of an Archival Collection

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Overview

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 - Billups-Garth Archive
 - A Brief History of Black History
- Why Collection Analysis?
- Goals for Collection Analysis
- Methodology
- Results & Implications
- Significance



Photograph of a Black woman shelling peas, circa 1890s. From the Marion Stark Gaines Photograph Collection, Billups-Garth Archive.

The Billups-Garth Archive



Photograph of the entryway of the Billups-Garth Archive, December 2017.

- Located in Columbus, Lowndes County, Mississippi
- Situated within the Local History Department at the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library
- Founded in 1992
- Contains over 1,000 cubic feet of archival materials:
 - County records
 - Court documents
 - Manuscripts
 - Maps
 - Photographs
 - School records
 - Vertical files

(Vance-Ali, 2013, Side tabs 1-3)

A Brief History of Black History in Archives

- Documentation of Black history predates the Civil War
 - Criticized their community's omission from the historical record;
 - Combated “derogatory characterizations in the master narrative” (Gibbs, 2012, p. 197).
- Carter G. Woodson, “Father of Black History”
 - Along with J. Franklin Jameson, developed the Carter G. Woodson Collection of Negro Materials at the Library of Congress in the 1920s (Goggin, 1985).
- Arthur Schomburg
 - Instrumental in “recovering, archiving, and popularizing a dynamic history of the African Diaspora” in the 1910s and 1920s;
 - Collection makes up the core of the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (Holton, 2007, p. 219).

A Brief History of Black History in Archives

- 1960s and Black Studies
 - Marginalized and “mainstream” repositories begin to intersect (Gibbs, 2012, p. 197).
 - Prompted the examination of collections (Porter, 1976, p. 77).
- 1970s
 - Howard Zinn and F. Gerald Ham reprimanded the archival community’s role in unequal collecting practices.
- **A lack of representation remains, even in the 21st century** (Johnston, 2001, pp. 213-215; Flinn, 2007, p. 152; Prescod, 2017, p. 76).

Possible Reasons for Lack of Representation

- Lack of written records;
- incorrectly or inefficiently coded record indexes;
- skepticism toward mainstream repositories;
- histories assumed insignificant (White, 1987, pp. 237-238; Johnson, 2017, p. 1).
- “Professional passivity,” neutrality, apathy, and a general adherence to the status quo (Zinn, 2009, pp. 555-556; Gibbs, 2012, p. 196).



Photograph of a Black woman with bonnet by fence, circa 1890s. From the Marion Stark Gaines Photograph Collection, Billups-Garth Archive.

Noted Limitations of Extant Resources



Photograph of Black individuals packing bales of cotton on the front porch of a log house, circa 1890s. From the Marion Stark Gaines Photograph Collection, Billups-Garth Archive.

- Subjects of collections are often limited to:
 - slavery;
 - Civil Rights Movement;
 - music;
 - sports;
 - entertainment (HistoryMakers, 2010; as cited in Gibbs, 2012, p. 199).
- Lack of “Black agency in the making of the record” (Prescod, 2017, p. 76).

Why Collection Analysis?

- Analysis provides important information about a given collection:
 - The number of pieces and titles in a particular subject;
 - formats represented;
 - age and condition of materials;
 - breadth and depth of coverage;
 - language in which the resources are available;
 - patron use and nonuse of the collection (Johnson, 2014, p. 297).
- Why is it important to archivists?
 - Archivists should conduct collection analyses to create “collecting priorities,” which allow archivists to “realistically evaluate the materials they currently hold, identify any significant weaknesses and use this knowledge to develop acquisition priorities” (Johnston, 2001, p. 219).

Goals for Collection Analysis

R1. What is the percentage of Black primary resources within the existing archival collection?

R2. What types of resources make up this percentage (e.g., textual documents, ephemera, sound recordings, etc.)?

R3. What are the subjects or themes associated with these resources?

R4. What percentage of these resources originated from within the Black community?



E. L. Bruce Co., 12 December 1920. From the Carl Brown Photographs Collection, Billups-Garth Archive.

Methodology: Data Collection



Photograph of the Billups-Garth Archive's control files, December 2017.

- Reviewed control files and inventories for evidence of keywords and phrases denoting race or relating to the Black experience.
- Utilized physical collections, Archivist, *Ancestry*, and *Google*.
- Noted collection number, collection name, resource type, status (i.e., processed or unprocessed), date created, creator, and content notes.
- Recorded data in spreadsheet.

