

Americans, Our History, and the 250th


Wilkening Consulting
audience research | knowledge curation

VIRGINIA
IS FOR
LOVERS

May 2020

Initial Question:

Will Americans want to celebrate
the 250th anniversary of the
signing of the Declaration of
Independence?

And if so ... how?

We quickly realized there was a lot more to this question than first appeared.

This was a question about American patriotism and identity ... and how that shapes how people view the past and the stories of our country's founding.

It brought us to questions about mythology, bias, historical truth, and inclusive history.

What divides us?

And what unites us?

We found, no surprise, that it is complicated, messy, and our questions evoked very strong feelings ... across the spectrum of our population.

1

Our values, attitudes, and beliefs affect how we approach the past ... and the divisions in our country extend to history.

2

That history is highly valued ... but a lack of inclusion is a barrier to engagement.

3

Yet the majority hold values about our country that they honor and respect ... and will want to acknowledge in 2026.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



PHASE 1: National Quantitative Sampling

SURVEY OF HISTORY MUSEUM-GOERS

- Fielded October 2019
- Distributed via email lists of 14 Virginia-based history organizations
- n = 8,005
 - 36% from Virginia / 64% from rest of U.S.
- Quotes from respondents designated as “museum-goers survey”

BROADER POPULATION COMPARISON SAMPLE

- Fielded October 2019
- Via Google Consumer Surveys
- n = 2,262
 - 25% from Virginia / 75% from rest of U.S.



PHASE 2: National Qualitative Panels

PANEL OF HISTORY MUSEUM-GOERS

- Fielded February/March 2020
- Recruited via survey of history museum-goers
- 127 entered panel; 74 completed
- Quotes from respondents designated as “museum-goers panel”

BROADER POPULATION PANEL

- Fielded February/March 2020
- Recruited nationally via Craigslist
- 99 entered panel; 77 completed
- Quotes from respondents designated as “broader panel”



OTHER WILKENING CONSULTING RESEARCH

THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS CONTRIBUTED TO OR VALIDATED THIS RESEARCH WITH COMPLEMENTARY OR SIMILAR FINDINGS:

- Inclusive History in America (*fielded 2018*)
 - Some of the findings around inclusion; development of the primer of inclusive practice
- Annual Survey of Museum-Goers
(*fielded annually 2017 – present; with American Alliance of Museums (AAM)*)
- COVID-19 Pandemic Qualitative Panel
(*fielded spring 2020 on behalf of AAM*)



METHODOLOGY NOTE:

Broader Population Blind Spots

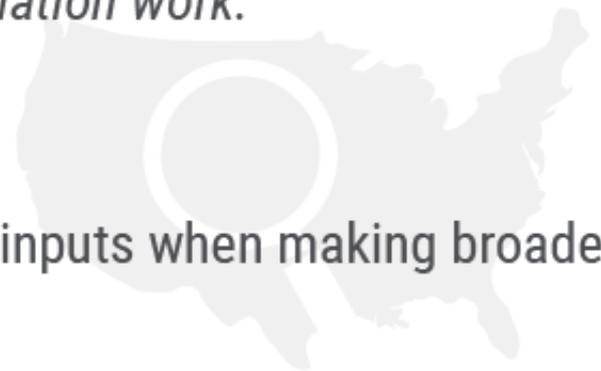
All surveys have some degree of survey bias

- Nearly impossible to capture a representative sample of the *entire* population
- Thus, important to consider population blind spots, including:
 - Very low-income
 - Lower education
 - Recent immigrants
 - Extreme elderly

My best estimates for blind spots *in broader population work*:

- Surveys: a third of population
- Panels: half of population

Important to keep in mind as these estimates are inputs when making broader estimates, projections about adult population

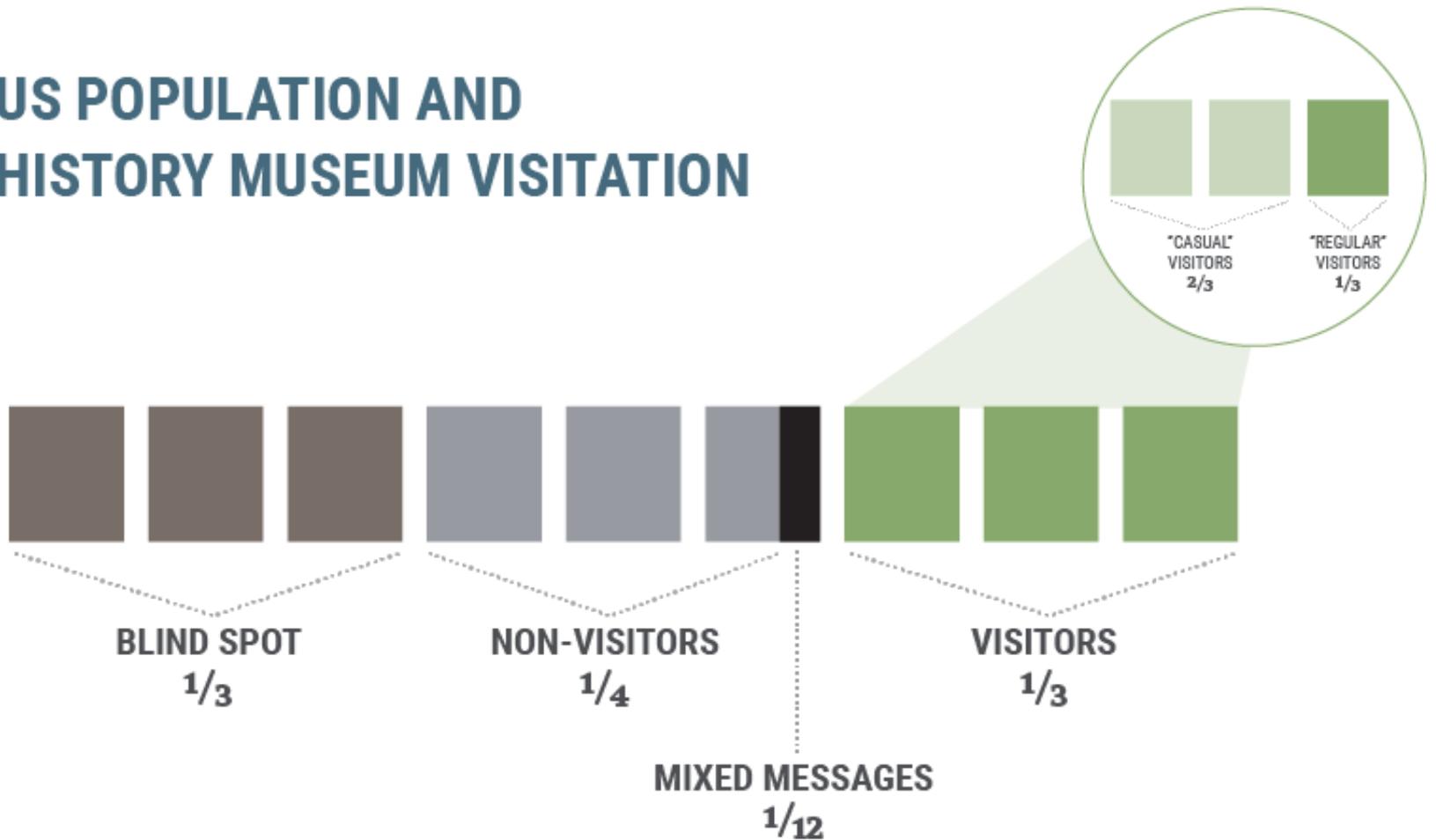


FOCUS OF RESEARCH:

- Focus is on *likely* history museum-goers
 - Occasional, casual, and avid museum-goers
- Though broader population survey results that represent 2/3 of the population will be shared for context

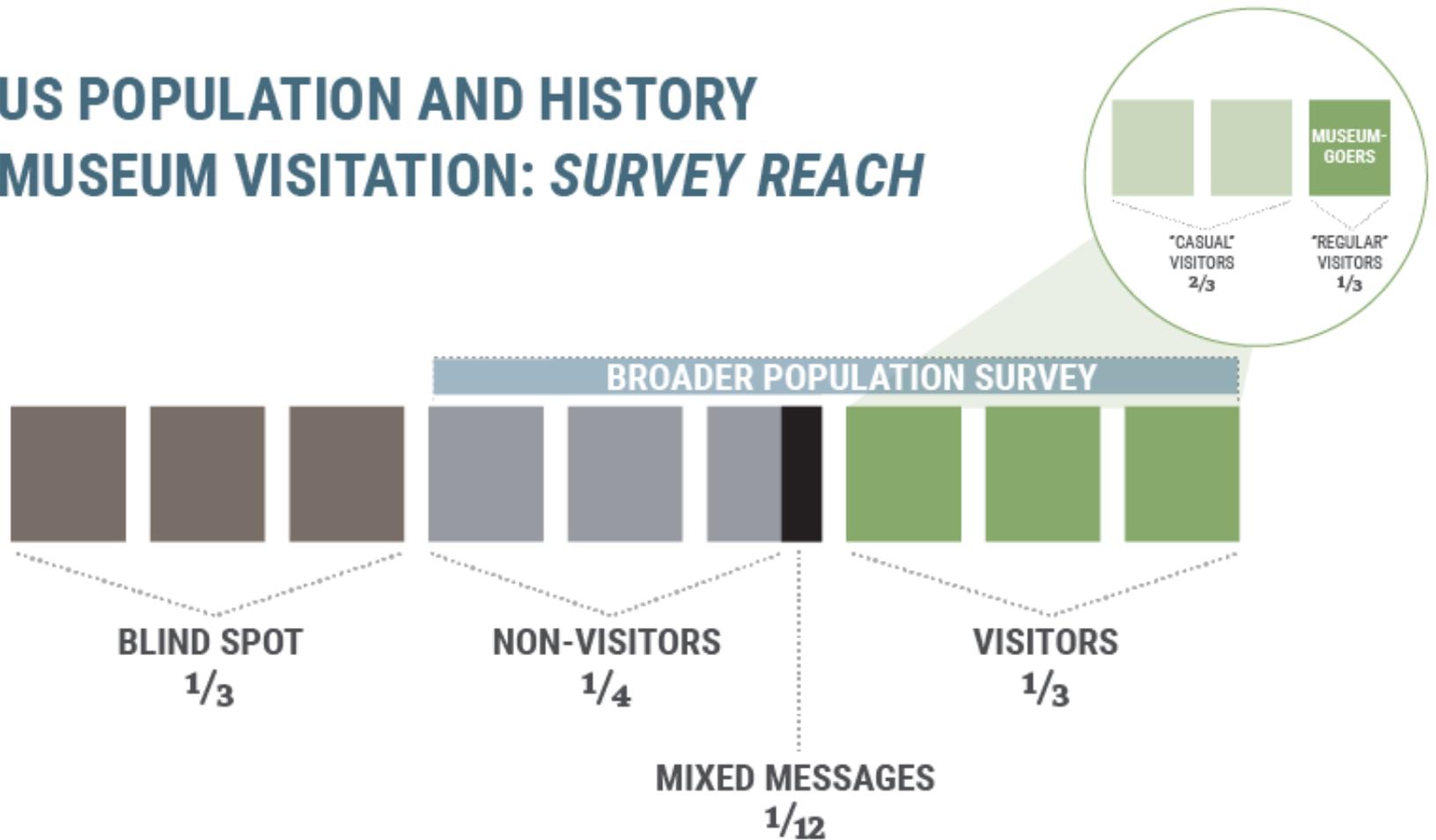


US POPULATION AND HISTORY MUSEUM VISITATION



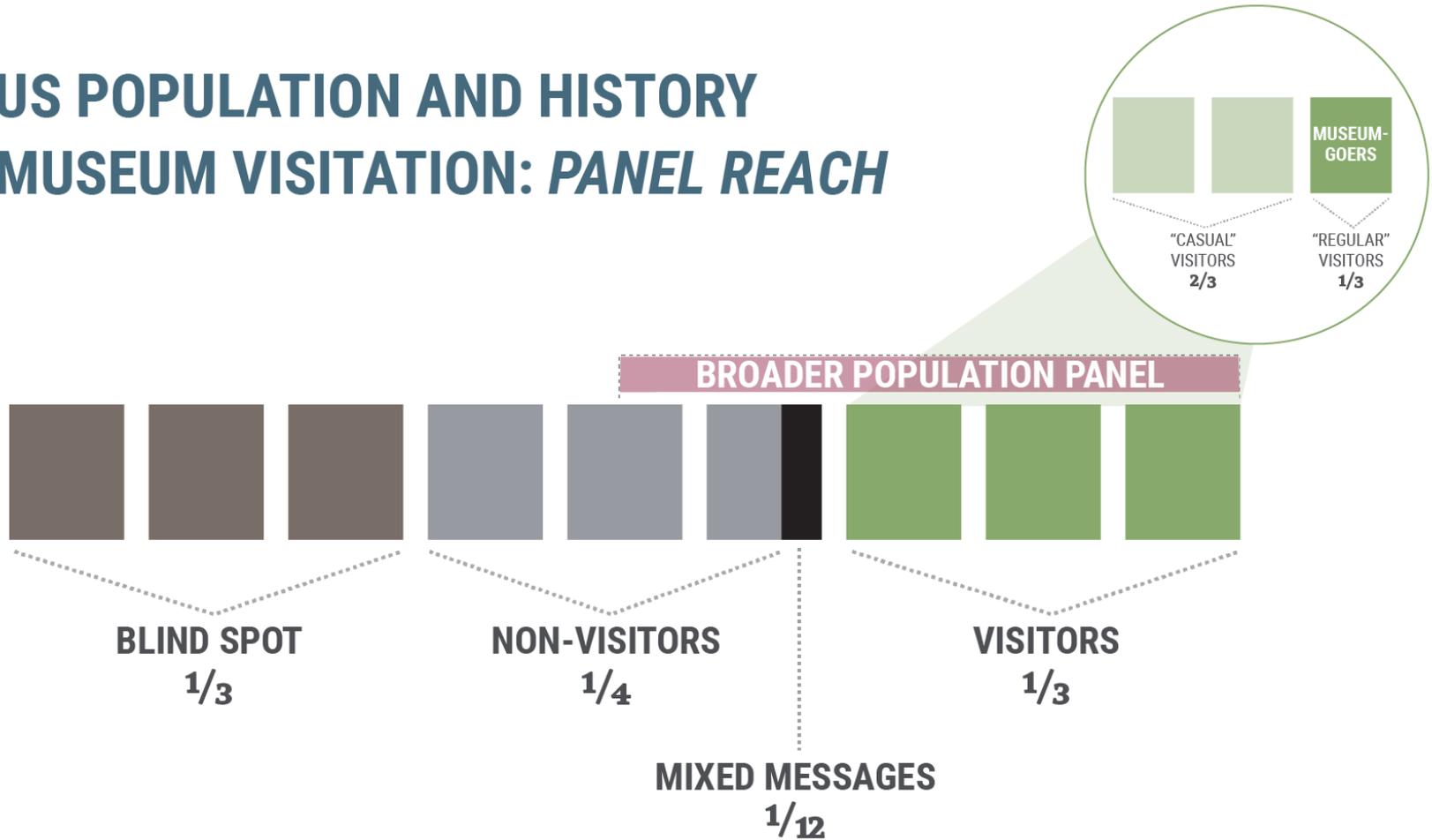
US POPULATION AND HISTORY

MUSEUM VISITATION: *SURVEY REACH*



US POPULATION AND HISTORY

MUSEUM VISITATION: *PANEL REACH*



METHODOLOGY NOTE:

Researcher and Project Biases



- My lived experience is as a white female
- My ideology, attitudes, and my behaviors skew heavily liberal
- I would identify myself as a “symbolic patriot” who also believes it is our moral imperative to share an inclusive history
- To mitigate my biases, particularly around more conservative attitudes, I:
 - Was careful to ground my research in evidence, quantitative and qualitative
 - Looked carefully for qualitative responses reflecting both sides with equal intensity, and noted when one side felt more strongly than the other
 - Fielded panels that were open to all perspectives, and deliberately populated with diverse opinions; panelists were unaware of my own positions and those from both sides commented that they felt heard in the panel
 - Tapped into a small network of conservative advisors to assess if the findings are fairly represented, or if my bias was coming into play

COVID-19 ADDENDUM

RE-OPENED PANELS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- April 2020
- Four additional questions asked about:
 - Rights and freedoms during the pandemic
 - Role of history
 - Financial challenges of museums
 - Feeling safe and comfortable in museums when they reopen



This research presentation focuses on research fielded before the pandemic, but the findings likely remain relevant during and after the pandemic.

Additional insights from the COVID-19 follow-up research is at the end of this deck.



Individual Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs



Tourism ... and History



Attitudes Toward History



Patriotism and American Identity



Lenses of American History



America: 2026



The 250th

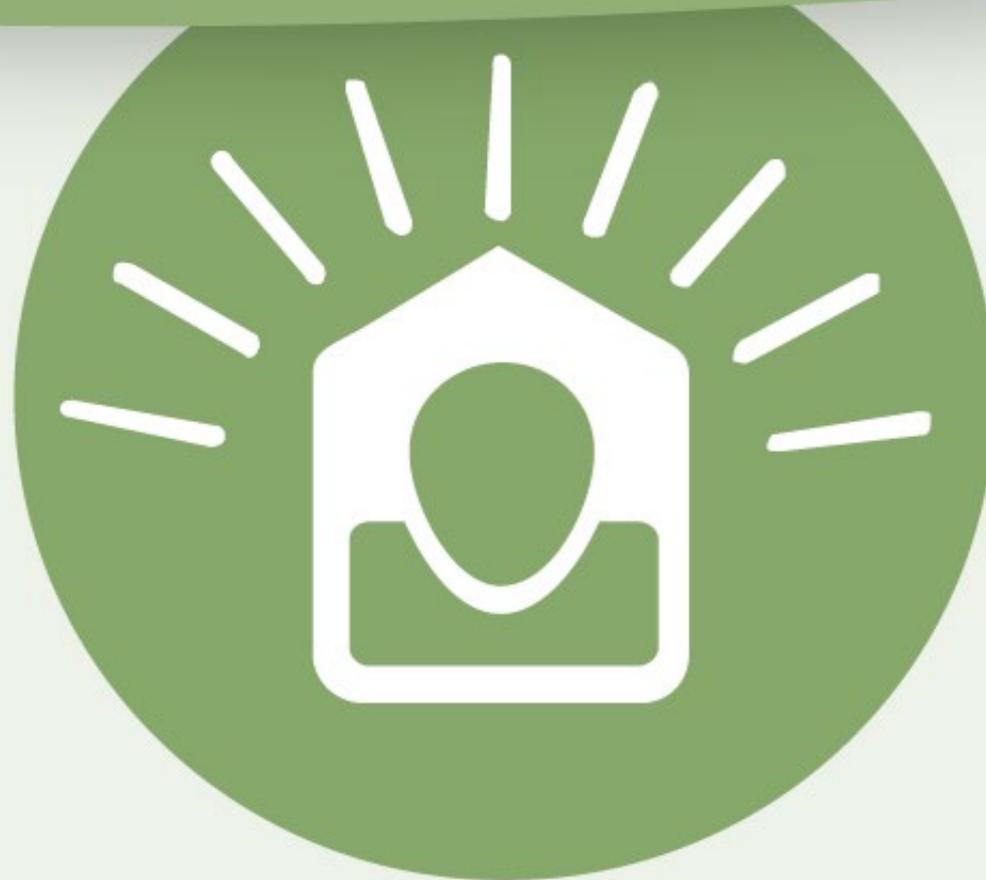


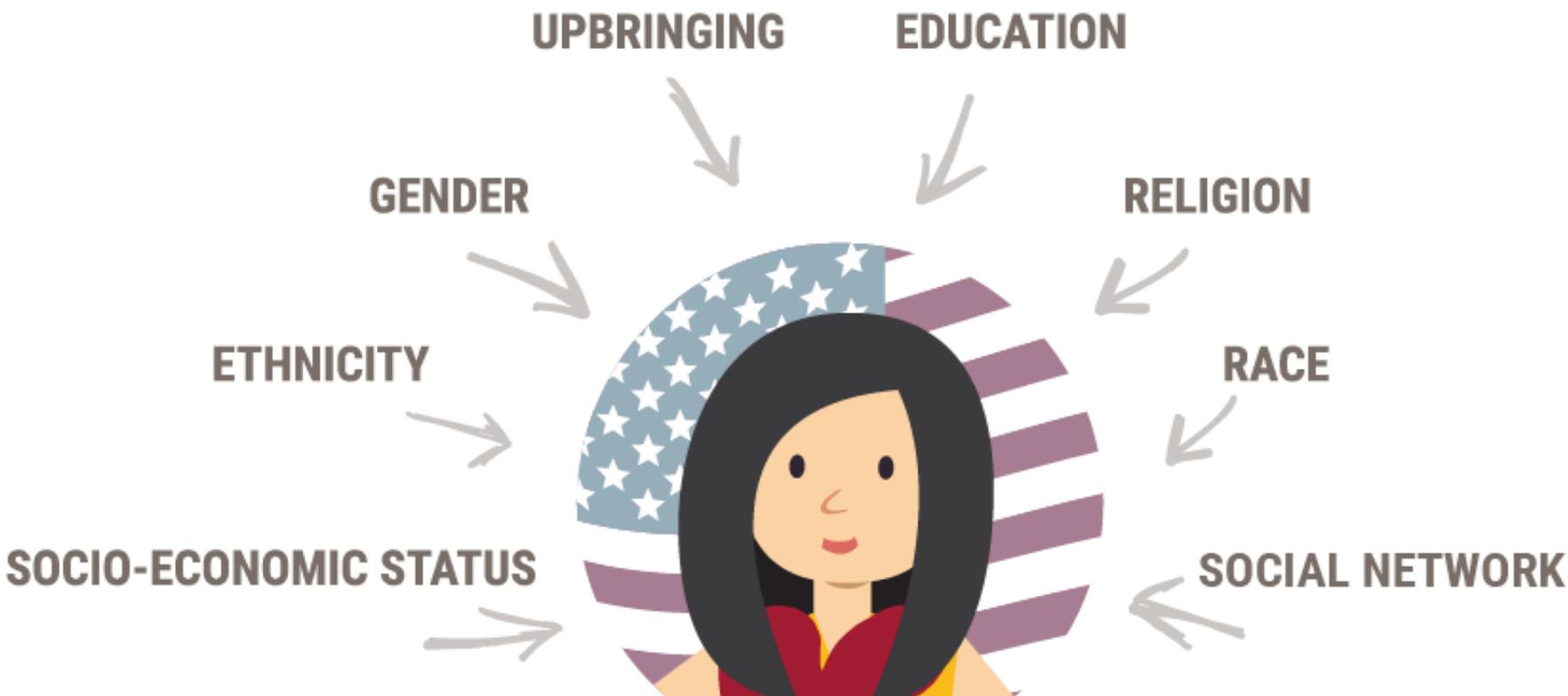
A Practical Guide to Sharing History in a Divided Country