Methodology: Data Analysis

- Compared number of relevant collections to the Archive's total holdings.
- Coded collections based on resource type:
 - books/publications, ephemera, film/video, photographs, prints/paintings/drawings, sound recordings, textual documents, and three-dimensional objects.
- Coded collections based on subject matter:
 - church organizations, Civil Rights, education, Emancipation/Reconstruction, employment, everyday life, Jim Crow, legal/records, slavery, and sports & culture.
- Coded collections based on origin of creation.

| | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | |
|----|---|----------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|---------------|------------------|--------------|--|
| | Name | Type | Status | Date Created | Date Received | Date Accessioned | Viewpoint | Notes |
| 1 | Freedmen's Bureau | MS | Processed | August 1865-Jun ? | | ? | Federal Govt | Selected photocopies of pages co |
| 2 | Richey Family | MS | Processed | August 28, 1865 ? | | ? | White? | Agreement with Freedmen betw |
| 3 | Hopkins Family Papers | MS | Processed | 1892-1970 | 3/11/08 | 11/15/15 | White? | 1.3. After slaves were set free; 1.2 |
| 4 | Black History | Record? | Processed | 1860-03-01 ? | | ? | White? | Deed. Transfer of ownership fro |
| 5 | History of Columbus, William Lowndes Lipscomb | MS | Processed | c. 1989 | | ? | White | Scrapbook which contains some o |
| 6 | Rufus Ward Papers | Books | Processed | 1914; 1846 | 15/12/02 | 15/12/10 | White | Two books: <i>The Ku Klux Klan or In</i> |
| 7 | Cyrus Green Diary, 1866 | MS | Processed | 1866/02/06-186 ? | | ? | White | Diary. Details life in Columbus as |
| 8 | Tales from the Crypt Research Projects | MS | Processed | coverage 1700s- ? | | ? | White and bl | Research projects completed by k |
| 9 | Henry Jackson Armstrong | Autographed book | Processed | 1954 ? | | ? | AA | Autographed copy of <i>Twenty Year</i> |
| 10 | R.S. Caldwell High School | MS | Processed | 1978/11/21; 19? ? | | ? | White? | High school yearbook, school newspaper, |
| 11 | School Handbooks, Columbus Municipal Separate School District, 1976 | MS | Processed | 1976 ? | | ? | White/AA? | loses leaf notebook containing th |
| 12 | Lowndes County Postcard Collection | Postcards | Processed | ? ? | | ? | Various | One postcard featuring AA wom |
| 13 | Frank Roberts Photographs 1980-1990s | Photographs | Processed | | | | White | Newspaper photographer comme |
| 14 | McClanahan Letters | Correspondence | Processed | 1970s ? | | ? | White | letters about family life includi |
| 15 | Marcella Billups Collection | Photographs, Writings | Processed | 1940s ? | | ? | AA | writings and photographs of Pearl |
| 16 | Yarbrough Collection | Photographs | Processed | c. late 1800s or (1995/02 | | 98/03 | White/AA? | Photograph of black couple wi |
| 17 | Literary Mississippi | Photographs | Processed | ? ? | 2001 ? | | White/AA? | Namely Frances Jones Gaither wh |
| 18 | Anna L. Glead Papers | Papers | Processed | c. 1880-1900 ? | | ? | ? | Letter to board of education of Lo |
| 19 | Lowndes County Brochures, Flyers, and Posters | Ephemera | Processed | | | | Various | Eighth of May Emancipation Celeb |
| 20 | Long (H.S.) Papers | Papers | Processed | 3/4/38 ? | | ? | White | Typescript of Reconstruction h |
| 21 | Stringer (Emmett J. Papers) | Papers | Processed | c. 1980s | 6/11/03 ? | ? | AA | Records relating to Stringer, r |
| 22 | Lowndes County Newspaper Collection | Newspapers | Processed | c. 1800s-2000s ? | | ? | Various | Everydaylife? |
| 23 | Penny Savings Bank Records | Records | Processed | 1906-1914 | | 2003 ? | AA | photocopies of the incorporation |
| 24 | Lowndes County African American Records Survey Records | Records | Processed | 2003 ? | | ? | White? | Records of the Lowndes Cou |
| 25 | Riley Family Papers | Papers | Processed | ? ? | | ? | AA | Three photographs and a short fa |
| 26 | Wiley Coleman Banks Scrapbook | Scrapbook & photos | Processed | 1910-1913 | 10/30/08 | 10/12/10 | White | Contains several photographs c |
| 27 | Billups-Garth Archives Oral Histories Project | Documents & sound recordings | Processed | 1996-1998 | 1996-1998 | 7/15/09 | various | 24 standard cassette tapes. |
| 28 | Robert E. Hunt Family Papers | Papers | Processed | 1930s-2005 | 2/2/10 | 2/4/10 | AA | Contains papers and photographs |
| 29 | Caldwell High School Slides, 1975-1981 | Slides | Processed | 1973-1984 | 7/9/08 | 11/22/10 | AA | ? slide trays with 147 slides during |
| 30 | Susie Shelton Papers | Papers | Processed | 1990-2010 | 2005-2012 | 2010-2012 | AA | photographs, obituaries, correspo |
| 31 | Ezra Baker, Jr. Papers, 1972 | Papers | Processed | 1971-2004 (bluk | 3/17/15 | 3/17/15 | AA | Three notebooks, one folder. Phot |
| 32 | | | | | | | | |
| 33 | Mary Billups Papers | Papers | Unprocess | 1876-1970 | pre 2005 | 3/28/14 | W | several items including one pamp |
| 34 | Gary Lancaster Research Papers | Papers and photographs | Unprocess | 1830s-1880s | 5/7/08 | 10/13/10 | W | contains one cabinet card of AA r |
| 35 | Lee Dilworth Papers | Papers | Unprocess | 1990-1998 | 10/3/07 | 10/13/10 | AA | Materials relating to Dilworth's li |
| 36 | Morton Family Plantation Record Book | Records | Unprocess | 1861-1904 | 1/5/04 | 10/20/10 | W | record book of Morton Plantation |
| 37 | Bessie Will Bush's Doll | Doll (artifact) | Unprocess | c 1980s | 6/21/05 | 11/22/10 | AA | AA doll. Clothes made by Bush, fo |
| 38 | Lowndes County VHS Video Cassette Collection | VHS | Unprocess | 1990s-2012 | various | 11/24/10 | various | Tales from the Crypt tapes |
| 39 | Robert E. Hunt High School Proclamation, 2005 | Papers and photographs | Unprocess | 2005/07/7-10 | various | 12/6/10 | W | proclamation from mayor Jeffrey |
| 40 | All of God's Children: Living the Dream Project 2005 | text & photographs | Unprocess | 2005 | 2005 | 12/7/11 | various | project headed by Wayne Bryan. I |
| 41 | Henry Armstrong Collection | ephemera, books, poster, photos, | Unprocess | 1938-1972, | various | various | various | various items to life of Armstrong |
| 42 | Anderson Grove School Lunch Receipts, 1945 | Records | Unprocess | 1945 | 10/20/08 | 1/6/12 | ? | twenty-two receipts relating to l |
| 43 | Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915 Book | Book | Unprocess | 1790-1915 | ? | 3/13/14 | W | published by the Department of C |