Final Thoughts

Individual Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs

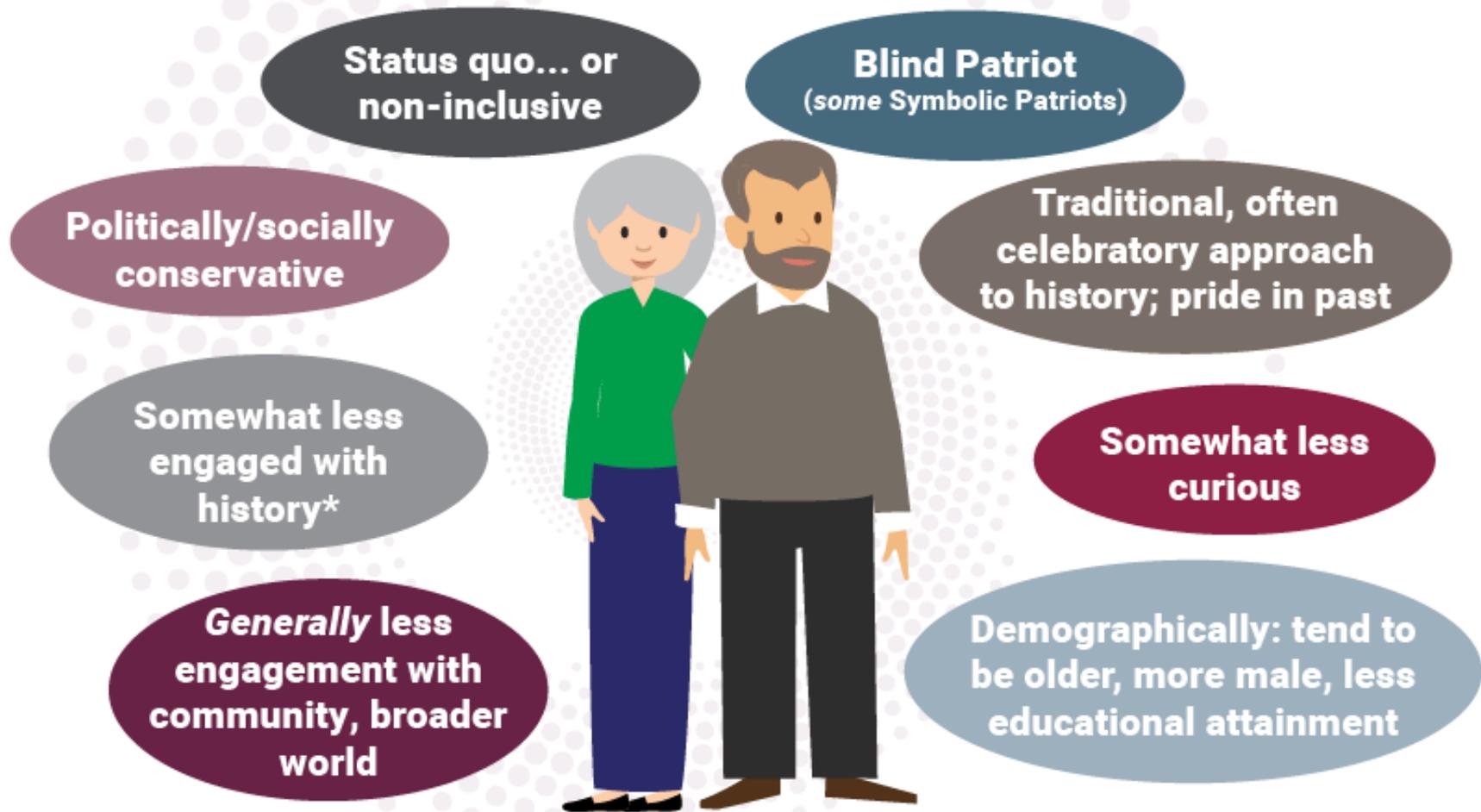




VALUES – ATTITUDES – BELIEFS

In this research there was a strong clustering of values, attitudes, and beliefs that affected how people viewed the past and our country ... and it reflected the current polarization in our society.

TRADITIONALS: More likely to have these traits



* Exception: small segment of "history buffs" that are heavily engaged in history

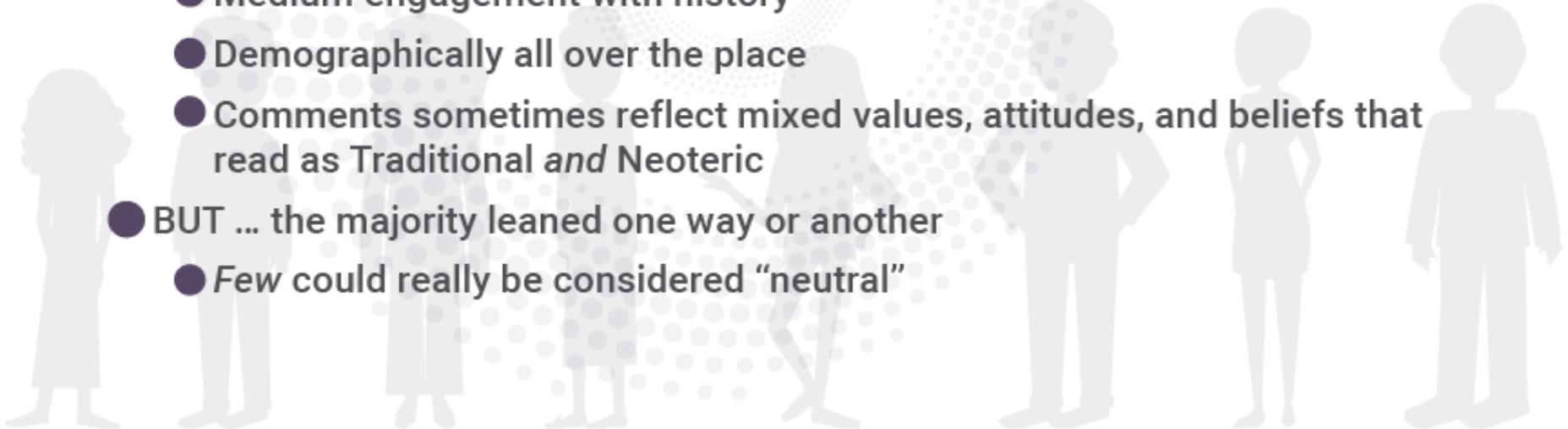
NEOTERIC: More likely to have these traits



Neoteric: adjective that describes new or modern ideas; from the Greek *neos*, for new

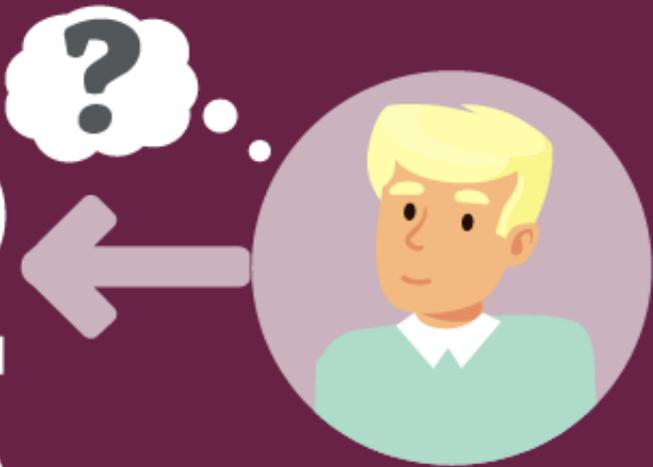
THE MIDDLE:

- Most people tend to lean towards the Traditional or Neoteric clusters
- Of those that do seem to fall in the middle:
 - More moderate politically
 - Symbolic Patriots
 - Status quo on inclusivity
 - More inclusive than Traditionals, less than Neoterics
 - Lower levels of engagement with community
 - Less curious
 - Medium engagement with history
 - Demographically all over the place
 - Comments sometimes reflect mixed values, attitudes, and beliefs that read as Traditional *and* Neoteric
- BUT ... the majority leaned one way or another
 - Few could really be considered “neutral”

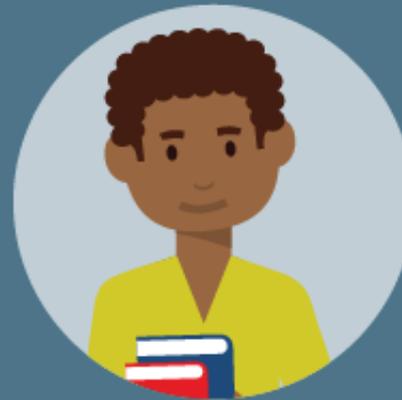


Thinking about history specifically, we all practice intuitive epistemology and approach the past with different sets of questions ... thus finding different sets of facts that support our values, attitudes, and beliefs.

FACTS



More Traditional
attitudes, beliefs,
and values



More Neoteric
attitudes, beliefs,
and values

FACTS

SPECTRUM OF VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS

Likely History-Museum Goers



For the majority of people, these clusters hold largely true ... though some may differ on an attribute or two, or vary in intensity of feeling.

Please be mindful:
while the clusters inform us of what
traits *generally* cluster together ...

... it is inappropriate to make assumptions about an individual based on demographic indicators alone.

Not everyone falls neatly into a cluster on *all* traits.

“

We retired in 2010 and both got into C.W. reenacting and by happy accidents started our dance group which started out thinking only of mid-1800's dance ... Our memory of history is so faulty because of what was left out in the telling of it. What some people call 'revisionist history' is often simply telling the truth or telling the things that weren't said before.

– DANCE MASTER (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

Thus, these clusters of values, attitudes, and beliefs affect how the United States and its past is viewed.

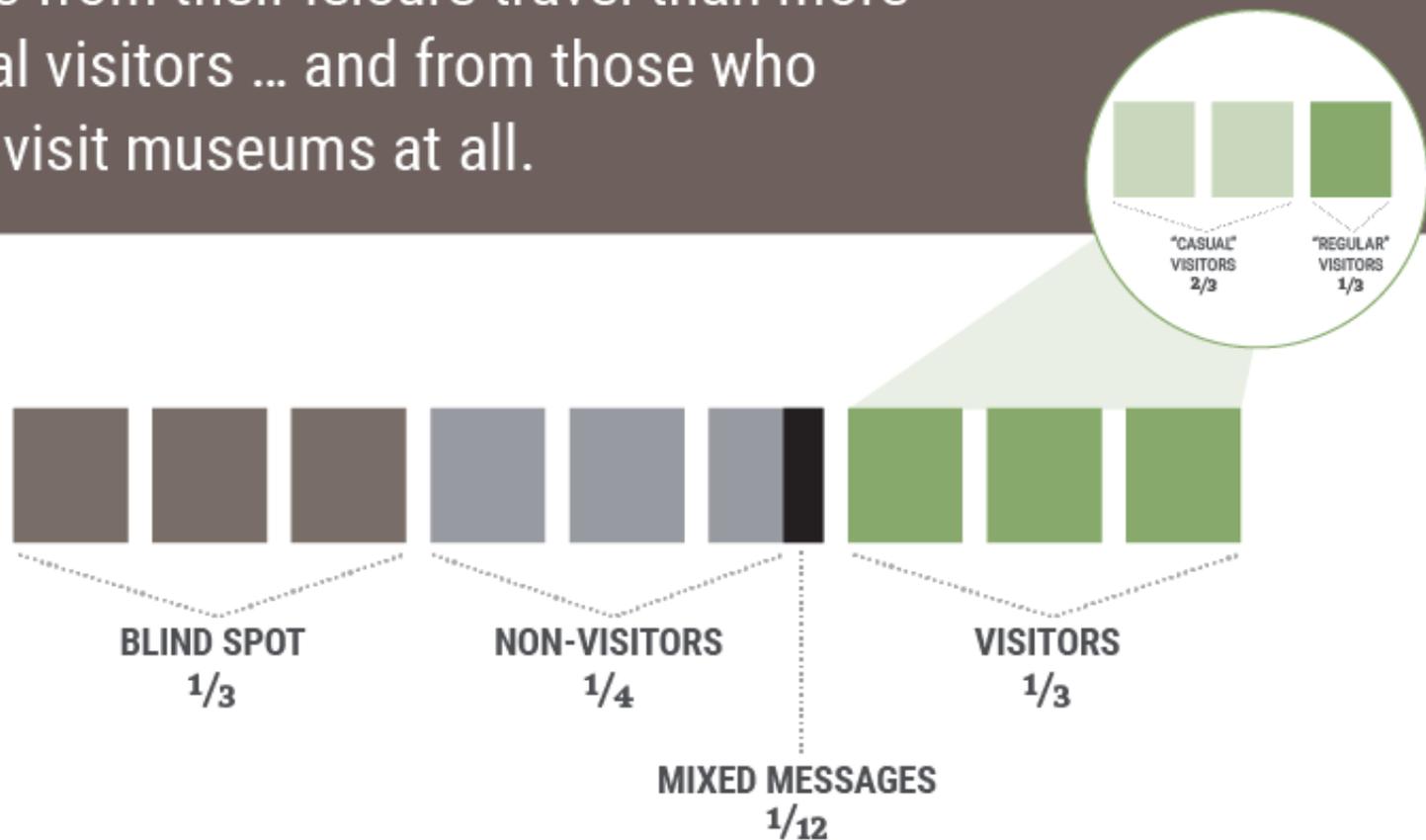
We'll be discussing *much* that divides us ... and some things where we don't differ that much after all.

Tourism ... and History



When it comes to leisure travel, the ideological clusters matter less than overall attitudes towards learning and history.

Those who visit museums *regularly* seek somewhat different things from their leisure travel than more casual visitors ... and from those who don't visit museums at all.



THREE DIFFERENT GOALS FOR LEISURE TRAVEL:*



RELAXING



EXPLORING (INCLUDING “SENSE OF PLACE”)



LEARNING (INCLUDING HISTORY)

*Aside from visiting family



WHAT DO MOST PEOPLE MEAN BY “RELAXING?”

NO SCHEDULE

“Relaxing to me involves a minimal agenda. Perhaps 1-2 things to do that day, but at an easy pace and with room for spontaneity.”

– JO (BROADER PANEL)

FUN

“More importantly, my goal is to have fun. Vacation should be fun. If it's not, why are you doing it?”

– HARLIE (BROADER PANEL)



WHAT DO MOST PEOPLE MEAN BY “RELAXING?”

BEACH/WATER

“Last vacation I went to Hawaii. It was a trip for sitting on the beach and eating too much food while maintaining a respectable level of intoxication.”

– GOFARK Y (BROADER PANEL)

FREEDOM

“Freedom from typical routines, traffic, deadlines, etc. To me, this is what traveling is all about. It's getting a chance to do what I want free from distractions and requirements, as that is very relaxing to me.”

– JOE S (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



WHAT DO MOST PEOPLE MEAN BY “RELAXING?”

ESCAPE

“Relaxing is letting go of everyday worries to focus on me and what I may want to be doing instead of what I need or should be doing. Without the worries of failure or repercussions.”

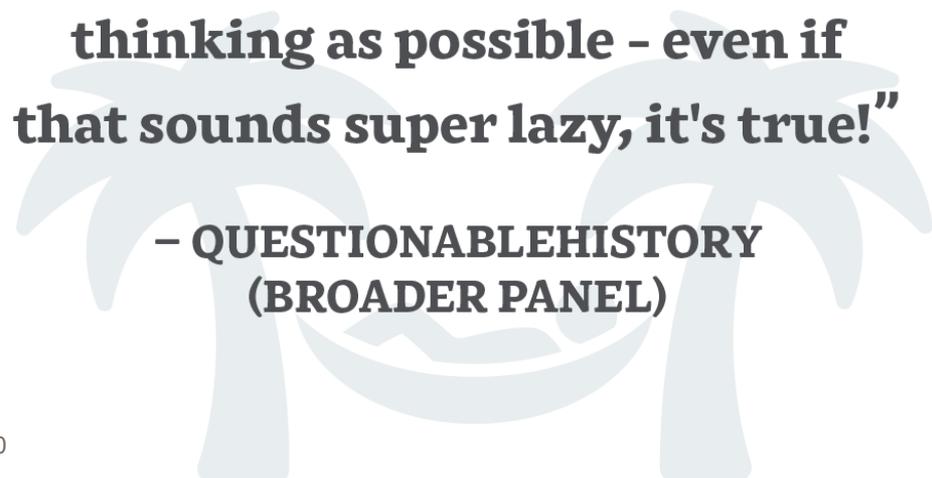
– EVELLYN (BROADER PANEL)



BUT NOT LEARNING

“History is not usually important for choosing my location, actually it's quite the opposite. Sometimes I associate history with having to think and use my brain while my leisure time is meant to do as little thinking as possible - even if that sounds super lazy, it's true!”

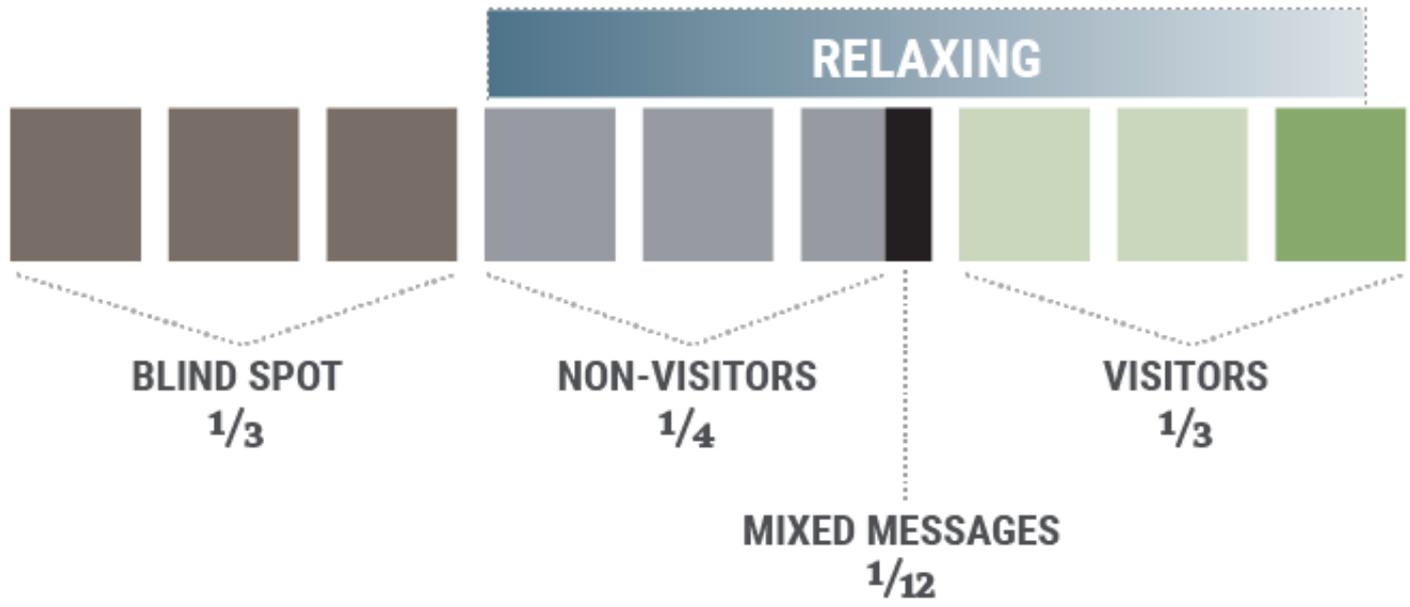
– QUESTIONABLEHISTORY (BROADER PANEL)



Relaxing was the primary goal of the broader panelists of casual and non-visitors to history museums ... though most museum-goers valued it to some degree as well.



MOTIVATION: *RELAXING*



But *some* museum-goers don't have "relaxing" as a leisure travel goal.



“
We don't 'relax'
on vacation. We
can sit around at
home for free.”

– RASHA (MUSEUM-
GOERS PANEL)

“
Relaxing is actually
NOT one of my goals for
vacation and travel. I can
think of nothing more
miserable and boring than
sitting on a beach or at a
mountain cabin or on a
cruise with umbrella
drinks – to me a total waste
of time and money.”

– ANCATDUBH1980
(MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

THREE DIFFERENT GOALS FOR LEISURE TRAVEL:*



RELAXING



EXPLORING (INCLUDING “SENSE OF PLACE”)



LEARNING (INCLUDING HISTORY)

*Aside from visiting family

What do they mean by “exploring?”

Mostly, it is figuring out what makes a place unique ... the quirks, the landscape, the people, the food.

Ultimately, it was about exploring the sense of place of a destination.



“

I'm drawn most to local culture when it is authentic. I love seeing the unique places, eats, smells, shopping, everything that lends itself to the uniqueness of the place.

- JEN OF THE FAMILY BLOG (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

For many museum-goers,
exploration, not relaxation, was the
primary goal of leisure travel.

The broader panelists generally liked the idea of exploring as well ... but a lighter-weight version than museum-goers.

Their exploration was less likely to include informal learning and history-focused activities.

A recurring theme of *both* panels was exploring food while on vacation.