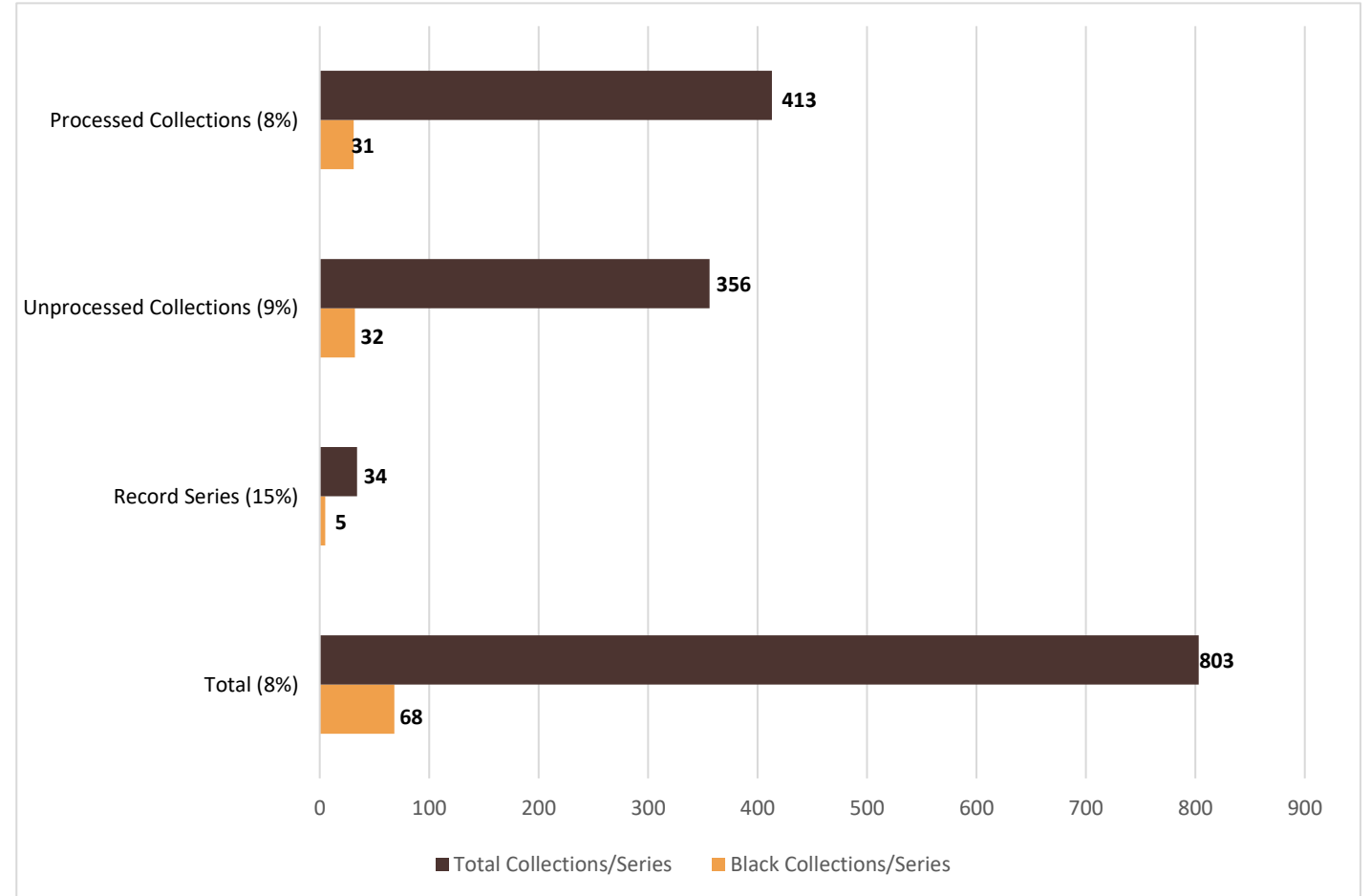
Screenshot of the spreadsheet used to organize data.

Methodology: Limitations

- Not generalizable:
 - Results reflect only one repository's collections.
- Manual data collection:
 - No formal electronic resource management system.
 - Control files and inventories manually searched for relevance.

Results

R1. What is the percentage of Black primary resources within the existing archival collection?



Total number of manuscript collections and record series compared to total number of Black primary resources.

Implications

R1. WHAT IS THE PERCENTAGE OF BLACK PRIMARY RESOURCES WITHIN THE EXISTING ARCHIVAL COLLECTION?

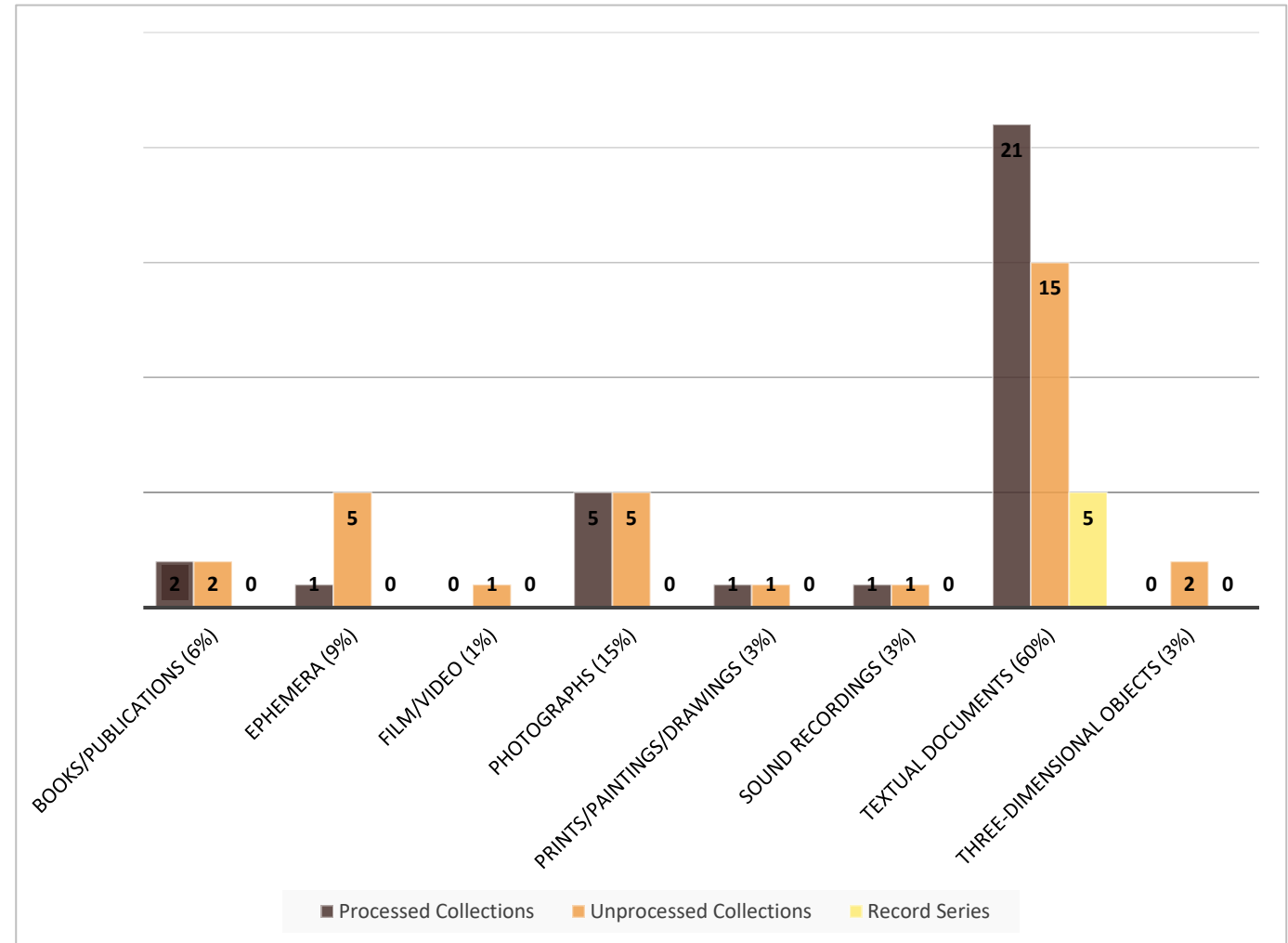
- Black primary resources make up only 8% of the total collection.
- 2010 U.S. Census indicates that Black individuals make up approximately 43% of Lowndes County's total population (USCB, 2010, Race section).
- Competition from the R.E. Hunt Museum and Cultural Center?
 - Opened in 2011.



Photograph of the National Food Store for WACR. From the Carl Brown Photographs Collection, Billups-Garth Archive.

Results

R2. What types of resources make up this percentage (e.g., textual documents, ephemera, sound recordings, etc.)?



Black primary resources broken down by resource type.

Implications

R2. WHAT TYPES OF RESOURCES MAKE UP THIS PERCENTAGE (E.G., TEXTUAL DOCUMENTS, EPHEMERA, SOUND RECORDINGS, ETC.)?

- Textual documents make up 60% of Black primary resources.
- Results contrast White's (1987) explanation that there are very few written resources documenting Black history.
- While textual documents make up a significant portion of the repository's Black primary resources, they are still small in number overall.
 - Only 5% when compared to all holdings.

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST

To: DuShane Emergency Fund
From: Ezra Baker, Jr.

February 9, 1972

I signed an intent slip stating that I wish to be re-employed at S.D. Lee High School for 1972-73 school year. Dr. Pryor (the Principal) stated that I wasn't to far out of compliance and if I would cut my sideburns up a little. I ask why did I have to cut them. He said he didn't know the Superintendent said cut them if I wanted a contract.

May 16, 1972

I wrote a letter to Dr. Pryor stating that I would like to work in summer school for the 1971-72 session. A letter was required if a teacher wanted to work.

May 29, 1972

Summer school started at S.D. Lee on May 29, 1972; I was employed. On May 31, 1972, Conard, Dawkins and I went to the superintendent's to pick up our contracts. He met with us individually. Superintendent Goolbsy said he would not issue my contract until I comply with the policies. Our conference period was about eight minutes.