“
I feel like food and how an area treats its history are the two biggest contributors to a sense of place.
– KASH (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL) ”

“
Of course, no vacation is complete without relaxing with good food and rests in a comfortable lounge chair. If an area has a reputation for local food specialties, we enjoy sampling and trying out local flavors.
– FELICITY R. BIJOU (BROADER PANEL) ”

“
Food is the easiest one, since I'm looking to try as many things as possible. I love asking the folks who live in the place I'm traveling where they enjoy eating, since no one knows better than someone who has to eat there! I also enjoy eating historic food if I can come across it, though often it seems that you'll be expecting hoe cakes but getting kale (nothing wrong with kale, mind you).
– KEITHS (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL) ”

But “sense of place” often included
the history.

Both museum-goers and the
broader panelists felt history was
fundamental to providing a sense of
place.



“ History definitely adds to the character and background of a vacation place. It defines what the place is, who it is, and its place in our American landscape. ”

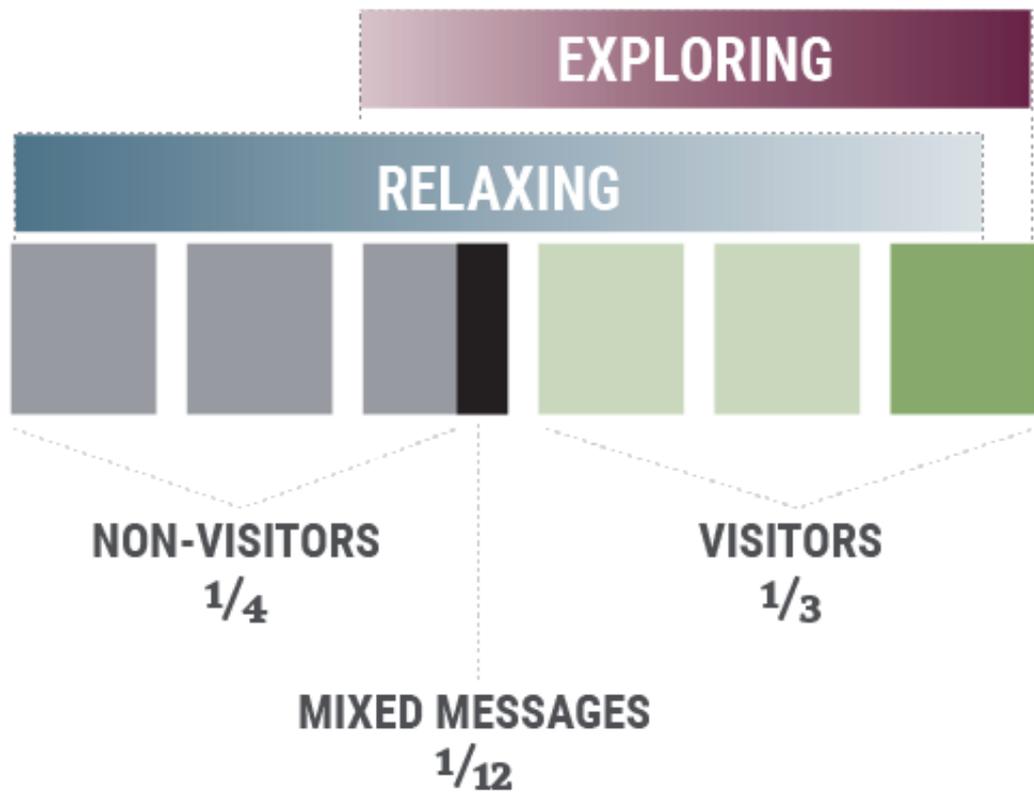
– RBANACH (BROADER PANEL)

“ To ignore the history of a place results in a failure to genuinely understand and appreciate that place and its people. ”

– LISA (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



MOTIVATION: *EXPLORING*



THREE DIFFERENT GOALS FOR LEISURE TRAVEL:*



RELAXING



EXPLORING (INCLUDING “SENSE OF PLACE”)



LEARNING (INCLUDING HISTORY)

*Aside from visiting family

Learning, including the personal growth outcomes of learning, were not the *explicit* motivation for most of the broader panelists. And history typically came under the “learning” category.



Learning ≠ Relaxing

“ I don't go to a museum for leisure. I go because I enjoy learning.

– GOFARK YUSEF (BROADER PANEL)

I see in the questions presented a desire to link leisure time goals with historic site/museum visits. I don't see them closely linked. Two distinct activities, where I expect distinct experiences.

– 603-ME (BROADER PANEL)

... history can be interesting, but I am not interested in it.

– PAUL T (BROADER PANEL)

Castles, churches, museums, forts of past generations do not interest me.

– CANAMERICANA (BROADER PANEL)



Museum-goers, on the other hand, often mentioned learning as part of exploring ... and some were very explicit about learning as a primary vacation goal.



“ Learning from the exposure to things outside of my normal life path broadens my perspective and often changes my values and reactions to circumstances.

– FEAN (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

A successful trip is usually marked by wanting to learn more.

– FRED A (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

If we're paying to travel, we're seeking adventure, captivating education, and fun!

– RASHA (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

As a result, my history-focused travel experiences have been some of the most formative of my life.

– LUIS P (BROADER PANEL)



And a few history museum-goers
make history the point of their
leisure travel.



“ Our entire vacations usually rotate around visiting some sort of history-related place. If there isn't anything of historical value, then we're not going.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

ESSENTIAL and ABSOLUTELY - Other than for family, I only travel for historical purposes. I'm hard core!

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

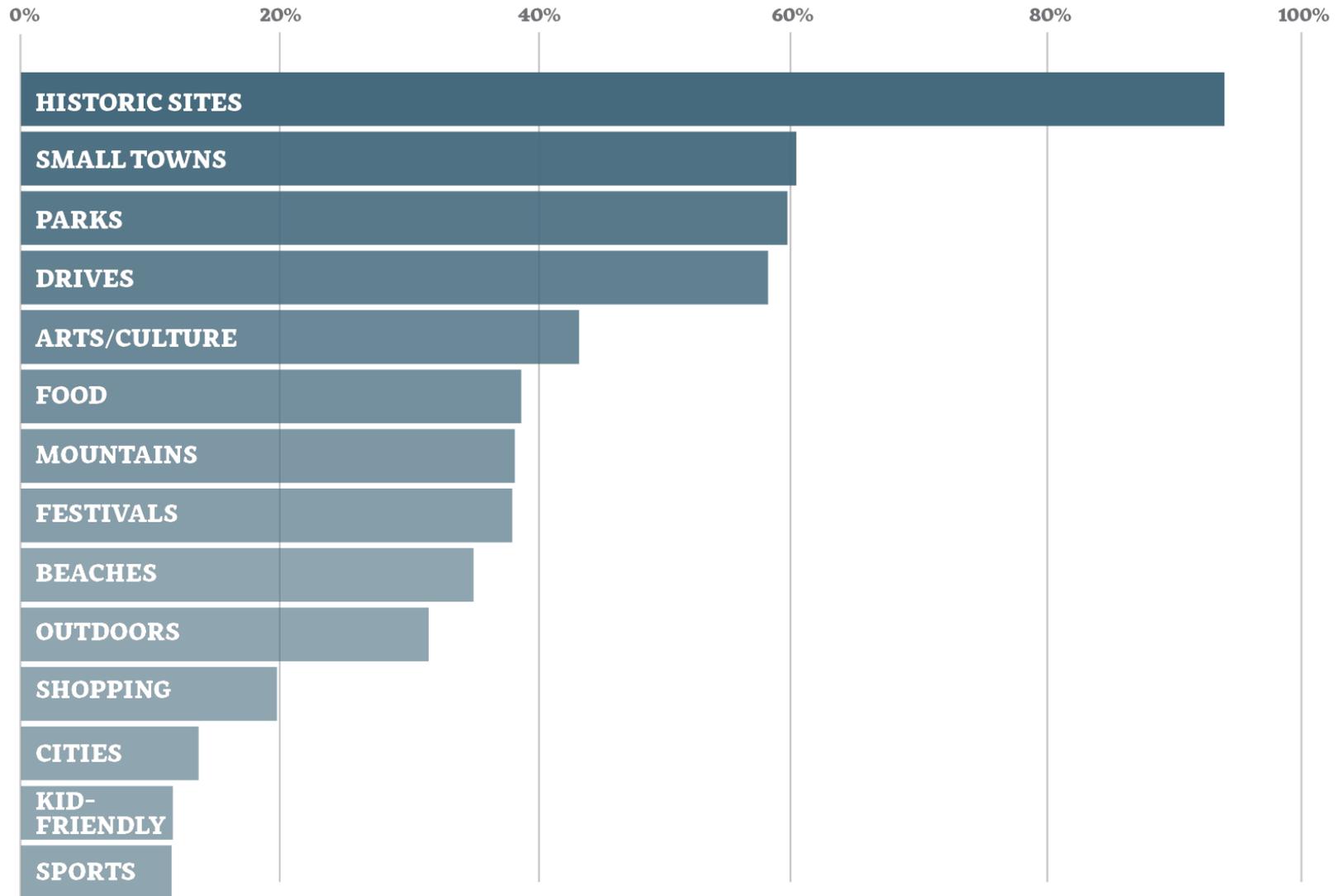
My vacations are planned around my interest in history.

– PAT W. (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)





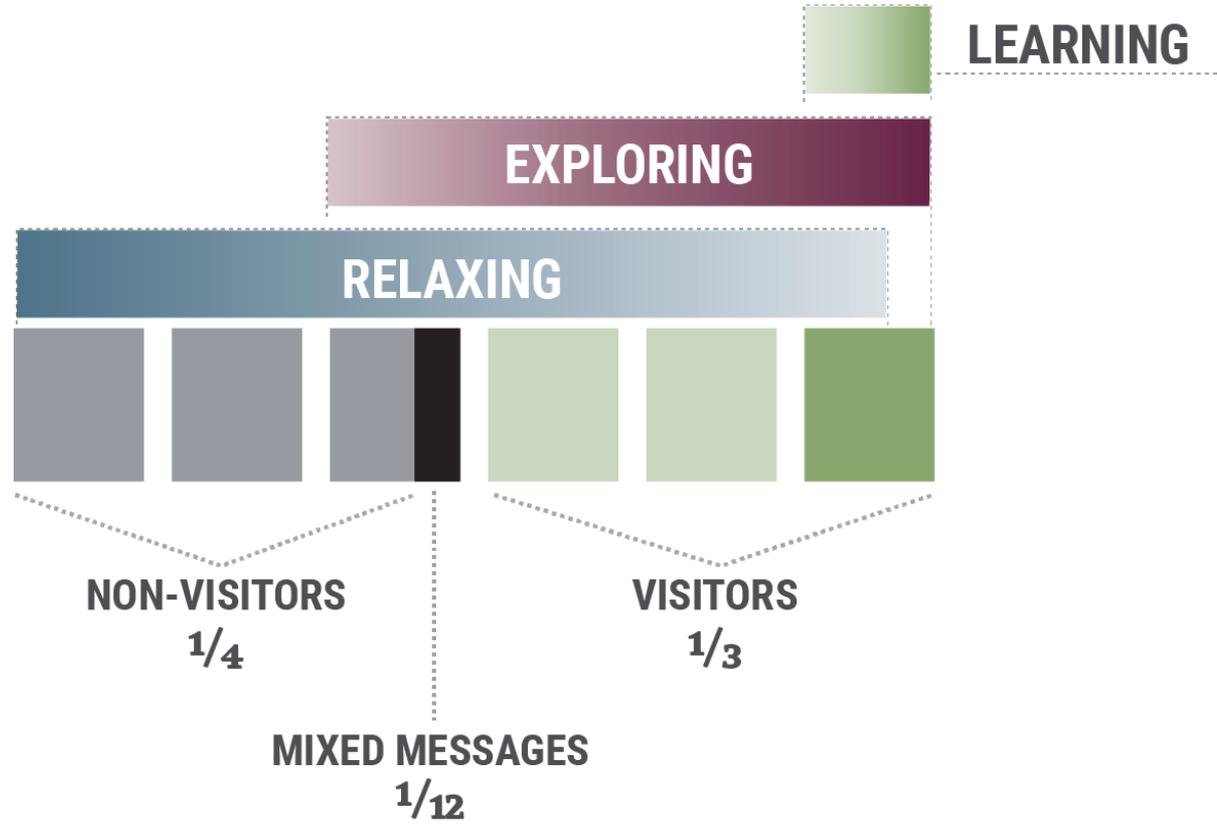
During Travel, What Activities and Destinations are Important?



* Question not asked of broader population.



MOTIVATION: *LEARNING*



For museum-goers, the multiple motivations around leisure time makes it easy for museums to serve them.

But for the broader panelists, history is only part of the exploration process, but it is a part of place that makes travel enticing.

Panelists were also introspective when they thought about what they valued about their leisure travel ... with prosocial outcomes coming out.



VALUE OF TRAVEL

“ This is an essential part of being a productive part of humanity, in my mind. We all can’t visit every part of the world or travel all the time, but wherever we do visit, learning about new places, people, and cultures helps us recognize that the world is much bigger than our own narrow perspective.

– LISA (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



“ I find seeing new things and experiencing different cultures is the best answer to ignorance and racism.

– MICHAEL M (BROADER PANEL)



And history, through its ability to help us understand other people and cultures, is a big part of that.

Yet not everyone thought history was as effective as it should be for promoting understanding of others.

● A few panelists in the broader panel were much more explicit about what they thought was missing ... and it was something that didn't really come up in the museum-goers panel:

Inclusion.



“ I don't think I would like to see America's historical contribution to a 'sense of place' because we have not fully dealt with our history. It would be dishonest to say our history adds to a sense of place while also denying that history has shaped many present-day outcomes for many people, especially those of color.

– JAMIE J (BROADER PANEL)

Yes, I would like to see more sense of place in American places because we are sometimes afraid to memorialize places with a hard or shameful history. But that takes away from an opportunity to have conversations that bring about peace, reconciliation, and strengthening.

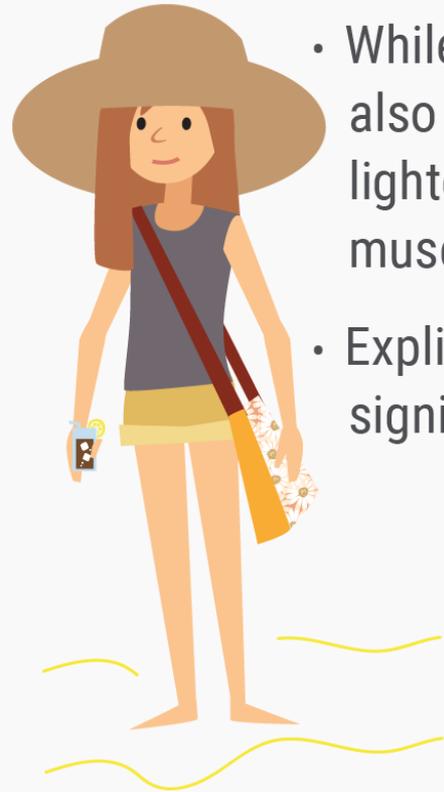
– JO (BROADER PANEL)

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LEISURE TRAVEL TAKEAWAYS

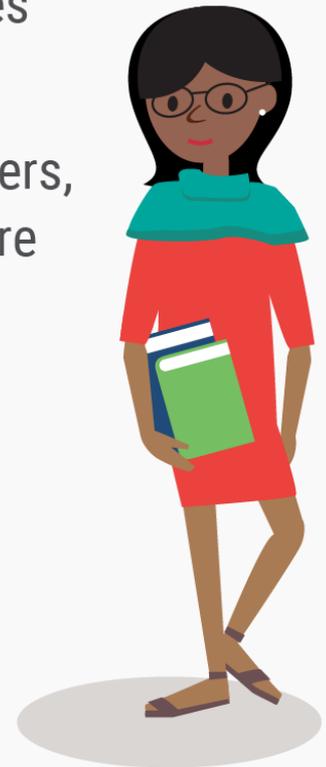
- For the broader panel, relaxation is the primary driver

- While exploration is also significant, it takes a lighter form than most museum-goers enjoy
- Explicit learning is *rarely* a significant motivation



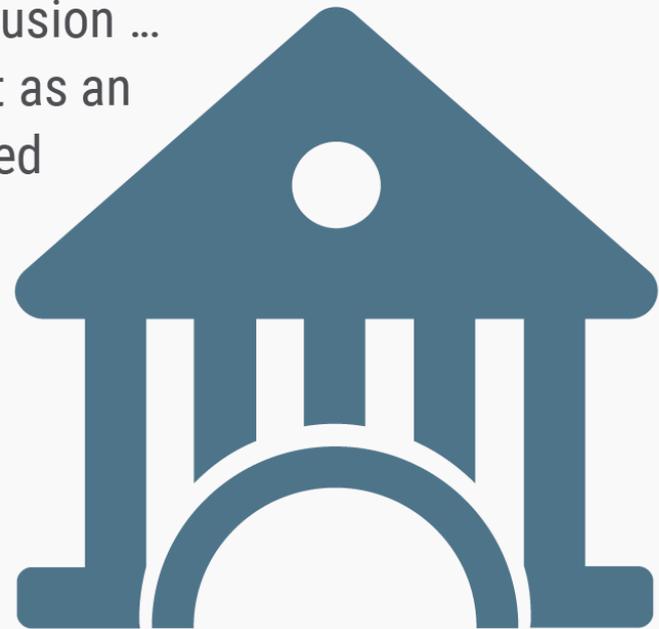
- For museum-goers, exploration is the primary driver

- And that often includes learning and history
- For some museum-goers, learning and history are THE primary drivers



LEISURE TRAVEL TAKEAWAYS: *HISTORY*

- For the broader panel, history was attractive as a contributor to sense of place
- Thus, use history as a gateway to exploration of interesting places
 - Through people, places, music, culture ... and especially food
 - And be honest and deliberate about inclusion ... not necessarily as the explicit focus, but as an expectation that will be honestly delivered
- But don't try to frame history as relaxing ... that creates dissonance



Attitudes Toward History



History museum-goers are *super* engaged with history ... as we would expect.

The broader population isn't ... but that doesn't mean they don't *value* history.



ATTITUDES TOWARDS HISTORY – BROADER POPULATION

“
History is interesting. I honestly wish I was more into it but it's not a major part of my life.

– GOFARK Y (BROADER PANEL)

I would categorize myself as a novice in the broader category of general history.

– CANAMERICANA (BROADER PANEL)

I have never had much interest in history in general ... [but] I am hoping to gain a fresh perspective on history in general, and look forward to seeing what others have to say.

– A B (BROADER PANEL)

... visiting a historic site is the furthest thing from my mind ... I feel close minded and uneducated typing that but it's the truth.

– QUESTIONABLEHISTORY (BROADER PANEL)
”



VALUE OF HISTORY

Most common reason people valued history:

**learning from the past can
prevent future mistakes**

“ I do think history affects current events today, especially in that many people ignore it, or don't learn about it, and so, YET AGAIN, more and more things get repeated that we could avoid if people would just pay attention to the patterns of history, politics, and society. ”

– THEWREN (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“ The job history offers us is of understanding that and recognizing the patterns. You can't stop the waves from tossing the ship about, but if you're paying attention you can probably keep from being pitched over the rail. ”

**– BROTHER MOON
(BROADER PANEL)**



VALUE OF HISTORY – OTHER COMMON REASONS

The past affects today

“I think it would be an illogical to say that history does not affect current events today. I don't think that question deserves any further response.”

– JOSH S (BROADER PANEL)

Tools for understanding present

“It taught me the role of cause and how nothing happens in a vacuum. These concepts are some of the tools for understanding the past, but perhaps more importantly, I use them daily in the present.”

- LISA (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

Tools for understanding people

“I've always been very interested in people and you can't understand people unless you know their stories. People and their stories are so important, and that's all history really is, people and their stories.”

- ASHB (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



VALUE OF HISTORY – OTHER COMMON REASONS

It explores our shared humanity

“History is important to me because I think it's the story of humankind. I think it proves that no matter what is happening in the world, humans are the same. They are always relatable, and people never really change. ”

– MARR (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

It gives us identity

“It is important because I matter. My ancestors matter. ”

– CRAMIREZ (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

It supports citizenship

“History is important to me personally for it enriches every moment of my life with an understanding of how we have arrived as a nation now and of what it means to be a responsible, appreciative, citizen. I feel a deep gratitude for all that have gone before me, and for the good they had achieved, that allows me to live in such a great democracy. ”

– COLUMBRES (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

First, let's examine attitudes around history from the broader panel.

When comparing responses from the broader panel to the museum-goers panel, the broader panel participated in far fewer history activities, and at a more superficial level.

They expressed critiques of history museums and historic sites, but also shared what *would* engage them.



CRITIQUES OF HISTORY MUSEUMS AND HISTORIC SITES

1 THEY ARE NOT THAT INTERACTIVE

“ I think the biggest problem with history exhibits is that they do nothing to capture your interest. You kind of have to go in already being interested. Other places, like science museums, tend to have some interactive element that puts you into whatever you're learning about then tells you why it's important. These little interactive bits grab your attention and make you want to know more, rather than 'Oh look. A cannon. That's cool, I guess,' and then you keep walking. ”

– HARLIE (BROADER PANEL)

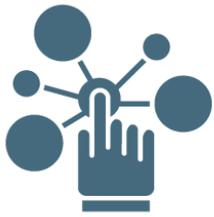
2 THEY ARE NOT APPEALING TO MY FAMILY

“ I would want my kids to go but I worry they would get bored after an hour. ”

– BRIDGET (BROADER PANEL)

“ I would go alone, My husband isn't into this stuff. ”

– CINDI H (BROADER PANEL)



DESIRED HISTORY EXPERIENCES

THEY WANT INTERACTIVE, LIVING HISTORY

“ It's a live presentation. I can 'see' history happening before me. I can experience how food was cooked, how people talked, what clothes they wore and ask questions to the re-enactment actors. I can hear the accent / different words the people spoke at that time and taste some of their food. ”

– KAREN K (BROADER PANEL)

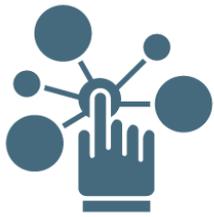
“ I think it would also be really cool if in the museum they had artifacts that you could touch and hold. ”

– CLAIRE (BROADER PANEL)

AND REMINDED US THAT INTERACTIVE HISTORY ISN'T JUST FOR KIDS ...