Summer school ended June 26, 1972. Dr. Pryor called me into the office and stated that if I wanted to work the second session I would have to cut my sideburns. I said that I would have to give that suggestion some thought. I did comply and I was hired for the second session.

August 22, 1972

Dr. Pryor called to my house. I was out of town my wife took the message, telling me to come to his office.

August 23, 1972

The administrative assistant W. M. Coleman came to my house and gave me a message from the principal asking me to come to his office.

August 24, 1972

I went to the principal's office at 11:30 A.M. He told me to go by the superintendent's office and pick up my contract. At 1:45 P.M. my wife and I went to the superintendent office. He stated that I was still out of compliance, and read the dress code policy that was adopted on July 31, 1972.

August 25, 1972

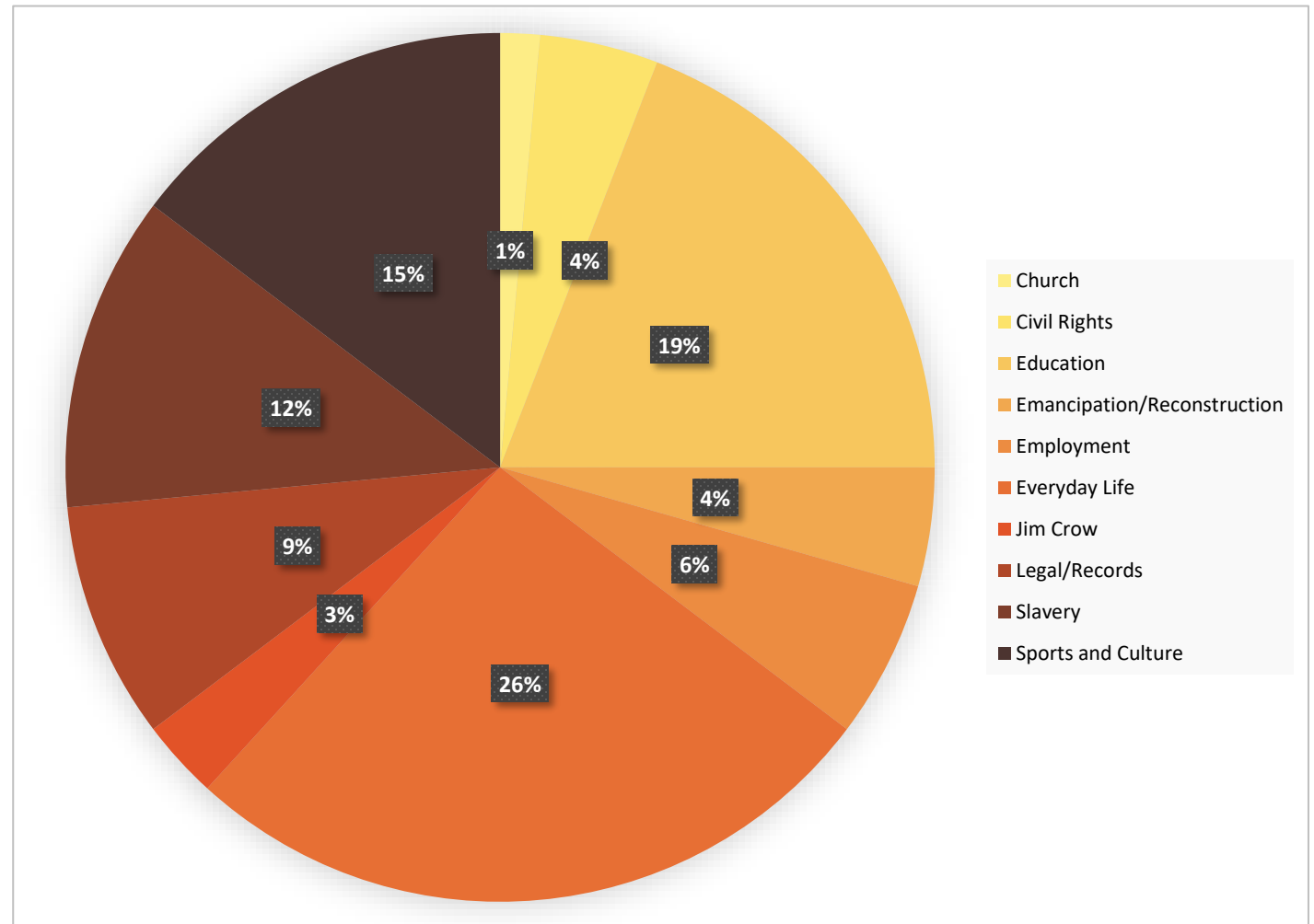
I complied with the dress code, my wife and I returned to the superintendent's around 4:00 P.M. he said now, you're in compliance

30

Chronological list of events according to Ezra Baker, Jr., 1972. From the Ezra Baker, Jr. Papers, Billups-Garth Archive.