“ Adults want to play in hands-on museums too, but we're expected to let the kids play. Harumph. ”

– MEHITABLE OVIATT (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



DESIRED HISTORY EXPERIENCES

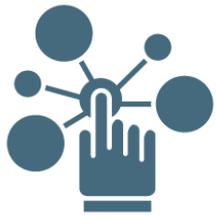
THEY WERE MORE INTERESTED IN HISTORIC SITES THAN MUSEUMS:
.....

“I prefer historic sites to museum buildings, so I would go to a historic site. I would pick a site that was the actual location so I could experience the landscape and environment in which the history happened. I usually enjoy historical sites that show how people lived, like a home. ”

– JO (BROADER PANEL)

“I agree with another respondent that actually going to the historic site to stand in the actual location is preferable to a museum ... ”

– UNTIDYHISTORY (BROADER PANEL)

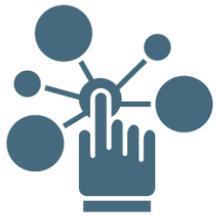


DESIRED HISTORY EXPERIENCES

AND THEY WANT CHOICE. THEY WANT TO FEEL
IN CONTROL OF THEIR VISIT.

“The museum should have something to do for all learning styles and interest such as video, rich pictures, interactive activities, tour guides and a map and quick blurb about the exhibits. ”

– RANAE B. (BROADER PANEL)



DESIRED HISTORY EXPERIENCES

AND EVEN THOUGH LEARNING AND PERSONAL GROWTH ARE NOT THEIR PRIMARY GOALS FOR LEISURE TRAVEL ... THEY DO VALUE THOSE *OUTCOMES* IF THEY WERE TO VISIT A HISTORIC SITE OR HISTORY MUSEUM.

“I would want to feel very curious during my visit ...”

– JULIA (BROADER PANEL)

“I would want to feel intrigued and have more questions to research about the historical information I would be learning.”

– CHRISR (BROADER PANEL)

“I'd want to feel like I was learning something during the visit and be able to remember the experience, in general.”

– SEAN (BROADER PANEL)

“After I leave, I would like to feel like I have a good understanding of the historical events at Plymouth Rock and that I understand the different perspectives.”

– MOUNTAINLIFE1 (BROADER PANEL)

“I want to feel empowered at the visit.”

– BARBARA G (BROADER PANEL)

There was a tension, however, between broader goals of relaxation and how they explore difficult content many history museums and historic sites share.

The strong consensus of the broader population was that history museums and historic sites have a moral obligation to share difficult history.

But for many, doing so *would* affect
their desire to visit.

Some broader panelists would avoid difficult history.

“I have not tended to go to many museums or sites that are difficult/serious in nature. I can't say that I have purposely avoided them, it just hasn't been something I've chosen to attend.”

– AMT (BROADER PANEL)

“I guess I'm one of those that likes things that are lighter and more fun. I would rather go zip lining and then go to an interesting restaurant than read about awful stuff like the Holocaust. I'm not sure what it would take to make me change what I enjoy doing.”

– AIR HEAD (BROADER PANEL)

“When I am on a relaxing vacation, I do avoid as I am on vacation to relax from everyday stresses of life. I don't seek them out intentionally.”

– CANAMERICANA (BROADER PANEL)

“In my own leisure time, I don't go out of my way to experience some difficult sites, I have to be in the right frame of mind for it. Leisure time implies a kicked back sort of attitude, to get away from stress and the unpleasant sides of life.”

– MACBETH (BROADER PANEL)

Others felt it depended or didn't affect them.

DEPENDS

“If I am by myself, I want to learn all I can and delve into the deep gritty details. If I'm with others, we steer a little lighter. It is still not left out though. So many ugly things could easily be swept aside, but I feel that is wrong.”

– HISTORY BUFF (BROADER PANEL)

DOESN'T AFFECT ME/MY DECISION

“I don't get rattled over uncomfortable history--I am fine with it and wouldn't think twice about not visiting a place because it was controversial or uncomfortable.”

–BRIDGET (BROADER PANEL)

“I think it doesn't affect my willingness to experience difficult and serious historical experiences. I go for a powerful experience, which can be powerful in either way, good or bad, is irrelevant for me. I go to be moved. To feel. I don't know that I would ever specifically seek out difficult historical experiences over good ones.”

– SAMUEL B (BROADER PANEL)

A few hedged, saying they don't avoid, but ...

“I do have to be in the right frame of mind knowing, in advance, that the experience may be difficult and challenging. Expectations for museums and sites must be clearly communicated to the public prior to their visit.”

– FELICITY R. BIJOU (BROADER PANEL)

“The only time I might avoid exposing myself to something like that is if I'm struggling with my anxiety and depression. When I'm more vulnerable... Then I might plan to go when I'm not struggling so much with my own stuff.”

– STARRFIRR (BROADER PANEL)

And some were willing and ready ...

“I'm definitely willing to take in sites that may be uncomfortable.”

– HUGZ (BROADER PANEL)

“I'm always ready for a history lesson and event learning. Any time there are some dirty nasty history in our past and genocides and everything, I am ready with open ears anytime I can to learn of what my ancestors endured.”

– EVELLYN (BROADER PANEL)

But they were very much aware of the tension between relaxing and difficult history, and wanted control over how and when they engaged with it.

BY FINDING BALANCE

“For my own leisure time, I like to do a mix of serious history that would be considered more 'heavy' and also leisure time activities such as skiing, hiking, beach, etc.”

– MOUNTAINLIFE1 (BROADER PANEL)

HAVING AGE-APPROPRIATE OPTIONS

“If something is very disturbing, there could be warning. Maybe you don't want to take your 7-year-old to see that part of the museum. Parents would have a choice to expose their children to certain parts of history.”

– JANE (BROADER PANEL)

OR BEING ABLE TO OPT IN OR OUT

“Care should be taken with delicate subjects, perhaps with warnings posted before those exhibits for people to decide if they want to engage ...”

– NICOLEG (BROADER PANEL)

But they still felt it was your role to share difficult history.

DEEPER IMPACT IS PREFERABLE TO MINIMAL IMPACT

“People who don't want to see something real about history are free to go to Disney World, the Noah's Ark museum, the mall, or many other places. History museums must not shy away from difficult truths in order to respect 'leisure goals.' I realize this may work against the goal of increasing audiences, but to me, having a profound impact on even a few people is better than having a wishy-washy vanilla impact on a greater number.”

– WOODBA (BROADER PANEL)

AND SOME AUDIENCES WILL BE ATTRACTED BY IT

“I think that history sells itself and that most people are interested and fascinated by the history of our fellow humans including the ugly and heinous. Museums provide us with interesting presentations of history and do a great job attracting us to attend. And historic sites also self sell.”

– RUTHIE (BROADER PANEL)

When it comes to how the past is shared, there was a theme that came out far more strongly in the broader panel than the panel of museum-goers.



“ Looking back, Native Americans were often still considered the bad guys. I don't think I got a balanced view at that time. – JANEY (BROADER PANEL)

Slavery ended in the 1860s, but we're still dealing with its legacy in the forms of poverty and discrimination today. – PWS5204 (BROADER PANEL)

No. School history is mostly if not all WHITE...couldn't connect with it. – BARBARA G (BROADER PANEL)

... The US is a nation of immigrants, yet we seem to portray ourselves collectively as discovering something (there were people here, we didn't discover anything), and taken great pride in that and taking 'ownership' of something that wasn't being offered for sale. And who got displaced/murdered/pushed out and told that there way of life for generations was barbaric or uncivilized and somehow offensive to the God of Christianity?? These are the issues with history and its portrayal that I find inaccurate and frustrating. I would prefer a history experience that tells both sides of the story. And a history experience that perhaps would cause the person experiencing it to see it for what is was. Not so much an act of bravery and heroism, but greed and insatiable desire for power and control. – ZENDA (BROADER PANEL)

I would love for the opportunity to start with an interactive museum that portrays American history in a REALISTIC sense - something that myself and other products of the public school system in the United States are deprived of. Stripping history of its mythological perspective would present the mindset that the individuals that are presented in this museum are relatable - they are not supported by the 'god-like' statues that are presented at history sites. – SIMON G. (BROADER PANEL) ”

This indicates that lack of inclusion may be a barrier to history engagement, rooted in how history is taught in school and continuing to how history is presented, or perceived to be presented, today.

BROADER PANEL TAKEAWAYS



HISTORY IS VALUED AND IMPORTANT



BUT ENGAGING WITH IT ISN'T RELAXING



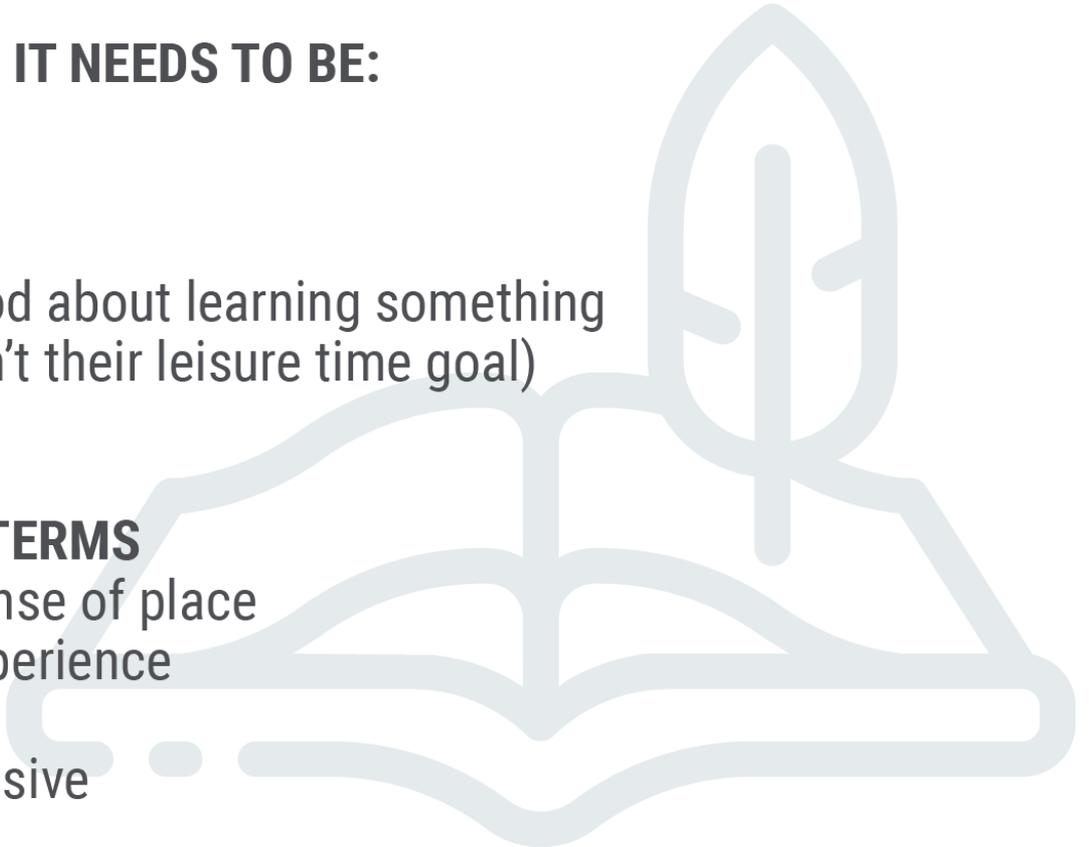
TO BE COMPELLING, IT NEEDS TO BE:

- Interactive
- Hands-on
- Living history
- Make them feel good about learning something (even if learning isn't their leisure time goal)
- Inclusive



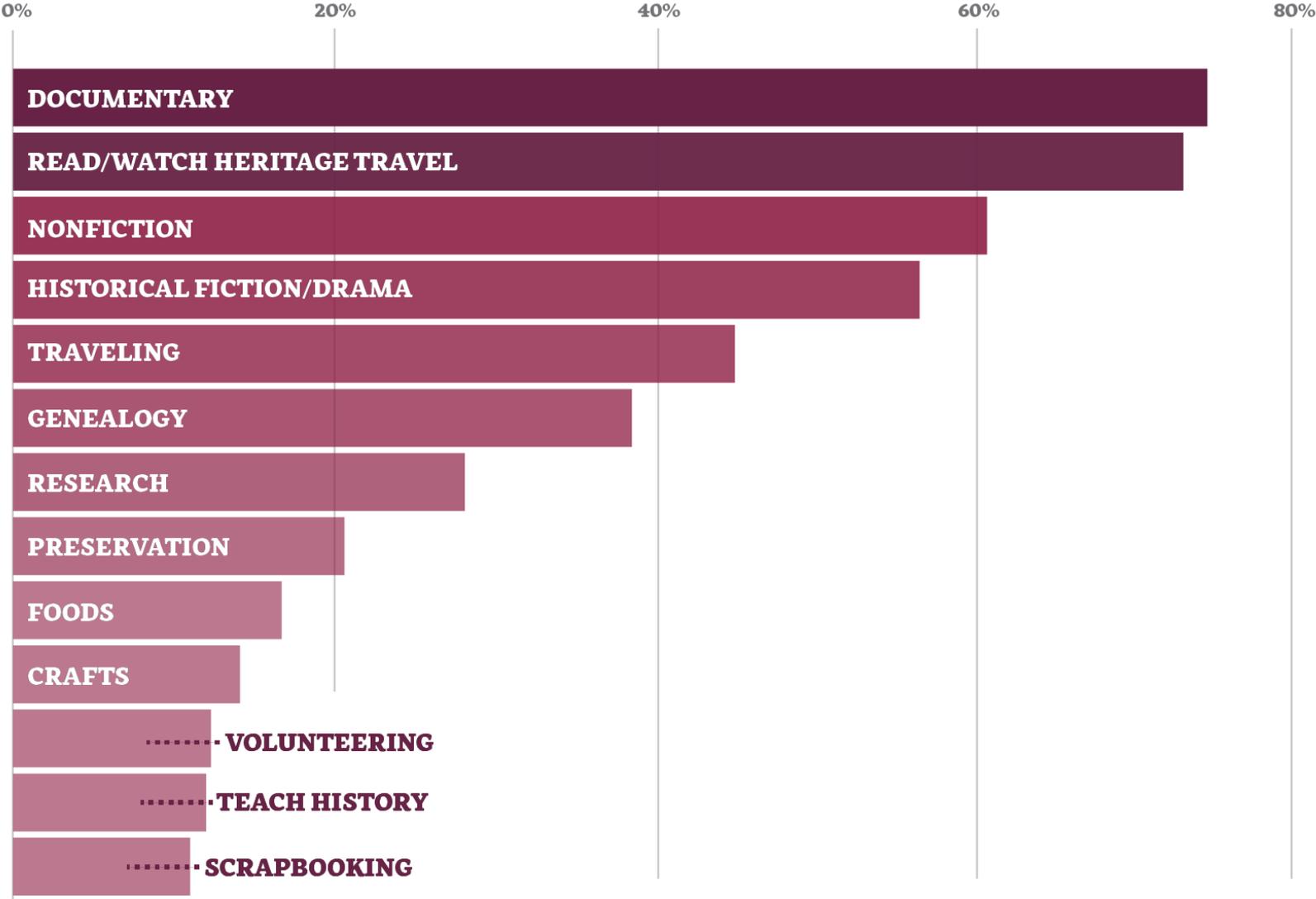
HISTORY ON *THEIR* TERMS

- Contributions to sense of place
- Control over the experience
- Not feel like work
- Be honest and inclusive



There were also major differences in how history museum-goers approach the past ... whether it is to learn and cultivate pride and unity ... or to learn and cultivate empathy and equity.

What History-Related Activities They Do



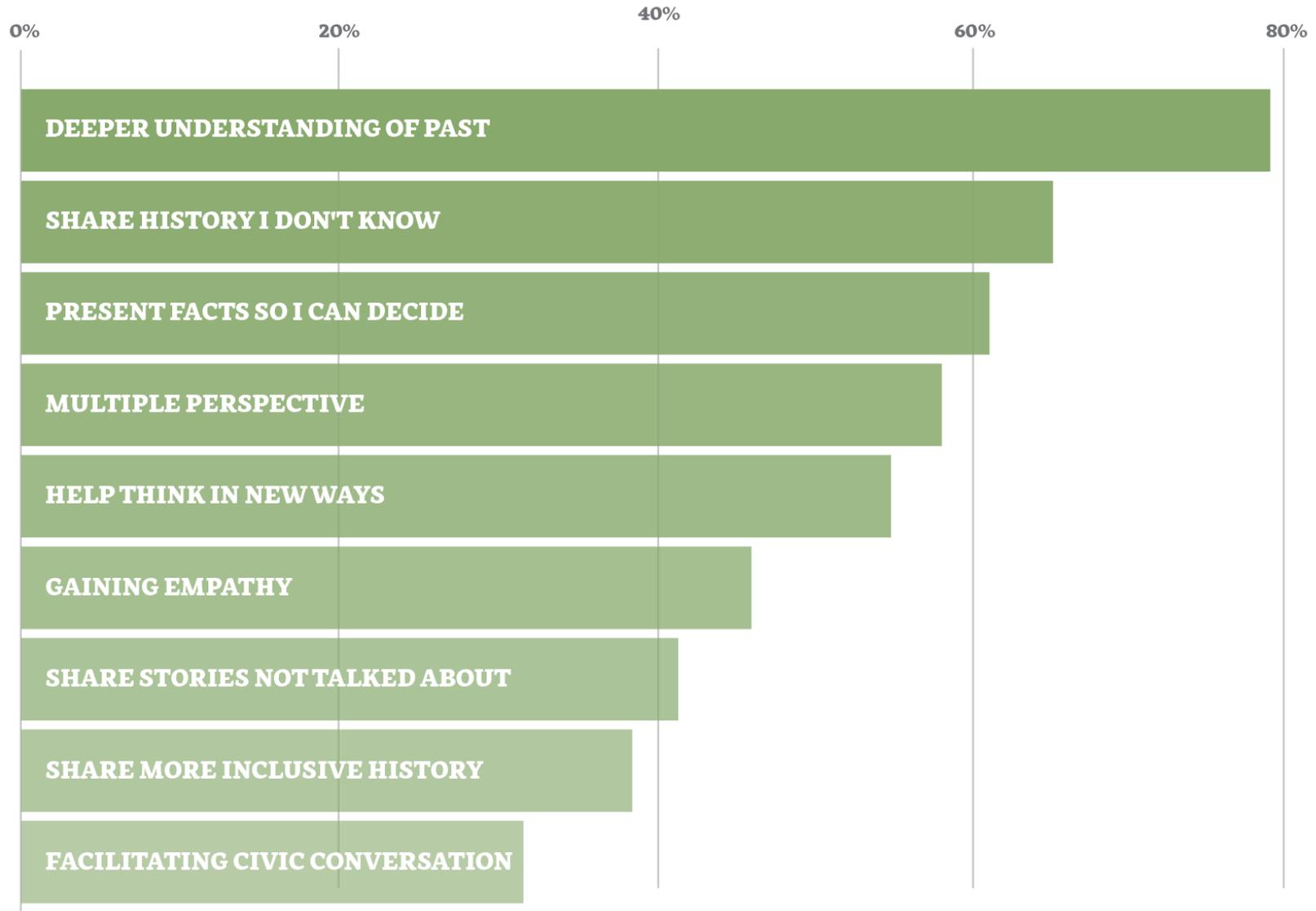
* Question not asked of broader population.

History Activities – *Museum-Goers*

Average number of activities selected:



Most Important Ways Museums & Historic Sites *Should* Talk About History?



* Question not asked of broader population.

Sharing the Past – *Museum-Goers*

There are two unifying themes for the majority of history museum-goers:

1

Gaining a deeper understanding of the past

2

Learning history they don't know

And this makes sense ... they are deeply interested in history, and extending it feeds their curiosity:

“ I love it when we can stand with the docent after the tour and he or she imparts little-known facts about the person who owned that place. ”

– HISTORYLOVER1743 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

But beyond those two themes, preferences on *how* we share the past become more tightly linked to values, attitudes, and beliefs.

And the differences between the clusters were apparent in the panel work, but quantifiable in the museum-goers survey.

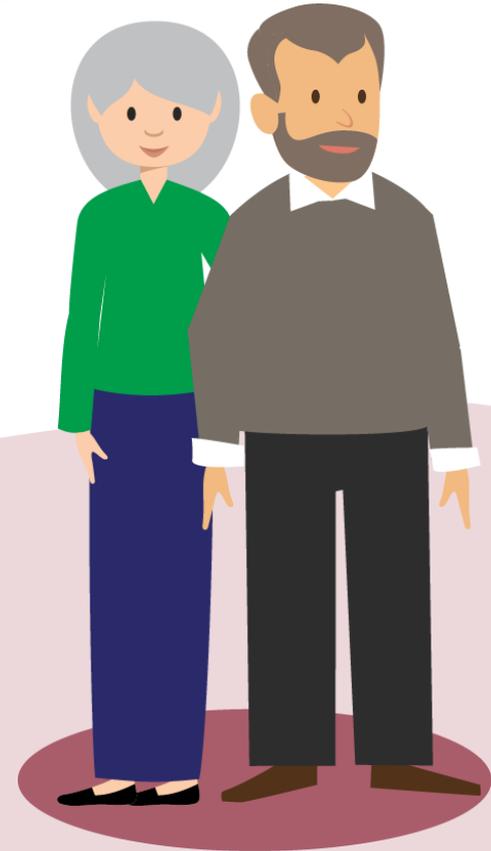
Sharing the Past – *Traditional Cluster*

The Traditional Cluster was less enthusiastic about most of these choices, and were significantly less likely to choose:

- Presenting multiple perspectives
- Being challenged to think about history in new ways
- Sharing stories of the past most people don't want to talk about
- Helping them gain more empathy/understanding of others
- Facilitating civic conversations
- And sharing a more inclusive history

But they were significantly more likely to choose:

- By presenting the facts, and letting them make up their own mind (their second most popular response)



Sharing the Past – *Traditional Cluster*

Respondents from the Traditional Cluster were *twice* as likely to choose to write in an additional comment, and most of those comments were critical and/or defensive in nature. They clustered around two themes:

1

Revisionist history and political correctness

“ History is what it is. Too late to change to please people for whom it isn't politically correct. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

“ Stop the rewriting of history you Marxist fucks. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

2

Inclusion

“ To combat 'inclusive!' ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

“ I'm tired of this 'inclusive' crap. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Sharing the Past – *Neoteric Cluster*

The Neoteric Cluster was less enthusiastic about one choice:

- By presenting the facts, and letting them make up their own mind (though over half still chose it)

But compared to the Traditional Cluster, they were significantly more likely to choose (by factors of 1.5x to 5x):

- Presenting multiple perspectives
- Being challenged to think about history in new ways
- Sharing stories of the past most people don't want to talk about
- Helping them gain more empathy/understanding of others
- Facilitating civic conversations
- And sharing a more inclusive history



Ultimately, when comparing museum-goers with broader panelists, the clear difference was in attitude about engaging with the past in the first place.