Results

R3. What are the subjects or themes associated with these resources?



Thematic percentages making up relevant manuscript collections and record series.

Implications

R3. WHAT ARE THE SUBJECTS OR THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH THESE RESOURCES?

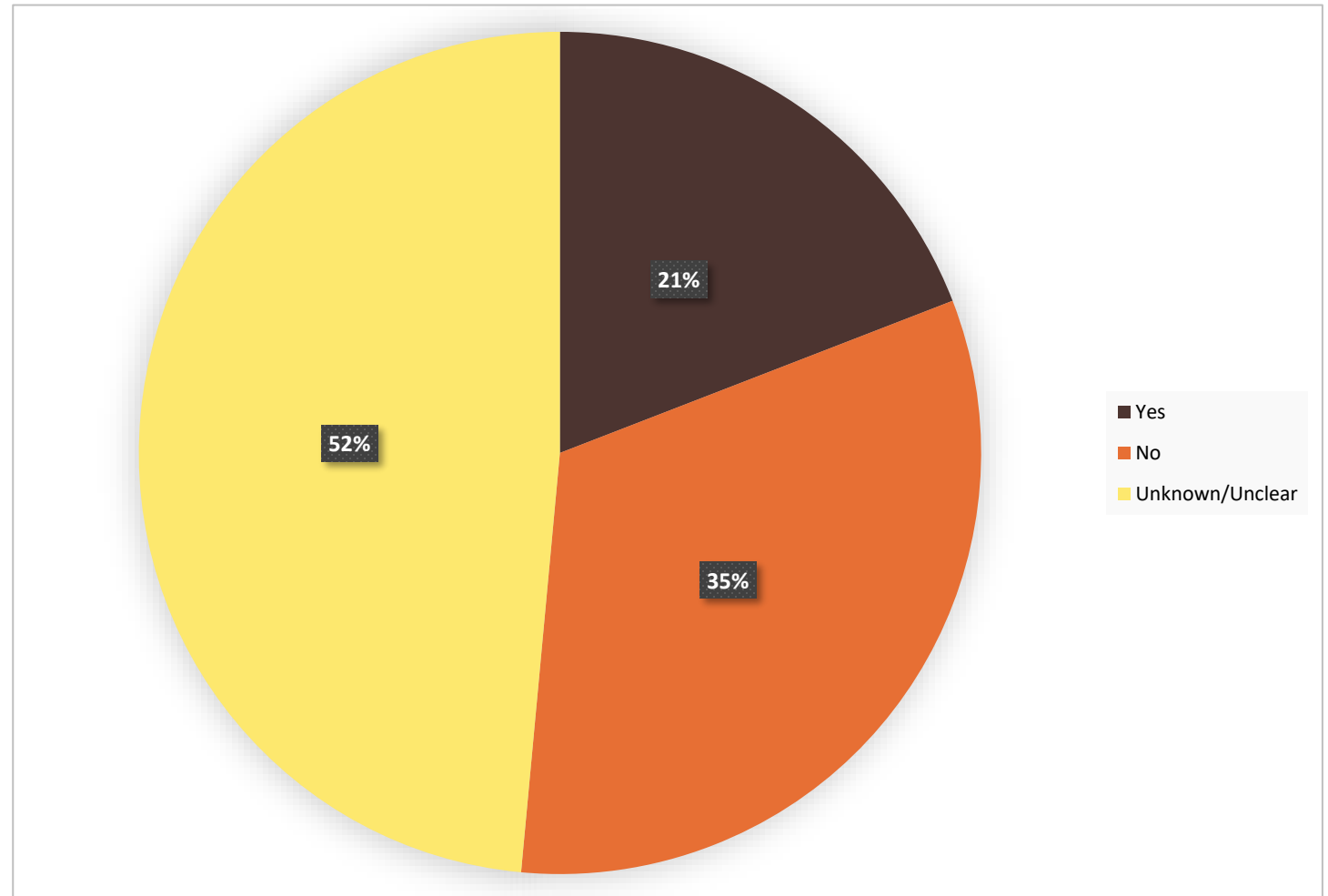
- Repository holds similar resources noted by Gibbs (2012, p. 199).
 - Civil Rights, entertainment, music, slavery, and sports.
- However, the most heavily represented subjects relate to everyday life and education.
- The literature's grasp of subject coverage may be inaccurate or at least incomplete.