There are those who are engaged, and others who value history but see it as more work and less engaging.

But for individuals who *are* engaged with the past, sharp differences arise that are driven by their values, attitudes, and beliefs ... including how we perceive our country in the first place.

Patriotism and American Identity





TYPES OF AMERICAN PATRIOTISM (OR NOT)



BLIND PATRIOTISM:

- A concrete and uncritical support of national policies and practices
- *Can* be rooted in American nationalism
- Increases affection for in-groups
- *"The United States is the best country on earth."*



SYMBOLIC PATRIOTISM:

- More abstract and affective attachment to nation and its core values
- Separates out affection for country from support for its institutions and policies
- Increases affection for out-groups
- *"The United States is a great country ... but so are others."*



MINIMAL/NO PATRIOTIC IDENTITY:

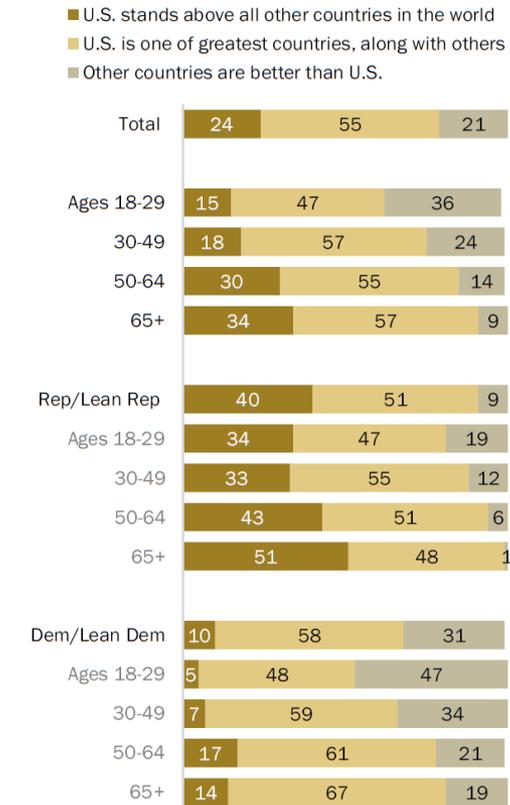
- Not part of their identity ... or feel betrayed by the United States
- Generally feel that other countries are better



AMERICAN PATRIOTISM – PEW RESEARCH CENTER²

Nearly half of young Democrats say other countries are better than the U.S.

Which of these statements best describes your opinion about the United States? (%)



Note: No answer responses not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 3-15, 2019.



AMERICAN PATRIOTISM – HISTORY MUSEUM-GOERS

The U.S. stands above all other countries in the world



The U.S. is one of the greatest countries in the world, along with some others



There are other countries/most other countries are better than the U.S.



HISTORY MUSEUM-GOERS PEW/BROADER



AMERICAN PATRIOTISM – *HISTORY MUSEUM-GOERS*



Blind Patriots much more likely to be conservative, have less inclusive attitudes

- Conservatives were 7x more likely to identify as “Blind Patriots” than liberals; <1% of conservatives said they were not that patriotic
- Less than 10% of liberals identified as Blind Patriots
- Less engaged with history than others



Symbolic Patriots are much more likely to be moderate or liberal

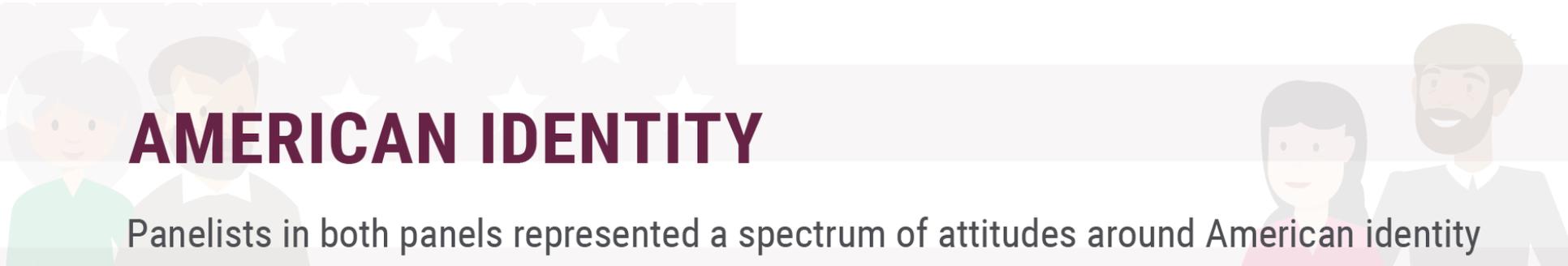
- They tended to be more inclusive than Blind Patriots
- In broader population sampling, were 50% more likely to visit history museums than Blind Patriots



No patriotic identity

- Much more likely to be liberal, but only comprise a small percentage of history museum-goers
- They were more common in broader population sampling
- Most inclusive attitudes

Panelists in both panels represented a spectrum of attitudes around American identity that lined up with their patriotic identity and values.



AMERICAN IDENTITY

Panelists in both panels represented a spectrum of attitudes around American identity

“Being an American means everything to me!”

– CHASINGHAWK
(MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“I am proud to be an American. I am the daughter of a veteran and granddaughter of WWII veterans. I was raised with a strong sense of being thankful for what we have and appreciative of the sacrifices that were made for this country to be what it is now.”

– BECKY (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“As I get older I realize more and more how lucky I am to be born American. We have so much that so many other countries do not -- very basic things like a stable government not on the daily verge of overthrow, career possibilities for everyone, civil rights, freedoms of expression and religion and sexual preference, laws against basic discrimination, and a strong culture that is flexible to allow many other cultures to thrive in it.”

– GEORGE D (BROADER PANEL)

“It is a small part of my identity, I am more than just the country I was born in.”

– ZENDIA (BROADER PANEL)

“Being American is not a significant part of my identity. Quite frankly, I’m embarrassed when I go abroad to be identified as American due to the current administration. I think nationalism, patriotism, and overly identifying with a country, culture, or religion is harmful and divisive, rather than something to take pride in.”

– ANCATDUBH1980
(MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

For Blind Patriots in the Traditional Cluster, American identity was rather straightforward.

But those in the Neoteric Cluster, which includes more Symbolic Patriots and those without patriotic identity, American identity was more complicated.

For some, there had been a shift in their American identity in recent years.

AMERICAN IDENTITY – *NEOTERIC CLUSTER*

“ Being American has always been a large part of my identity ... and until recently, I was very proud to be American and proud of the ideals that we stood for around the world. ... But in the last few years, I've really had a serious struggle with being American and what that means. I don't believe what is currently happening in the country is much to be proud of and I am truly bothered to think that anyone would associate me with some of the political values that are being espoused. So I've had to come to terms with what it means to me to be American and whether or not it's ok for me to love America unconditionally ... I'm sad. I'm sad at the way things are going and how we don't seem to be striving for some of these goals and ideals we used to. So it's less of a part of my identity now, than it was before. ”

– EVERDEE19 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“ Frankly, within the past 4 years, my association with being an American carries lots of baggage. At its base, it reaches the level of embarrassment when it comes to the direction and focus our nation has taken since 2016-17. ”

– FELICITY R. BIJOU (BROADER PANEL)

“ At 61, you would think I would have had time to figure this out. I want to be proud of our country, and until lately, I was ... after the last 3 years, I'm scared for our country and want to help to make it stay something to be proud of. ”

– CINDI H (BROADER PANEL)

But for people of color, responses
were sharper.

AMERICAN IDENTITY – *PEOPLE OF COLOR*

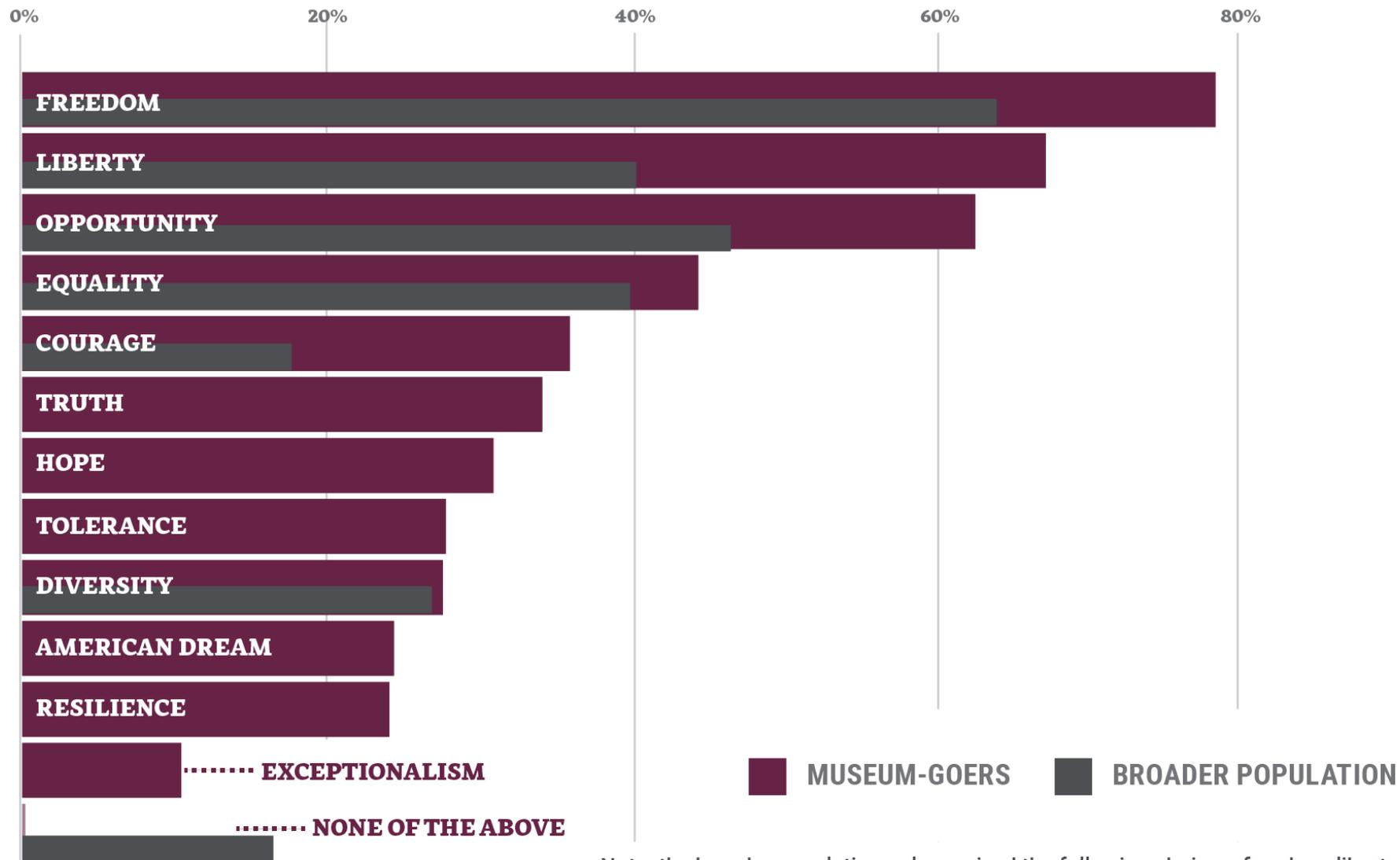
“ To be an American means to have been living in a country my whole life where I have been made to feel by White Anglo Americans to be less than. ”

– CRAMIREZ (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“ I am not particularly patriotic. I don't think America has ever been great or is currently great. I think it's OK and we still have work to do. ”

– JAMIE J (BROADER PANEL)

Which of America's Founding Ideals are Most Important to You? (Choose 5)



Note: the broader population only received the following choices: freedom, liberty, equality, diversity, courage, and opportunity, and were limited to 3 choices

FREEDOM

“Being American to me means freedom...”

– KELLY (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“Being American means being free.”

– CHILLMONGER (BROADER PANEL)

● TRADITIONAL CLUSTER VALUES

LIBERTY

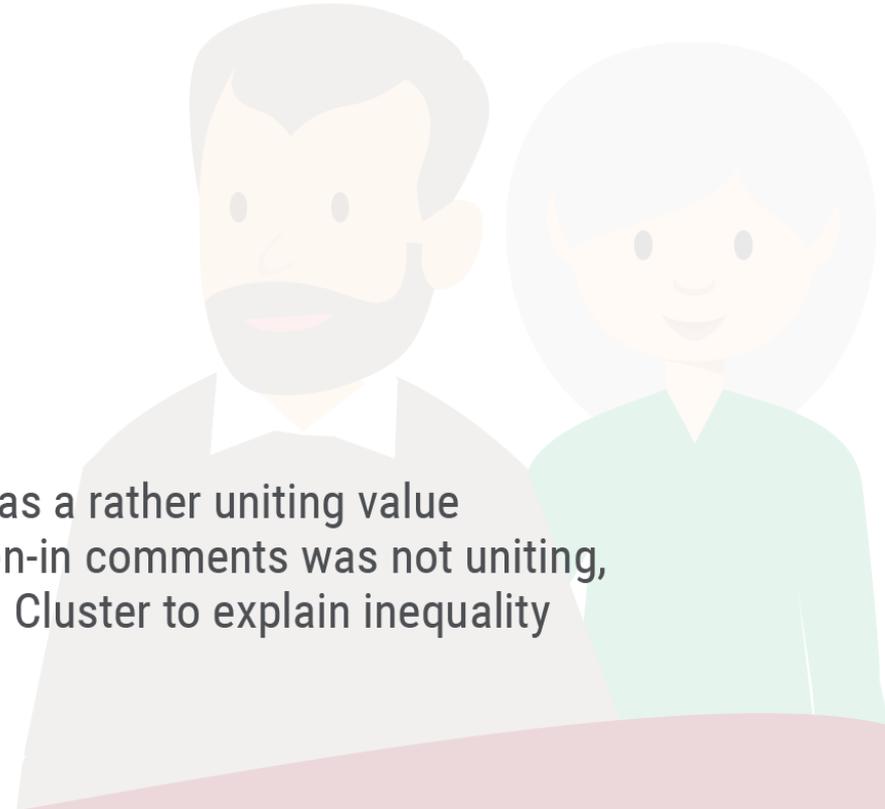
COURAGE

AMERICAN DREAM

EXCEPTIONALISM

OPPORTUNITY

- In quantitative analysis, this word appears as a rather uniting value
- BUT ... the way this word was used in written-in comments was not uniting, but instead used by some in the Traditional Cluster to explain inequality



● TRADITIONAL CLUSTER VALUES

Additionally, written-in comments and panel comments brought other themes forward:

SELF-RELIANCE, WORK ETHIC

“Earning your own way, protecting yourself and your family and working towards improving the country are what the United States was founded on.”

– DSAR93 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“... a strong work ethic that rewards with personal satisfaction and a decent standard of living.”

– GEORGE D (BROADER PANEL)

RELIGION AND SACRIFICE

Virtually *all* religious comments came from Traditional Cluster

“So, yes, I very much believe that America was founded on Christian principles and biblical foundations.”

– AERISKATE (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“True appreciation of our great country and all of the people in it, giving thanks to God and all who came before to sacrifice to give all that we have.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Religion and sacrifice came up far less in the broader panel

NEOTERIC CLUSTER VALUES

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY

TOLERANCE

Written-in addition:

IDEA THAT AMERICA DOES NOT LIVE UP TO OUR FOUNDING VALUES

“It was stated this country was founded with all people being created equal, but America, and Americans have failed at that. The founding documents must be held to the language it contains for all Americans. We need to honor those documents to make all peoples equal.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

There was also pushback within this cluster about American founding values in the first place

“There are not any particular values that I would associate with being uniquely American. For example concepts such as courage, honor, duty, freedom, ingenuity, creativity, etc. can be found in many people, no matter what country they live in.”

– ANCATDUBH1980 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

AMERICAN GREATNESS

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER

Almost goes without saying

“America is the best country in the world, without question.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

NEOTERIC CLUSTER

“Greatness” is a fraught term

“The 'make America great again' culture is infuriating because ultimately we just have a toned down version of the same problems - institutionalized racism, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, etc. Can we call ourselves great when we are a country that was literally built by slave labor and the genocide of the native people?”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY



CONFLICTING VALUES

CHANGE

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER

Values don't change

“ I think America more than ever needs to look at the ideals and values of our Founding Fathers. I realize we live in a different world, but value and ideals are eternal. The America we live in today is not what our Founders envisioned unfortunately. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

NEOTERIC CLUSTER

Values evolve as ideas, knowledge, and science expand

“ I think the most important product of the United States' founding is the Constitution which still provides the basis upon which our country functions. But the Constitution has to be used in ways to address today's questions in ways the Founders would have never expected or even desired. To be a strict constructionist does not allow for changing ideas, knowledge, scientific discoveries. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY



CONFLICTING VALUES

EQUALITY

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER

- Sense that equality exists for all now, and that actions to increase equality subverts our founding values
- More likely to distinguish between equality of *opportunity* from equality of *outcome*

“**Economic and social equity sounds like socialism and socialism SUCKS and has no place here in America. America is about equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome.**”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

“**The values and ideals are hugely relevant and they teach people how to be happy and successful. The problem is these are not being taught as they were originally implemented. They've been turned upside down. The values and ideals from America's founding stressed equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome. The responsibility you have to rely on yourself to succeed, not on government to bail you out for your bad choices or lack of initiative. That you don't wrap yourself in victim-hood and blame others for your failings.**”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

NEOTERIC CLUSTER

- True equality doesn't exist for all now, and we have much work to do
- More likely to bring up equity

“**We are still being challenged to achieve equality and true freedom.**”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

“**We still have work to do on living up to our values and ideals, legacy of slavery, and economic and social inequity.**”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY



CONFLICTING VALUES

UNITY VS. DIVERSITY

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER

- More likely to see these terms in opposition
- Seeking unity is strongly desired
 - And diversity inhibits unity and strength

“... as if diversity in and of itself was a virtue. It is NOT. Not unless we all share the same values and we all work together for our communities and country. WE ARE AMERICANS. WE ARE IN IT TOGETHER. What divides us makes us weaker. What unites us makes us strong and vibrant ...”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

“If you emphasize division (diversity) you will drive people apart ...”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Tolerance = putting up with ... if we can find unity and common purpose

NEOTERIC CLUSTER

- Less likely to find conflict between two values
- Celebrating diversity is strongly desired
 - And diversity creates strength

“We no longer have a common story. Rather than adding to the braids of our narrative with greater understanding and additional voices, our story has frayed into numerous strands, which are weak and limited - or no rope at all, with no understanding of the past for way too many people. We need to work together to develop a thicker rope, a stronger narrative that ties us together to tackle the challenges of the future. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Tolerance = celebrating differences, which make us stronger

VALUE OF INCLUSION

At the root of much of this is widely varying attitudes around the value of inclusion ... and they correlate strongly with patriotic identity

RATES OF INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES BY PATRIOTIC IDENTITY:

 **Blind Patriots: 1/5** 

 **Symbolic Patriots: 1/2** 

 **Not patriotic: 2/3** 

FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT PATRIOTIC, THEIR INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES APPEAR TO BE MOTIVATING THAT CHOICE

- Most sharply critical of U.S. for not living up to freedom and equality of all
- More likely people of color, younger, and more liberal
- But for Blind Patriots, these attitudes can feel un-American

AMERICAN IDENTITY: TAKEAWAYS

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER

- Prefers an America that aligns with their more traditional values ... which tends to make them Blind Patriots
- *Most* desired what they perceive as a benign status quo, which can include:
 - Tolerance is something you put up with
 - We are not hyphenated Americans
 - People of color should assimilate into existing mainstream culture
 - Desire for unity and a common story ... which tends to be celebratory and not that inclusive
- But *some* are fighting hard for a celebratory white history ... and deliberately avoiding or loudly condemning more inclusive stories
- In broader population, the Traditional Cluster is less likely to visit history museums
 - But a significant segment of history museum-goers are Traditional

NEOTERIC CLUSTER

- Prefers an America that promotes equality and diversity ... which tends to make them Symbolic Patriots or to not have patriotic identity
- *Most* desired a more inclusive America, as they felt it aligned with ideals of our country
 - Tolerance means acceptance
 - We are all our own cultures/identities
 - There are many stories that contribute to our country's story
 - Equity matters
- More likely to visit history museums, casually or regularly

Thus, we can conclude that those who are in the Traditional Cluster who are engaged with history are *already* visiting history museums ... and the others in this cluster are among the least likely to visit.

But while those in the Neoteric Cluster are more likely to visit history museums, many are casual visitors who could be encouraged to visit more often ... and some are choosing not to visit because they don't think museums are inclusive enough.

Audience growth, is most likely to come from those in the Neoteric Cluster.

But history museums can't ignore
the significant percentage of
engaged history museum-goers
who are from the Traditional
Cluster.

Lenses of American History



The evidence from this research makes clear that our values, attitudes, and beliefs strongly affect how we view the past.

Fortunately ... most people admit this.

“
I certainly assume
my own perspective
shapes my view of
history, and as much
as I'd like to be
open-minded, I tend
to put a lot more
weight on historical
accounts that
confirm my biases.

– HASTINGS (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

I think it's
impossible for our
values, attitudes,
and beliefs not to
affect how we view
the past. Let's face
it, we interpret the
past through our
current
understanding of
what it means to be
human.

– SUSANNE M. (BROADER PANEL)

”



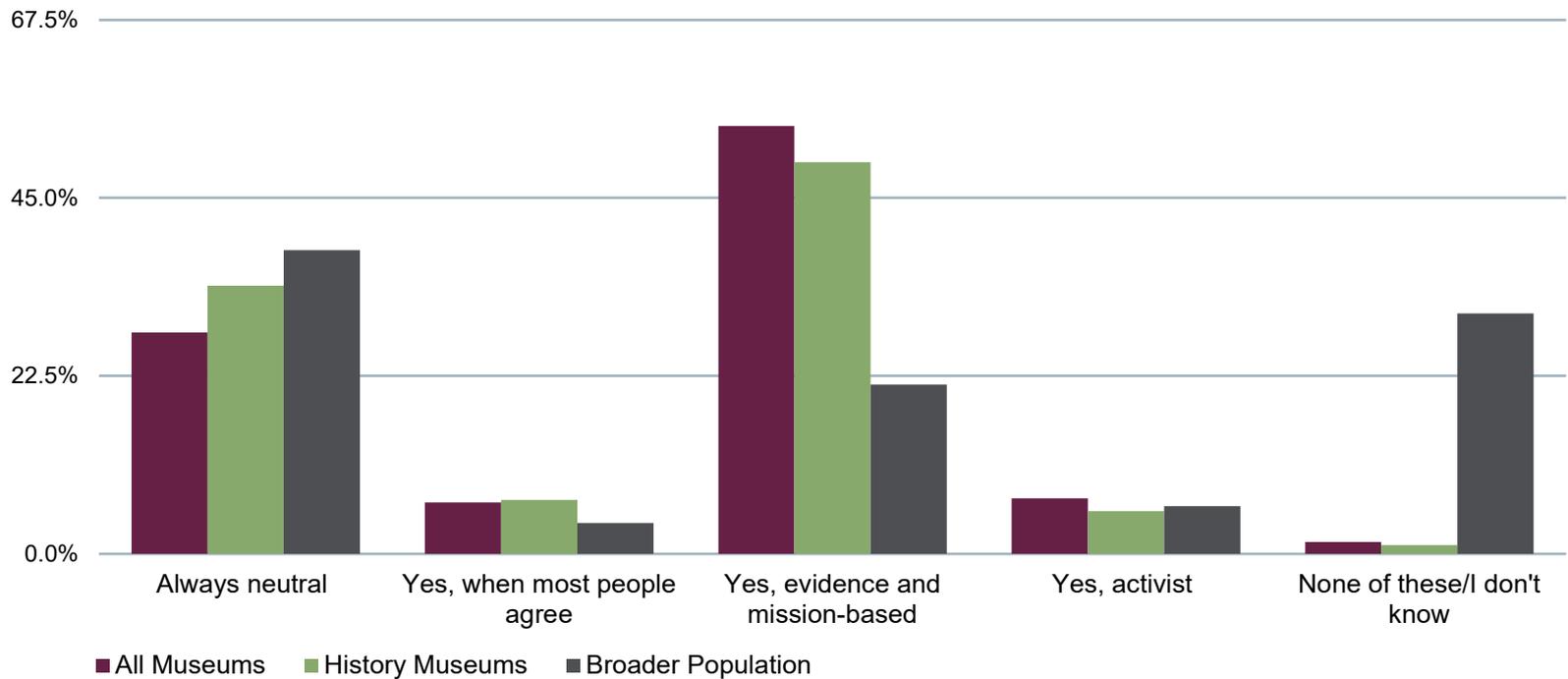
LENSES OF AMERICAN HISTORY

People's values, attitudes, and beliefs strongly influenced how they examined and considered American history

- Perceptions of museum neutrality
- Historical empathy
- Difficult history
- Whitewashing the past
- Sharing *everyone's* stories
- Race and inclusion



SHOULD MUSEUMS TAKE A POSITION





PERCEPTIONS OF MUSEUM NEUTRALITY

Individuals who identified as conservative were 5.5x more likely than self-identified liberals to say “always neutral” (55% vs. 10%)

“I think history can bring people together in a museum because it should be a neutral setting where people can explore and make their own decisions. Yes, I believe museums should remain neutral ...”

– SEAN (BROADER PANEL)

Self-identified liberals were 2.2x more likely to say “evidence-backed position” (68% vs. 31% of conservatives)

“ 'Neutral middle ground' sounds so damning....isn't 'The Truth' what we should aspire to? If I go to a WWII museum that has a display about the concentration camps and genocide that says maybe it did happen, maybe it didn't, we're being neutral, I will not want to be a patron.”

– WOODBA (BROADER PANEL)



PERCEPTIONS OF MUSEUM NEUTRALITY

In reality, however, there is no neutral position



No! Neutrality is impossible...

– ELLEN (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

History is not neutral, so a museum should not be either.

– HAKIMBRUE (BROADER PANEL)

The middle ground is hard to define and will actually be different for different people. What someone feels is the middle might seem polarizing to someone else.

– ASHB (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)





BIAS

Traditionals were more likely to see bias in how history is presented *today*, but not so much the past.

For Neoterics, bias is more often seen in how history was presented *in the past*...and they want a more inclusive history presented today.

“
A return to an accurate view of history.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

“
I think rather than catering to the botched history most of us grew up on, historical sites and museums should focus on the facts without withholding or sugar-coating details.

– HARLIE (BROADER PANEL)



HISTORICAL EMPATHY

MORE TRADITIONAL

- Say they exhibit more historical empathy because they don't judge people of the past by the morals of today
- But they seem to *feel* personally judged by those past events ... and some appear to feel shame or guilt

MORE NEOTERIC

- Say they exhibit more historical empathy because they consider those who were harmed in the past, and apply what they feel is a basic standard of humanity to events of the past
- But they don't *feel* personally judged by those past events ... and appear to feel more remorse



DIFFICULT HISTORY

Most say that history museums have an obligation to share difficult history

“ It’s their most important obligation in my mind.

– TC (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

“ History museums are obligated to be truthful, and not exploring difficult realities of the past (or present) is essentially a lie-of-omission. If museums choose not to present information because it might be painful, they’re contributing to the myth-building of culture and that can be a dangerous path.

– TIMBH (BROADER PANEL)

”

But there is division on why and how ... and when it comes down to it, even *if*.



DIFFICULT HISTORY

MORE TRADITIONAL

“ I truly believe that museums and historic sites need to tell all the truth about historic events. There is no need to apologize or whitewash history - it happened, and we learned from it. „

– SCARLETT (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

MORE NEOTERIC

“ People, especially in this day and age, are asking for this history and asking for places to come clean ... I think it's a form of reconciliation to at least tell these people's stories and tell them as individuals. „

– MARR (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



DIFFICULT HISTORY

MORE TRADITIONAL

“I feel that American history has been co-opted and turned unfairly into a net negative. I would like to see a more positive (not jingoistic, just not self-loathing) perspective return to our view of history.”

– BROTHER MOON (BROADER PANEL)

MORE NEOTERIC

“It absolutely HAS to be told. If those uncomfortable things are not spoken about, lessons from past mistakes will never be gleaned, and the US will continue to have this unacceptable aversion to talking about race, privilege, and class.”

– SNAILSA (BROADER PANEL)



WHITEWASHING THE PAST

MORE TRADITIONAL

- Perceived to happen when monuments are removed
 - BUT ... they resist a more inclusive sharing of the past in museums

“I feel we focus too much on slavery and trying to erase history that's offensive to people's feelings.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

MORE NEOTERIC

- Happens all the time to make white men look good
 - Which is why monuments need to come down ... they make white men look good and whitewash the harms

“Confederate flags and monuments are uncalled for. Our country needs to pay more attention to the fact that slavery happened and we cannot just ignore that. We need to teach about slavery and the men who kept the institution alive. These men need to be less glorified than they are. America needs to own up to its mistakes and know that our history is ugly.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY



SHARING *EVERYONE'S* STORIES

MORE TRADITIONAL

- General consensus of yes
- But ...

“I'm tired of hearing about the minorities and emphasizing things that wouldn't even make a footnote of a white person had done the same.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

MORE NEOTERIC

- General consensus of yes
- With a moral imperative ...

“History is written by the victor and too often they fail to include the problems they had themselves. We have been the same in our treatment of minorities, American Indians, indentured servants, Japanese Americans, etc. When we continue to gloss over these items, we sometimes continue to mistreat the group because the way we wrote history appears to justify our treatment.”

– CHARLES LL (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

That extends to our country's
founding stories.



WHICH FOUNDING STORIES?

Traditional Cluster felt balance was everyone's stories, but *especially* the Founding Fathers

“I think the Founding Fathers did a great job and their values are still valid today, though sadly not entirely embraced some of the public ... The size of the exhibit devoted to the role of blacks in the Revolutionary War in the local Revolutionary War museum would lead the uninformed to believe that they played a major role. I call that revisionist history. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Neoteric Cluster felt balance was including the Founding Fathers, but emphasizing a more diverse and honest history

“The founding stories of our country are not romanticized in my mind in any way. They are mostly stories of a country that was taken by force. Although the end product we have here today, in my view is great, the way we went about obtaining the current state we are in is very deplorable. First our country was founded because rich white men did not want to pay their taxes. Then our country expanded by stealing it from the natives. All these stories are very important because it's who we are. That doesn't make it right though. ”

– JOSH S (BROADER PANEL)



WHICH FOUNDING STORIES?

And the Neoteric Cluster didn't hesitate to be critical of how our country was founded

“I think it is insulting to Native Americans to use the words 'founding' when referring to America. It is an entitled perspective that assumes everything began when 'you' arrived. ”

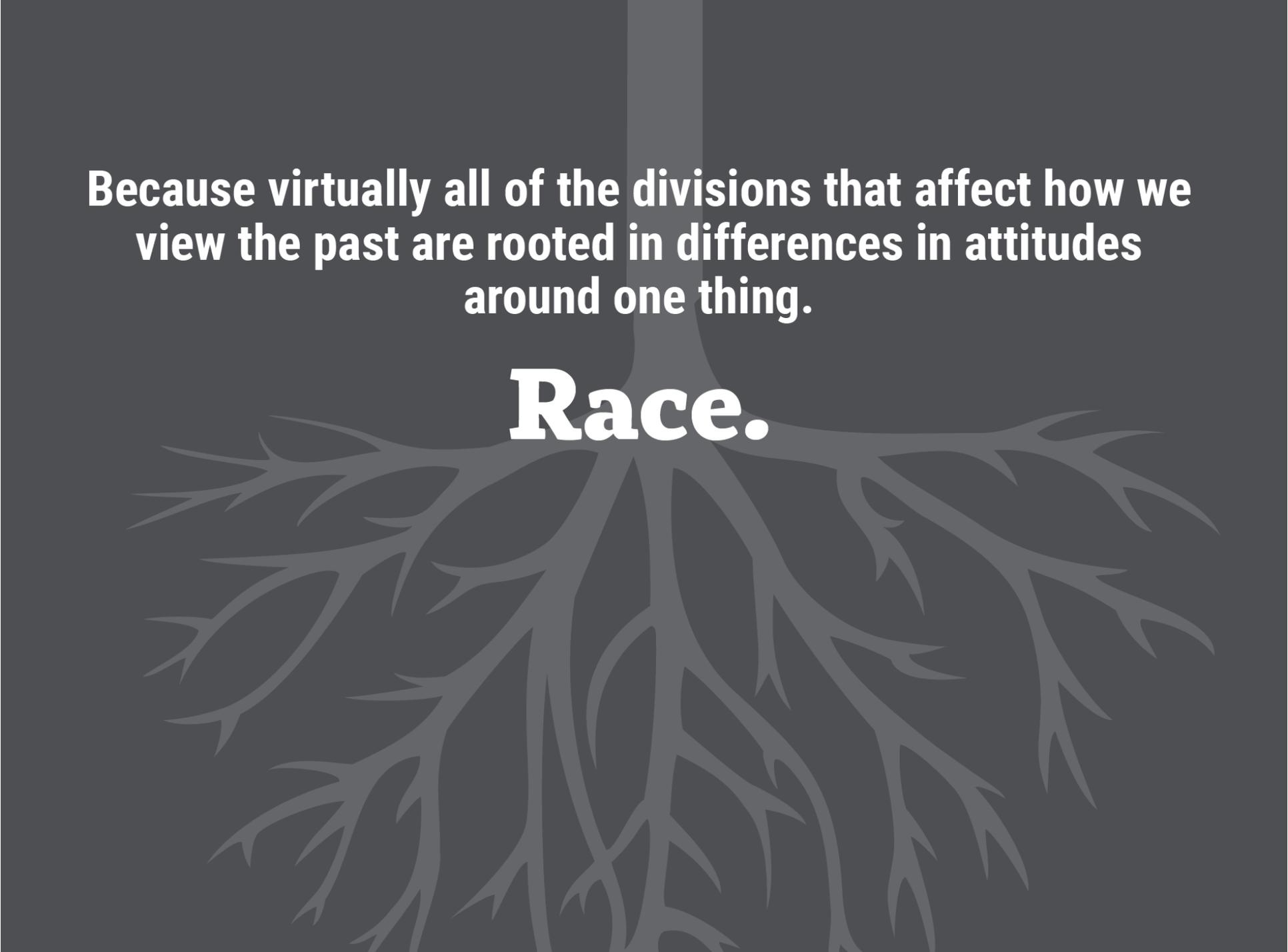
– HISHANDMAIDEN
(MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“The founding stories are a mythology to uphold white supremacy and control over the stories of the other folks who were here before Anglo Saxons. The Hispanics, the American Indians, and those who were brought here as enslaved people to make whites wealthy and run an economy. That is the true founding of America, built on land theft and genocide, and then racial, ethnic, and linguistic erasure.”

– CRAMIREZ
(MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“I am amazed at the courage it must have taken to come and settle a new land and build a country...and equally amazed at how ruthless and arrogant the settlers had to be to come here and take the land away from the people already here.”

– ZENDIA (BROADER PANEL)



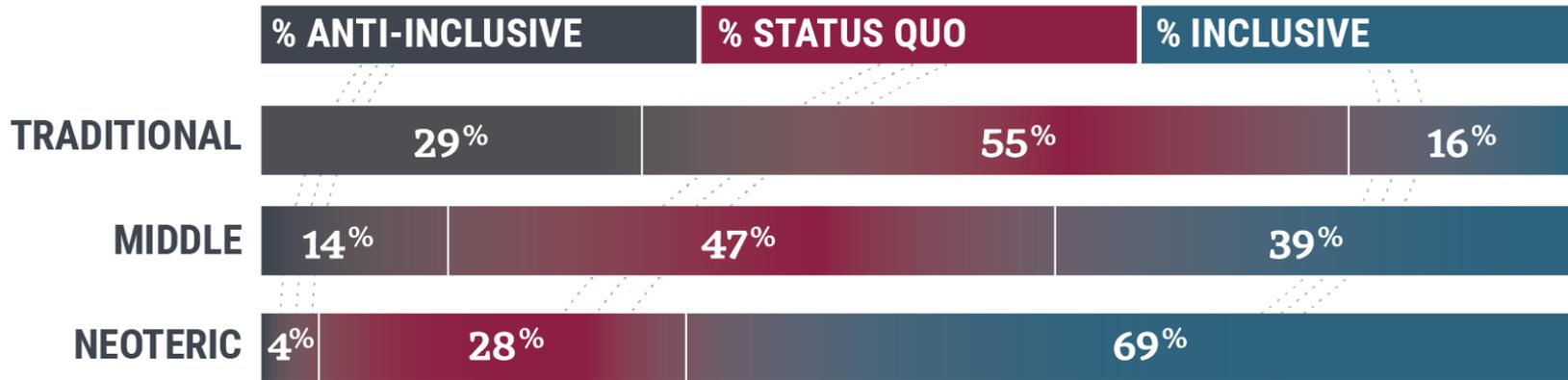
Because virtually all of the divisions that affect how we view the past are rooted in differences in attitudes around one thing.

Race.

The divisions between the two clusters here are deep ... divisive ... and there is a great deal of finger-pointing.

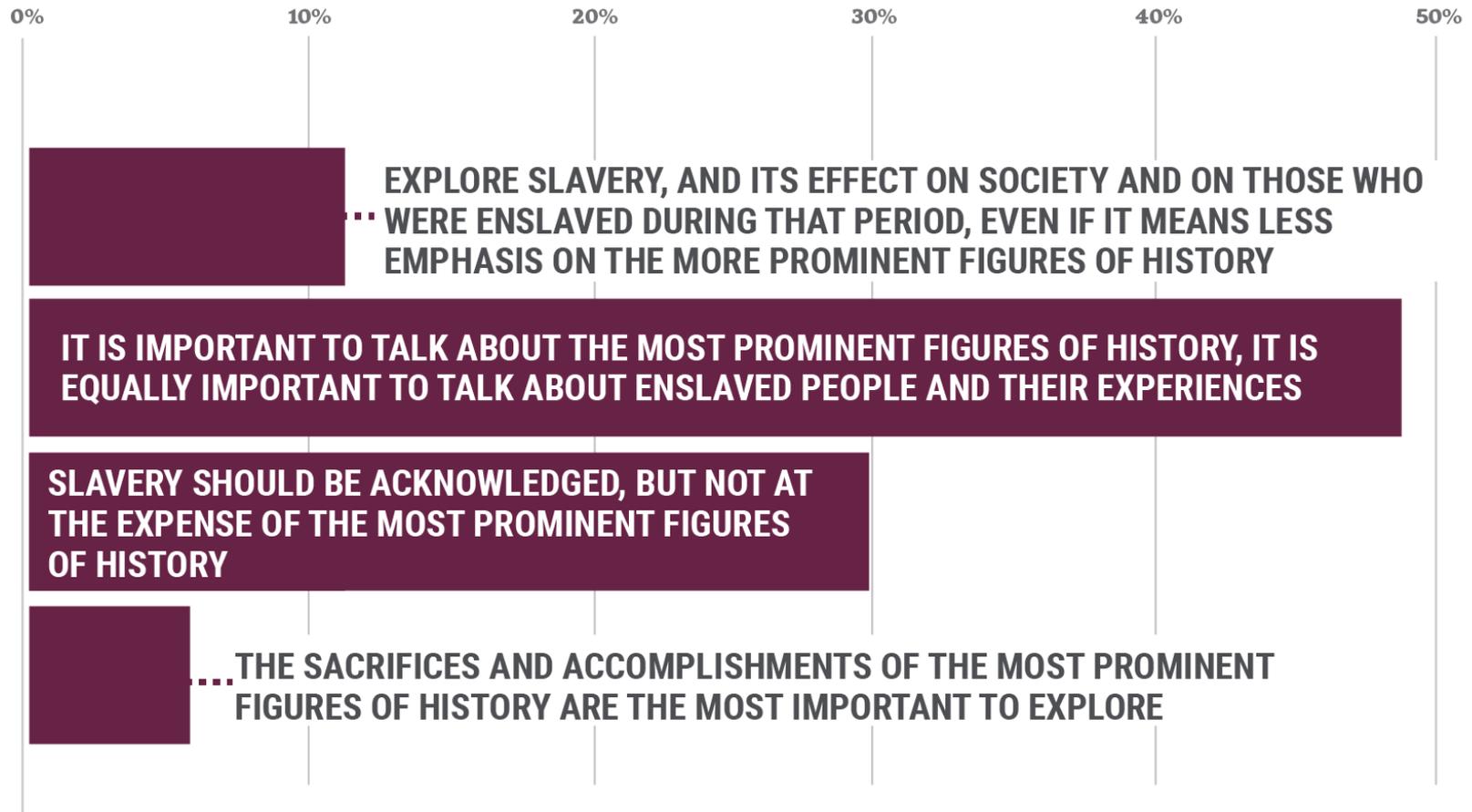


INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES BY CLUSTER (ESTIMATE)

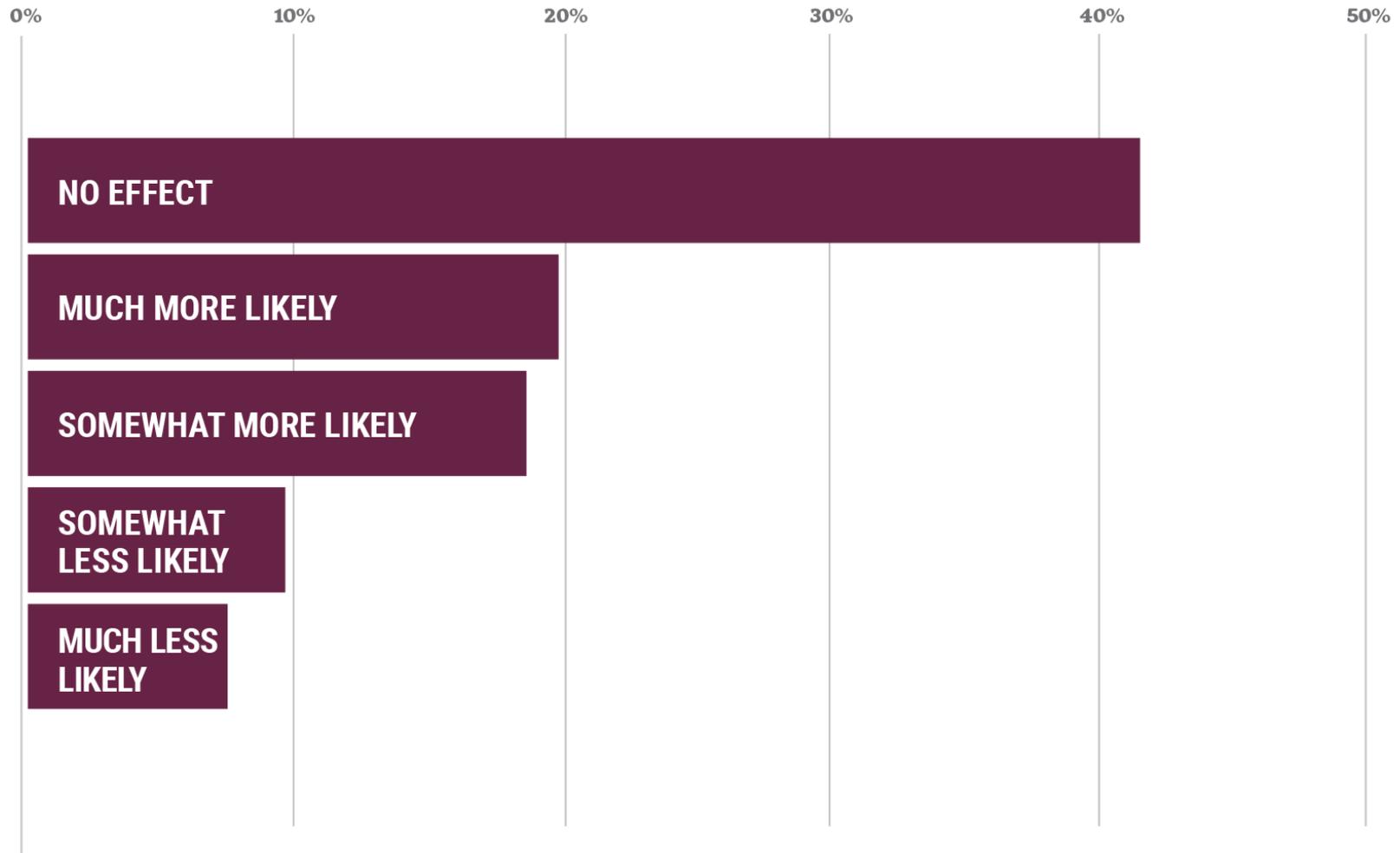


- ✘ **ANTI-INCLUSIVE:** Can range from extreme white nationalists to those who actively avoid any inclusive content
- 📄 **STATUS QUO:** Neither seeks out nor avoids inclusive content; largely satisfied with long-standing presentations of history. Exposure to inclusive history can range from none to quite a bit.
- 🕒 **INCLUSIVE:** Actively seeks out inclusive content and/or explicitly wants museums to include inclusive stories of the past

When Discussing Slavery, What is Most Important?