Copywork of Joe L. Durrah of portrait of R.E. Hunt student, 1953-54. From the Carl Brown Photographs Collection, Billups-Garth Archive.

Results

R4. What percentage of these resources originated from the Black community?

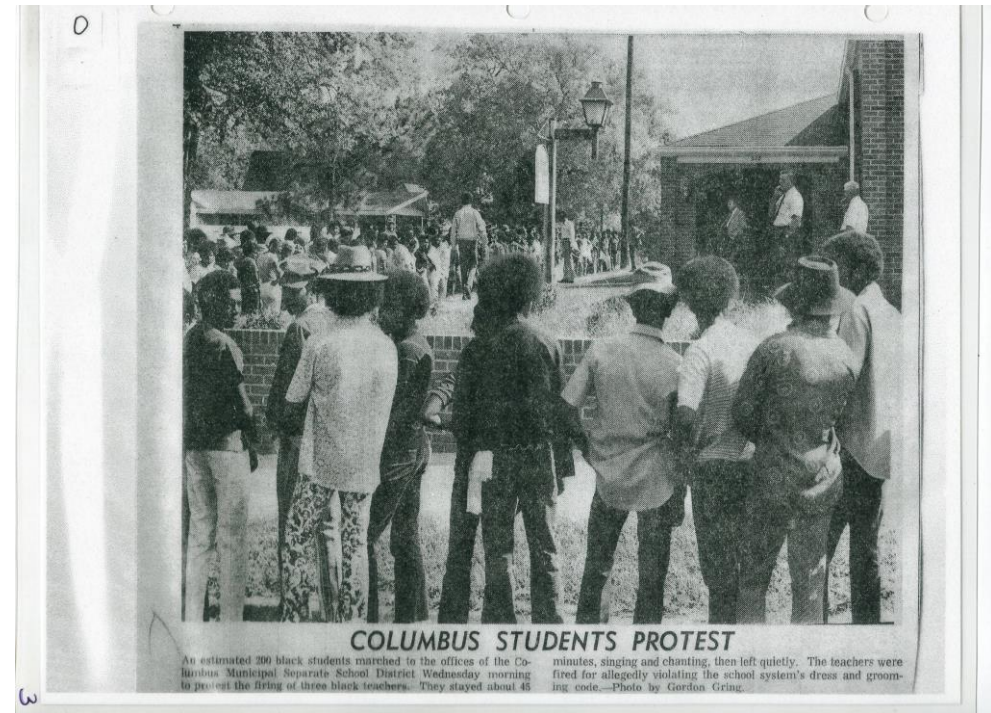


The percentage of resources created within the Black community.

Implications

R4. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THESE RESOURCES ORIGINATED FROM THE BLACK COMMUNITY?

- Only 21% of resources originated from the Black community.
- Findings support assertions made by Flinn (2007) and Prescod (2017).
- Findings may encourage archivists to be more aware of the origins of resources.
 - **Give agency to marginalized communities!**



“Columbus Students Protest,” unidentified newspaper, October 1972. From the Ezra Baker, Jr. Papers, Billups-Garth Archive.

Significance

- The study, while not generalizable, supports previous findings in that there is a dearth of materials related to Black history.
- There is a need for more studies related to this subject:
 - More comprehensive data collection and analysis.
 - Examination of other marginalized communities.
- Hopefully, archivists will be encouraged to undertake similar projects to:
 - Grow the collective understanding of this issue.
 - Create collections that better represent the communities they serve.

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Property of The Columbus-Lowndes Public Library

Photograph of a Black woman drinking tea at a table while sitting in a rocking chair, circa 1890s. From the Marion Stark Gaines Photograph Collection, Billups-Garth Archive.

Thank you for your time and attention.
Questions? Comments?

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Interested in viewing materials from the Columbus-Lowndes Public Library's Billups-Garth Archive?
Check out their holdings at the Mississippi Digital Library!
<https://msdiglib.org/columbus>