How Likely to Visit Museums/Sites that Discuss Slavery Thoroughly?





INTERPRETING SLAVERY



- 80% say that a “thorough” interpretation will either not affect *or would* increase their visitation
 - Both museum-goers and the broader population sample
- Majority of museum-goers say slavery demands *at least* equal treatment to the stories of the more “prominent” figures of the past





INTERPRETING SLAVERY

- Those who say they would be less likely to visit if you interpreted slavery “thoroughly” are the LEAST likely to visit history museums in the first place
- Whereas there is a persistent thread in the broader research that not being inclusive *enough* keeps audiences away



INTERPRETING SLAVERY

The overwhelming consensus of the Neoteric cluster is that it is your moral imperative to interpret slavery thoroughly and openly

“ Please keep up the good work you have begun doing to educate visitors about multiple layers of history, including about women and slavery. DO NOT give in to the reactionaries who only want a sanitized, fictionalized, 'Scarlett O'Hara' view of history. Their (willful?) ignorance is a major factor in why we are in the dire political and cultural situation we are in now.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY



SHARING *EVERYONE'S* STORIES: PRACTICE

**And many in the Neoteric Cluster are demanding it
(while also finger-pointing)**

“ History is written by the victors. There are few Americans that have delved into history beyond legend and myth, including many in Congress and government service. Museums often support legend and myth as history ... ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

“ Our country was founded on rejection of some 'old world' values; for religious and economic 'freedom', at first, and then as a tax revolt against foreign governance. However, we brought a fundamental tenet of the old world with us: while it was OK to reject limitations that had been imposed on us it remained OK to impose limitations on others so we (essentially white men of property) could prosper. The Puritans fled religious discrimination - but exercised strict religious intolerance. Our Founding Fathers rejected foreign governance in the name of 'freedom' but held African Americans in slavery and imposed limitations on women all while committing genocide against Native Americans. Nearly all 'Americans' today are descended from immigrants -- but immigration is now 'bad and destroying the country'. A mixed legacy indeed. The best historic sites and museums recognize the accomplishments of the past without losing sight of the sacrifices made, and imposed on others, to realize those accomplishments. Our stated values of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' haven't, and won't be, achieved until they have been achieved by all. Understanding how we got to where we are today, with all its positives and negatives, is crucial to becoming what we could be in the future. ”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

But *some* from the Traditional Cluster are more skeptical.

First, the majority of the Traditional Cluster tend to support the status quo ... which isn't an endorsement, but neither is it perceived as a problem.

And *some* in the Traditional Cluster *do* want slavery thoroughly examined.

But there is a significant segment of visitors and *some* potential visitors who have concerns ... and they are virtually all from the Traditional Cluster.

Among this segment of the Traditional Cluster, there was a strong sense of defensiveness, as well as loss aversion as they felt that “their” history was being sacrificed for history that wasn’t as important.



CONCERNS



IMBALANCED INTERPRETATION ... OVERSHADOWING “IMPORTANT” HISTORY



**Meaning more and more historical places
and museums are focusing too much on
apologizing for the institution of slavery
and not enough on the actual history.**

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY





CONCERNS



THAT THE EVENTS OF THE PAST THEY VALUE MOST WILL BE ERASED



**It really hurts me to hear people run this
Land that I love, down. To dig up the
wrongs of the past and try and take away
for achievements that were hard fought,
and make the past something that should
be erased.**

– POTTERYLOVE (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)





CONCERNS



PERCEIVED NEGATIVE JUDGEMENT OF FOUNDING FATHERS



We should not demonize the Founders for what was the normal for their world.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY





CONCERNS



LACKS CONTEXT ... EVEN IF THE CONTEXT IS OUTSIDE THE MISSION



**In controversial social matters,
as much information as possible
should be also shared. Such as there were
Black slaves in America there was also
white slaves in Africa and wars in Africa
also over slavery of whites-called the
Barbery Wars.**

– APPRECIATION (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)





CONCERNS



RESISTANCE TO IMPLICATION THAT THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY CONTINUES TO AFFECT AFRICAN AMERICANS TODAY



The current attitude in America seems to be that if you don't agree, you can't be friends or even get along. Those of us who choose (or chose) to work hard are entitled to what we earn. Those who can't work should receive out assistance. Slavery was wrong, but we should not be penalized now for something that happened so long ago, further those descended from slaves are not entitled to reparations.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY





GRAPHIC LANGUAGE AROUND SLAVERY INTERPRETATION

“
What I don't want is for certain aspects of history, something like the scourge of slavery, shoved down my throat at every turn and stop. Sorry...it was a horrible time and practice as we all know and acknowledge...but it's not the only thing to be talked about regarding some of our Founders homes. Of late...it's being crammed down visitors' throats.

– CHASINGHAWK (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



And much of this is driven by one
thing:

FEAR.



THE FUTURE

SOCIETY

AMERICA

Fears

TRUTH

THEMSELVES

The anti-inclusive segment of the Traditional Cluster was defensive, fearful, at times angry, and *sometimes* offensive.



ANTI-INCLUSIVE COMMENTARY

“

We are changing history to be politically correct and history is being changed to pander to special interest groups. One would think the Civil War was all about slavery ... I dare say the descendants of Africans introduced to the New World through slavery are much better off than their ancestors that remained in Africa.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

”



ANTI-INCLUSIVE COMMENTARY

“

Please return the focus to our Founding Fathers. We are sick and tired of having to hear about slaves.

The majority of people who visit historical sites are NOT interested in hearing about slavery. We want to learn the history of OUR ancestors.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

”



ANTI-INCLUSIVE COMMENTARY

They are completely relevant, and if true history was taught, you leftist, Marxist sons of bitches that are tearing down our monuments and ruining our museums would be taking helicopter rides.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

But there are also individuals in the Traditional Cluster who may fall in the “status quo” category of inclusion ... but are also conveying discomfort with a more inclusive history.



DISCOMFORT WITH INCLUSION

“ No one wants to be lectured to or feel somehow accused for wrongdoing for having a family history that is out of style.

– GUSSIE (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

Roots are so important. Almost everyone is on each other about respecting someone else's cultures/practices but hardly anyone these days wants to admit that 'white' history is also a culture or roots of people in this country.

– MELLENY (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



Individuals from the Neoteric Cluster also explored ideas of discomfort around inclusion ... but typically framed it as productive discomfort.



PRODUCTIVE DISCOMFORT

“There are particularly good places in Oklahoma to experience Native culture and hear how history has treated them, and they are doing a wonderful job telling their stories. When they show a map of where their people lived before they were forced to leave, and you realize it was your ancestors who took their land, you bet it makes you squirm, and it should.

– MEHITABLE OVIATT (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

Emotions are so, so, so key. If you ask me, this is the most important part ... Experiences, especially dark history, can make us feel bad emotions. It can make us feel conflicted and uncomfortable because they can challenge things that we thought were true. But I think that museums are safe spaces for those kinds of discoveries.

– MARR (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



And some from the Neoteric Cluster
did their share of fingerpointing
towards anti-inclusive attitudes.



INCLUSIVE FINGERPOINTING

AND TO BE CLEAR, I know a lot of my responses mention the way we gloss over slavery and racism and genocide in general, and since people in the past have taken that to mean I have something against white people, I will say now that that is far from the case. I have a problem with people being treated like crap because of the way they were born. I have a problem with people contently living in ignorance and people knowingly adding to the problem. I have a problem with a government built on the backs of another nation's people continuing to hold them back simply through manipulation. But more than all of that, I DESPISE the fact that we've all become so complacent and content with it. We have the right to overthrow the government if we want to, but we don't. We live in ignorance, in fear, with the thought 'What could I do? I'm just one person,' and I fully admit even I have those thoughts because it's true. We no longer live with a government we can overthrow. We live with a fortified oligarchy that would have us and has had us, executed for even a peaceful protest.

– HARLIE (BROADER PANEL)



INCLUSIVE FINGERPOINTING

“ Their comments included things like they found it depressing when they were just looking for a day out, it was boring because all the guides talked about was how hard life was for slaves, that the guides were exaggerating how bad slavery was, and even that the guides were racist to white people for talking about masters’ cruelty and things like shackles, whipping, and rape. These visitors did not want to learn about history, they wanted a *Gone With the Wind* re-enactment. I don’t feel like there is any hope for people who refused to listen to uncomfortable stories and chose to complain instead of thinking about what was hard to hear.

– ANCATDUBH1980 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



All of these fears and emotions, on both sides, are palpable and strong ... and a central part of how people think about the past and this country.

Understanding the emotions underlying the differences is vital:

Some in the Traditional Cluster feel guilt, shame, and loss.

Some in the Neoteric Cluster feel regret and remorse.

BOTH feel anger, especially towards each other.

And they all want you to present
what they think is a balanced
narrative.



SEEKING BALANCE

FOR THE TRADITIONAL CLUSTER:

How history was presented in the past was balanced ... and the addition of more inclusive stories has put it out of balance, to the loss of what they consider to be “important” history.

FOR THE NEOTERIC CLUSTER:

How history was presented in the past was imbalanced ... and the addition of more inclusive stories has put it closer to balanced.

This imbalance underscores why there is no neutral position.

And this all affects what they want
for America in 2026.

America: 2026



Consensus that everyone wants what is best for our families, communities, and country in 2026.

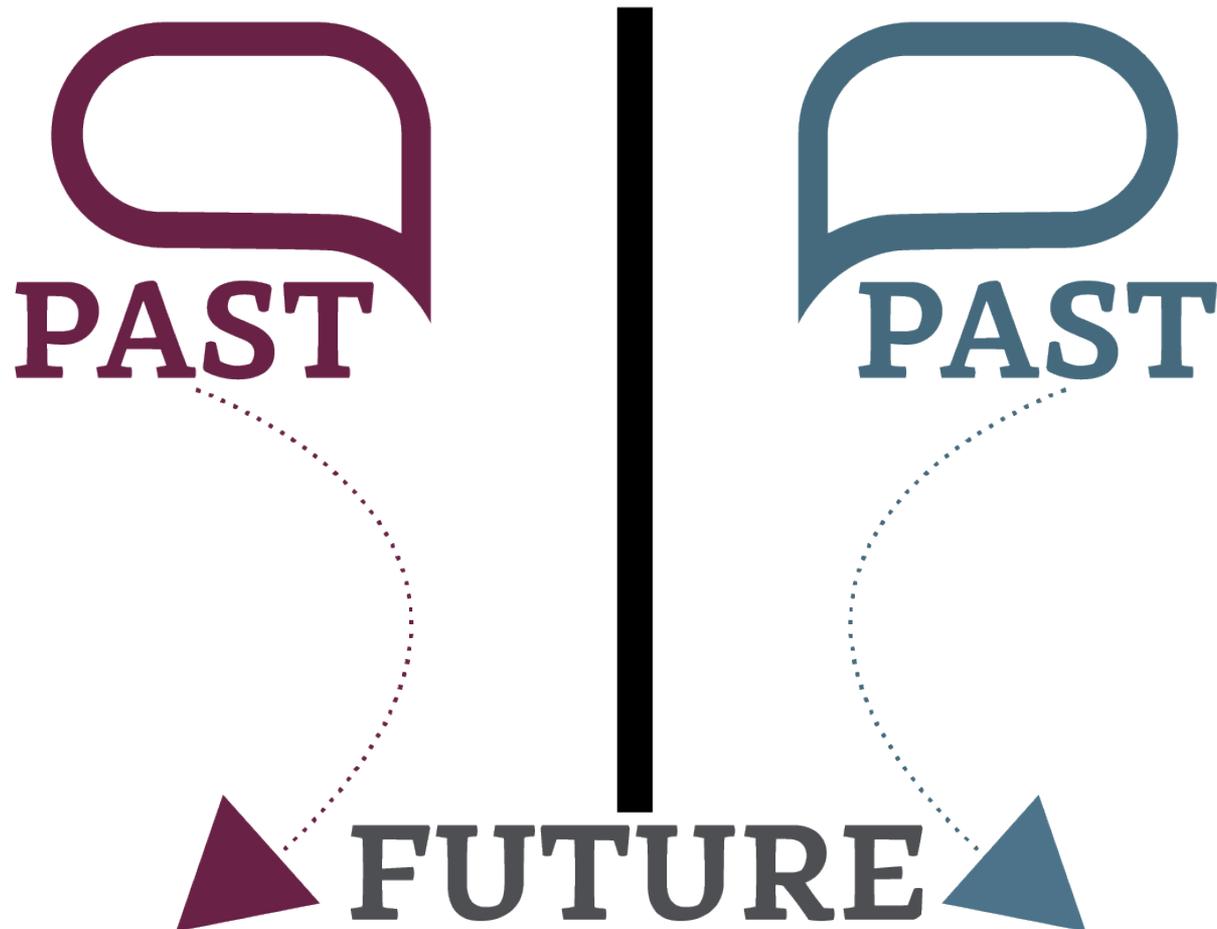
And many wished for a less polarized and divisive public discourse.

But there were strong differences in opinion about what that means.

Some point to the past as the ideal
to go *back* to.

Others point to a more equitable
society they hope to find *in the
future*.

And if we can't agree on the past, that makes coming together for the *future* all the harder.





HOPES FOR 2026

MORE TRADITIONAL

Focus on greatness, pride, maintaining rights and liberty, honoring the past, and, for some, religion

“Return to the values that made this country strong: self-independence, acknowledging God as the Divine inspiration for our founding documents and the need for our culture to return to a moral society, emphasizing standards of truth, virtue, liberty and freedom.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

MORE NEOTERIC

Focus on inclusion, diversity, equity, with a number also commenting on fighting climate change and fair elections

“More equality for all. More universal care for citizens and acceptance and appreciation of diversity and it's beneficial effects to our society.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

There was *little* agreement.

Only 7% of Traditional Cluster made comments that fell into the themes common among Neoteric Cluster.

And only 3% of Neoteric Cluster made comments that fell into the themes common among the Traditional Cluster.

MORE TRADITIONAL

MORE NEOTERIC

I would like to see the radical leftist/socialist attempted overthrow of our country defeated and the leaders imprisoned. Our 250th should include the celebration and preservation of our great Republic and Americas victory over Socialism/Communism.

I don't want the Founding Fathers' ideals and who they were be forgotten. Without them, we would not have the nation we have today. To demonize them because they either had slaves, didn't do everything in their power to end slavery, or both should NOT be the only thing that defines who they were and what they mean to our country. They sacrificed greatly to do what they did, and for people today to say that regardless of that great sacrifice, the only thing that should define them is their position on slavery and their 'whiteness' is extremely harmful, and a gross mischaracterization of both their accomplishments and our Nation. It does nothing to help the discord, or promote good will. We need to promote our Founding Fathers, and the good things our Nation has done for the people around the world.

Acceptance of the varied fabric of American Life and an appreciation of the past as well as hope for the future. A coming to terms with both the good aspects of our history and it's figures and an acceptance of the negative aspects of our figures and history. Nothing is perfect and everything has value, even if only to show us our failures so that we might learn from them.

I'd like to see an acknowledgment that despite what the Founding Fathers intended, people in the US are not treated equally and that efforts will be made to change that. This starts with education for everyone and opportunities to succeed at anything one chooses.

I want Trump to be in jail for his crimes along with his entire family and his supporters.

And there were fears that our
country is doomed.



FEARS FOR 2026

MORE TRADITIONAL

“This turn toward socialism and the teaching of revisionist history in our schools will eventually lead to the downfall of America.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

MORE NEOTERIC

“I really hope we get to celebrate our democratic republic in 2026 but if he's not impeached or steals the election (again, by fluke or design) it won't be around.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

If we are envisioning such different Americas ... how can we come together to commemorate the 250th?

The 250th



“

**Lived through the
bicentennial... seemed to
dominate everything right
up to July 4th then poof ...
nothing but two-dollar
bills and bicentennial
quarters...**

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

”

“

I doubt that this anniversary will have much of an effect on the course of events or the national mood. In my memory the Bicentennial celebrations were sappy, self-congratulatory, jingoistic BS, and I imagine these will be the same. But maybe your research will inform some corners of resistance, where people will really come together to think about our past and our future. So thank you!

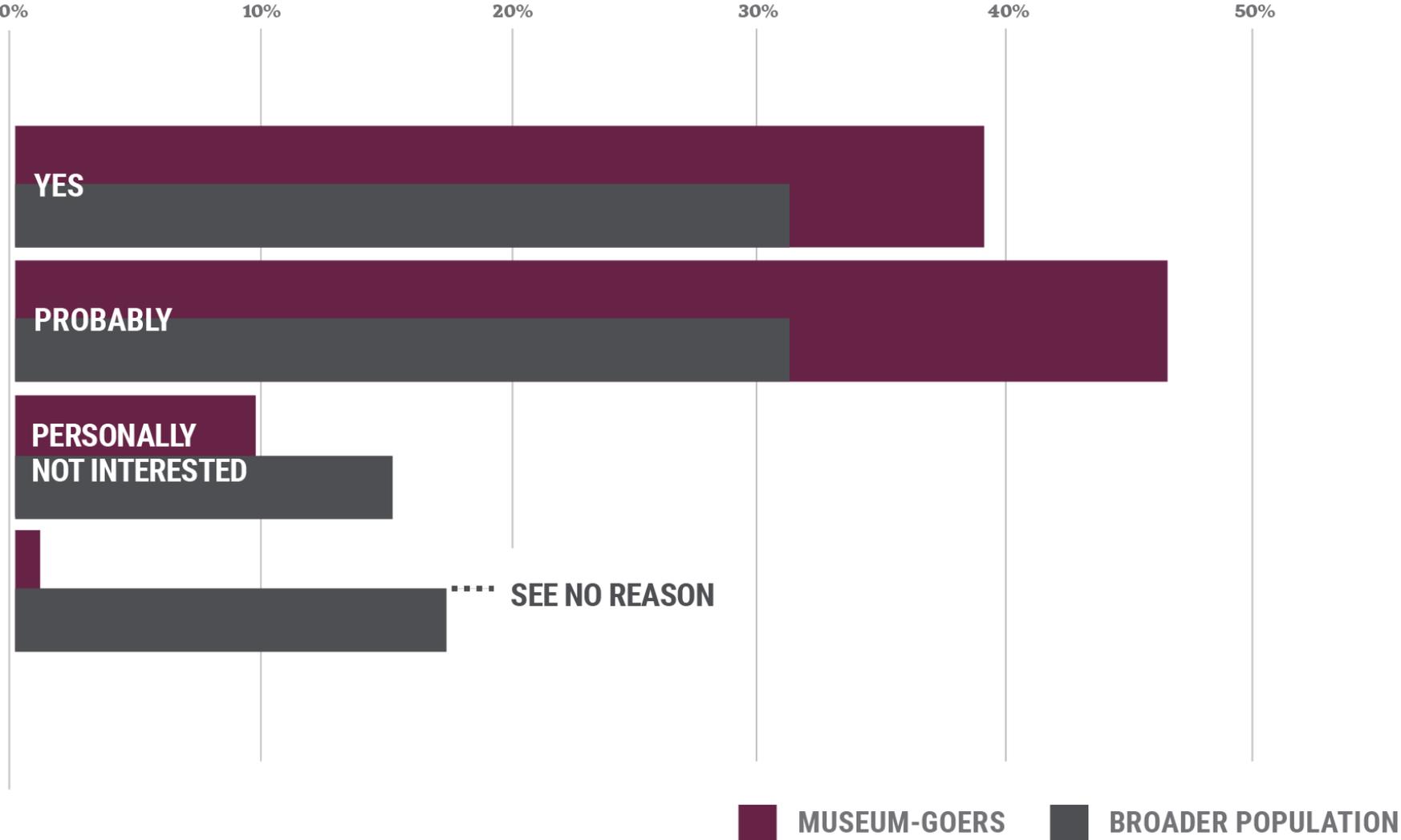
– MARGARET (BROADER PANEL)

”

First the good news.

The majority of Americans DO want
to mark the 250th.

Will You Do Anything to Celebrate the 250th?



86% of museum-goers, and 2/3 of the broader population, reported they are likely to want to celebrate the 250th

But their enthusiasm wasn't universal ... and they had different ideas of *how*.



ENTHUSIASM DIFFERENCES

Traditionals were much more enthusiastic

“

**Let's throw
a big party!**

– MUD WINTER (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

**I would love to see
grand celebrations
throughout the year.**

– DAKOTA2265 (BROADER PANEL)

”

Neoterics had a more muted response

“

**Willing to entertain
options presented. ”**

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Or to approach it with more wariness
Especially broader panelists

“

**I really am not that
interested in this as a piece of
history, so I wouldn't really care
if it is commemorated in my
local community.**

”

– A B (BROADER PANEL)

TWO PRACTICAL REASONS FOR SKIPPING



Age and health concerns

“I'll probably be with George & Martha in heaven then.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY



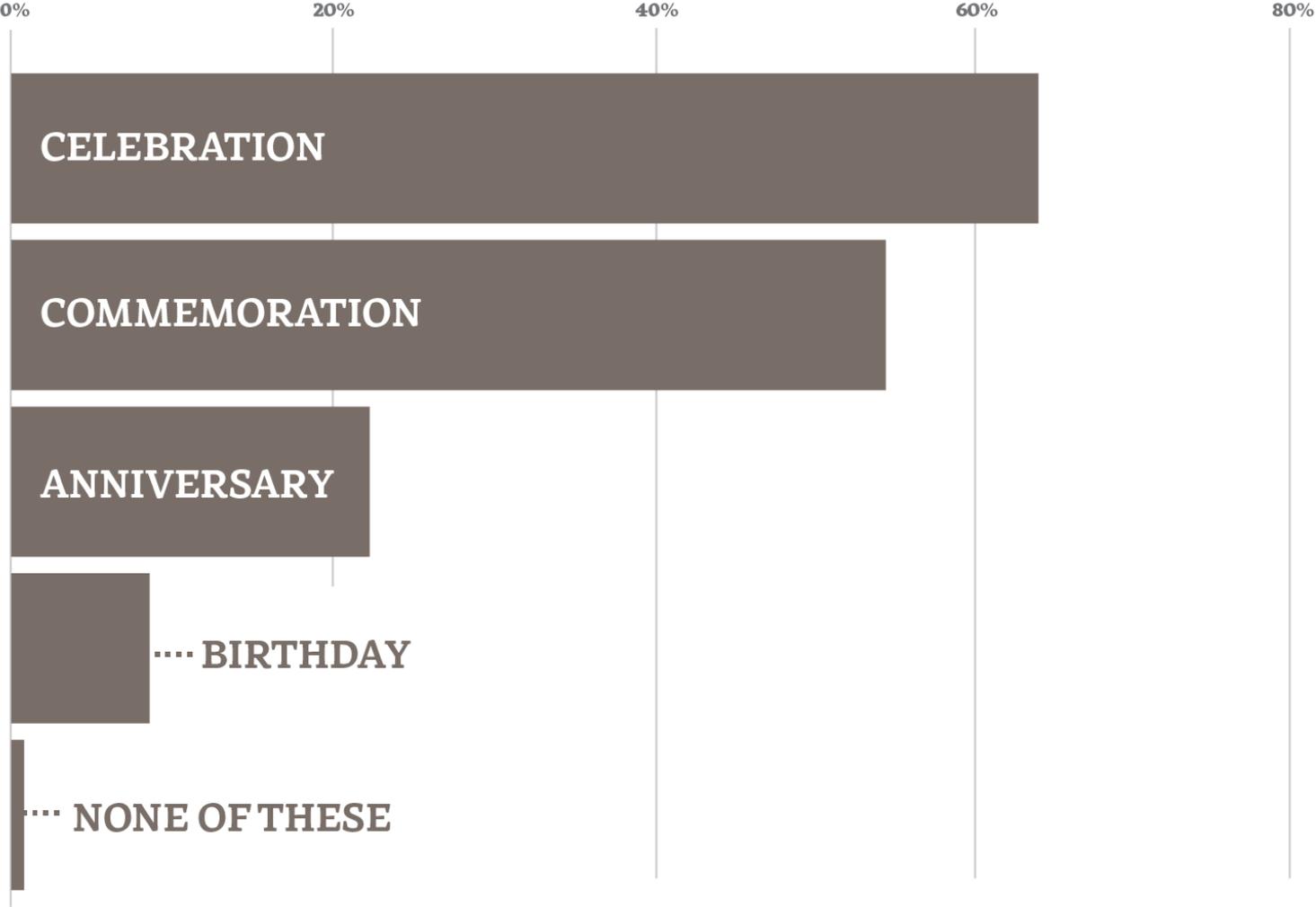
Dislike of crowds

“I do not like crowds.”

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

First, what do we *call* it?

What Best Describes the Potential Events Surrounding the 250th?



At first glance, it looks like
“celebration” is the right word ...

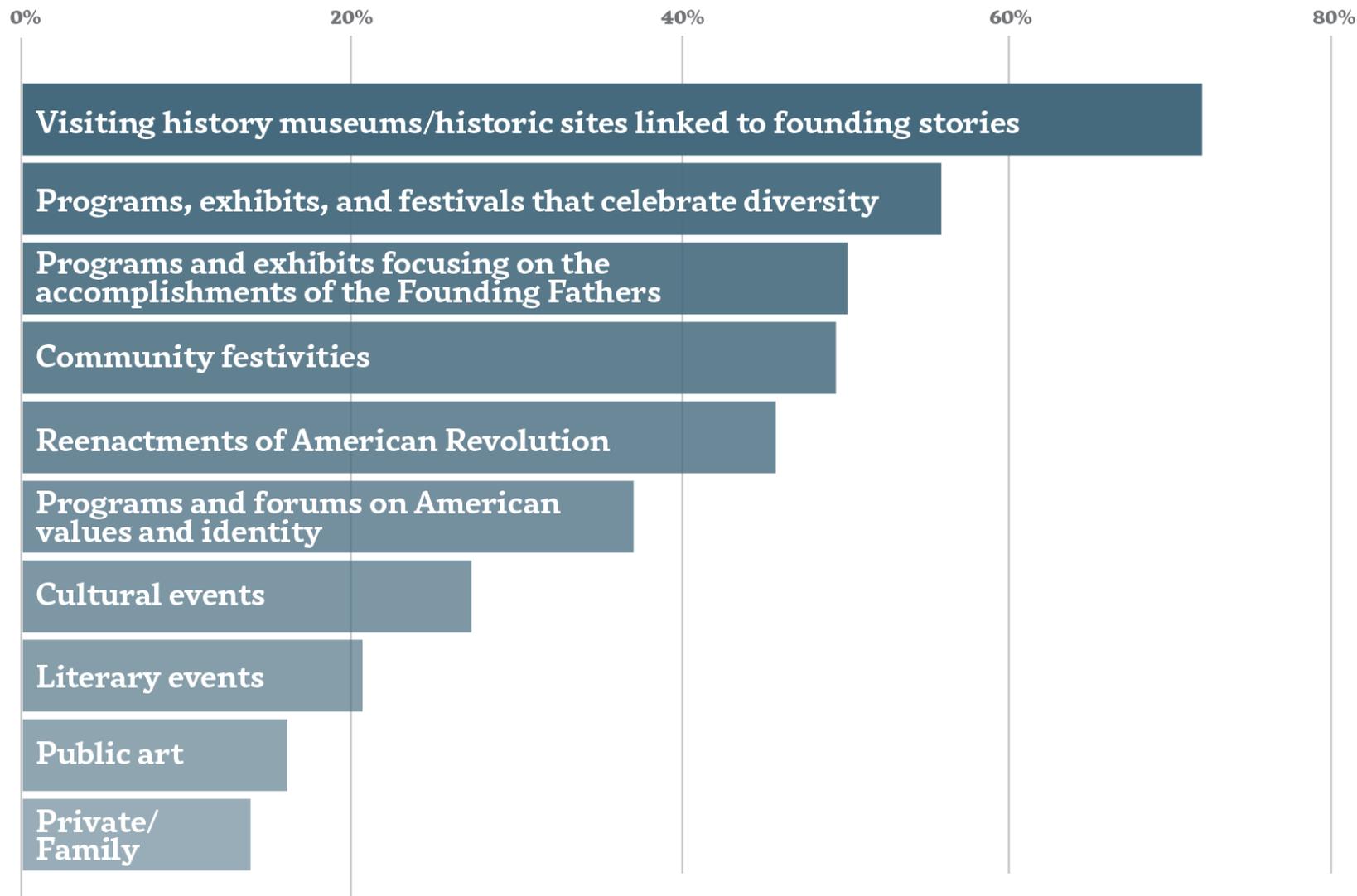
... but it skewed toward the
Traditional Cluster, and the Neoteric
Cluster was less enthusiastic.

And for those who had significant concerns about how inclusive events will be, or that the U.S. hasn't lived up to its values, the word "celebration" can appear to be tone-deaf (or worse).

Thus, “commemoration” is recommended for broader engagement.

So how will they want to mark the
250th?

If Yes, How Will You Acknowledge the 250th?



* Question not asked of broader population.



EVENTS AT HISTORY MUSEUMS: THEMES FROM PANELS

DEMONSTRATIONS

“I would like to see a combination of these museums in presenting a joint exhibit that includes demonstrations of early tools, farming, cooking ...”

– MELLENY (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

REENACTMENTS

“I always enjoyed reenactments. Historical truths that are a little more enticing when I can see it happening.”

– JOSEPH H. - (BROADER PANEL)

LIVING HISTORY

“I would like to see reenactments and have people role play. What did people eat, wear, play, do for work, do for worship, do in their leisure time, etc.”

– SUSANNE M. (BROADER PANEL)

EXHIBITS

“I hope many will recognize it with special exhibits or tours about how the Declaration came to be.”

– PLIMOTHMOM (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

“

Also, let's be real- the 250th is gonna have some **BOMB fireworks.**

– DAUGHTER OF THE NORTH
(MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

We can commemorate with parades, fireworks, BBQs, and teaching and murals to highlight the original event.

– RBANACH (BROADER PANEL)

I'd like the community to embrace this celebration by flying the American flag at every household.

– SEAN (BROADER PANEL)

”



CELEBRATIONS OF AMERICAN FOOD

“Also anything with great American cuisine would be amazing as well.”

– JAVIER (BROADER PANEL)

“One neat idea I could think of that would be enjoyable for all is a food exhibition, showing how the food and drink culture of our nation as a whole has progressed over the years. Seeing how dishes have remained in culture but have been tweaked over time in addition to understanding how and when new items were brought about into culture would be a sight to see for all. Who doesn’t appreciate good food?”

– KYLE (BROADER PANEL)



CELEBRATIONS OF AMERICAN FOOD: PIE

“

What about a national pie contest?

– CHEFSF (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

Bunting, pie contests?

– RVACAT (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

apple-pie eating contests ...

– GUSSIE (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

But underlying all of this was the values that people hold about our country ... and what they want to bring forward in that moment.

TRADITIONAL CLUSTER AND THE 250TH

★ MUCH MORE ENTHUSIASTIC

★ IT IS A CELEBRATION, FOCUSING ON POSITIVE STORIES OF OUR FOUNDING AND VALUES

★ DEVELOPING PRIDE

“One word comes to mind: PRIDE! Yes, our country struggles with many of today's issues, but that is nothing new. There have always been struggles, and we have always had differing opinions. But, with the 250th anniversary of this pivotal event in our history, we need to focus on bringing all Americans together through pride in their country. This anniversary is further proof that the USA is here to stay, and our approach to existence works. Freedom works.” – LOLLIE S (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ HONORING FOUNDING FATHERS

“I'd like to see special parades and community pride reignited and our Founding Fathers once again revered.” – CHASINGHAWK (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ SENSE OF SACRIFICE

“For history museums and historic sites, I would like to see programs that are full of the American Spirit! I would put in place exhibits that show the great men and women who fought so bravely to achieve our Independence!” – POTTERYLOVE (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ UNITY

“I would like the outcome of the events associated with this celebrations to bring about unity of our nation.” – AMILLEROH (BROADER PANEL)

NEOTERIC CLUSTER AND THE 250TH

★ WANT A MORE THOUGHTFUL, INCLUSIVE COMMEMORATION

★ NOT JUST FOUNDING FATHERS

"I think we should broaden it, and not just focus on the Founding Fathers." – LYNF (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

★ EMBRACING DIFFERENCES

"I would like the United States to be different. I would like to see more positivity and also to respect and embrace each other's differences." – RENEE1984 (BROADER PANEL)

★ DIVERSE HISTORY

"I would immediately restructure to hire staff of color and hire consultants and experts to bring in Native, Black, and Latinx voices. I would like to see other stories told." – CRAMIREZ (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

"I'd also get input from Native American communities on how to communicate the cost of forming this country to them and their legacy; nobody should go through the 250th thinking wow, there was this win-win situation when the nation was born." – WOODBA (BROADER PANEL)

★ A LOT OF "WORK IN PROGRESS"

"I would hope the outcome of these events would help us all focus more on who we are as a nation and whether we are reflecting the values championed and authored by our founders. Quite simply, are we practicing what our Founding Fathers preached?" – FELICITY R. BIJOU (BROADER PANEL)

NEOTERIC CLUSTER AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

SOME SAW AN OPPORTUNITY TO EVALUATE OUR PERFORMANCE AFTER 250 YEARS

“ An interesting exhibit would be recording visitors and their thoughts about the 250th anniversary and how we are or are not living up to the ideals in the Declaration of Independence. Visitors would get to see other people's videos and record one of their own.

– JAMIE J. (BROADER PANEL)

As a visitor, it would be interesting to see an exhibit that compares the concerns, hopes and promises outlined in the Declaration with periods throughout the 250 years where they were perpetuated, met or exceeded. I'm a professor at a culinary college in Ontario. Every course has expected outcomes, and everything we teach in that course is mapped to see that it supports the outcomes that have been outlined by the Ministry of Education. How about mapping the outcomes in the Declaration?

– CHEFSF (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

NEOTERIC CLUSTER AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

“ The 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence should be an opportunity for all of us to look at where we are at as a country. As a so-called world leader, do our citizens have access to clean water? basic healthcare? ability to express their religion customs? do children have access to adequate education? do our veterans have the mental healthcare that they need and deserve? In my opinion, the 250th anniversary would be the perfect (yet overdue) time to give reparations to the kin of those enslaved individuals, the perfect time for land to be given back to the Native Americans who deserve the rights to their sacred grounds, the perfect time to free those incarcerated individuals who are unjustly being held for menial crimes, the perfect time for all children of immigrants--both legal and not--to have the opportunity to be reunited with their families.

– LYLE K. (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

NEOTERIC CLUSTER AND THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

A FEW WERE MORE RADICAL

“ It's time for the truth to come out and the truth is, I don't want to celebrate a document that was signed by a bunch of women-mistreating slave owners. It's time we re-write history. Heck, change Independence Day to Firework and BBQ day ... I think the outcome of this 250th WHATEVER should be looked at as a time where we tear that document to shreds and write a new one. Have it drafted by men and women who live in today's time.

– FABIAN H (BROADER PANEL)

Just wanted to comment, I love this idea.

– JENNY (BROADER PANEL – IN RESPONSE TO FABIAN H)

”

It is *not at all* recommended that history organizations lead with a “tear it up” message ... but there is an interesting and productive idea here.

If Americans were to create a statement of values today, what would it include? And who would we include in the writing?

That thought exercise can be a source of productive discourse.

There is also a segment with the Neoteric Cluster that sees nothing to celebrate in 2026 ... and they wrote vividly about why.

Virtually all of the comments revolved around inclusion.

Inclusion of women.

“

The 250th Anniversary doesn't mean anything in particular to me. We like to celebrate round numbers – yay. The ideals expressed in the Declaration are inspirational and aspirational, but not yet a reality for many people in our country. Given the fact that there are those who recently voted against ratifying the ERA in Virginia and others who vow to continue to block it on a national level, it demonstrates to me that the phrase 'all men are created equal' is just words, not practice. Why would I want to celebrate that?

– ANCATDUBH1980 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

Inclusion of people of color.

“

These ideals were not shared with people of color. So, they are not important to me as founding values.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Signing of declaration means nothing to me because was not written for blacks.

– BARBARA G (BROADER PANEL)

My ancestors were not free nor independent at that time... no reason to celebrate.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Not much progress socially, but a lot of BS talk about how we are a post-racialized country where women 'can run to be president.' A bunch of white men having been in power, taking away all the rights from other people, and staying in power, and then turning it around and being like, 'Why isn't everyone as ahead as me?'

– SNAILSA (BROADER PANEL)

”

And *a few* from the Neoteric cluster
feared the 250th would be used to
further weaponize patriotism.

“ I hope that the 2026 is a celebration of all that is good in America instead of an opportunity to weaponize patriotism for political gain.

–MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

I worry that too much bluster and pomp around the anniversary of the signing might prompt a high level of ugly patriotism. By that I mean people who might use all the flag waving and pride of our declaration 250 years ago to be self-righteous and imperialistic (in a way), to pit one citizen's version of patriotism against another person's or your own, and hold prejudice against that.

– GEORGE D (BROADER PANEL)

”

So what are the ultimate outcomes
desired from the 250th?

It varies.



OUTCOMES: PRIDE ... OR BECOMING BETTER?

MORE TRADITIONAL

“My hope is simple and singular. That the events of the 250th would reignite a healthy national pride and our love for our country.”

– JEN OF THIS FAMILY BLOG
(MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

MORE NEOTERIC

“2027 needs to see us better.”

– AMBER (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)



OUTCOMES: UNITY ... OR EQUITY?

MORE TRADITIONAL

**“I want
Americans to
be one again.”**

– RMOS83 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

MORE NEOTERIC

**“We still have work
to do on living up to
our values and
ideals, legacy of
slavery, and
economic and social
inequity.”**

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY



OUTCOMES: LESS POLARIZATION

“ I would hope that it would be different in a sense that there is a greater sense of camaraderie between people as Americans ...

Therefore, I just wish for a greater sense of empathy and understanding that for as much as we like to think we are different from one another, we are all, fundamentally, just people.

– SIMON G (BROADER PANEL)

”

“

I would love for America to be better bonded and less divided, but that is not always realistic; however, this would be an amazing side effect of the 250th. The preference then would overall be de-polarization. That would be amazing to see our country actually come together.

– HAKIMBRUE (BROADER PANEL)

”

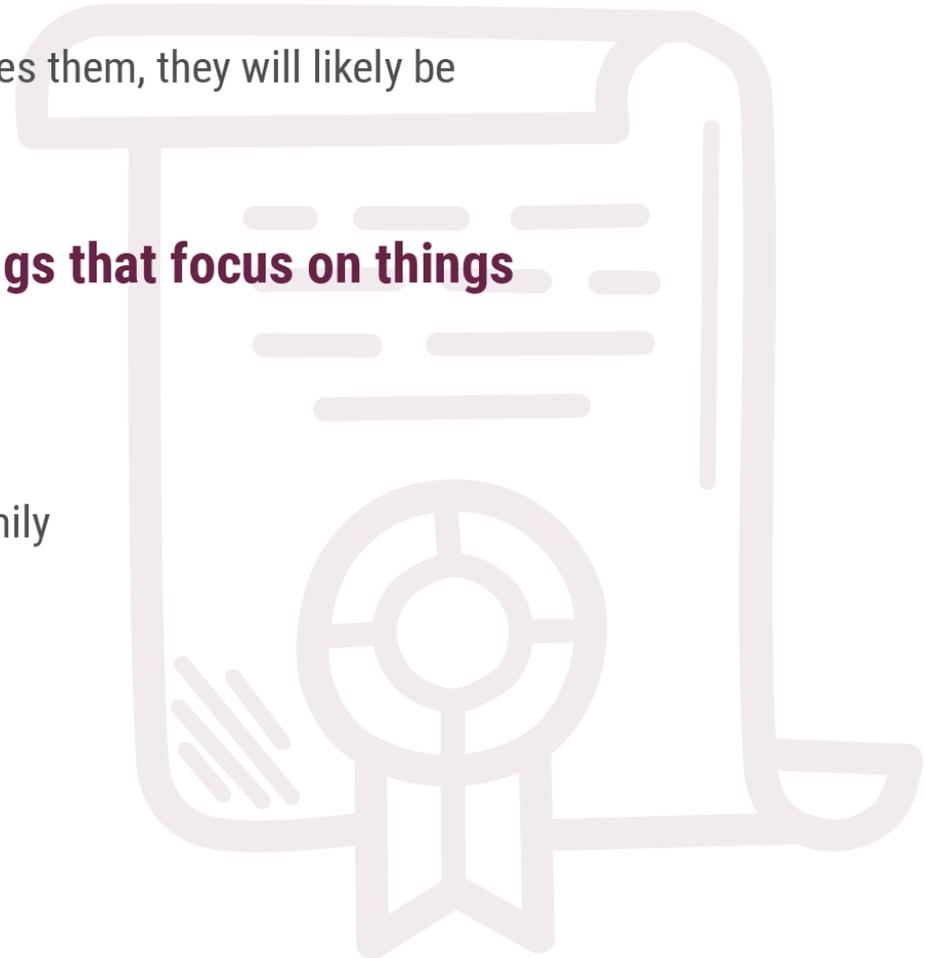
THE 250TH TAKEAWAYS

The Traditional Cluster is excited and enthusiastic about the 250th

- So long as some of your programming engages them, they will likely be satisfied

This means positive, celebratory things that focus on things that *do* unite us

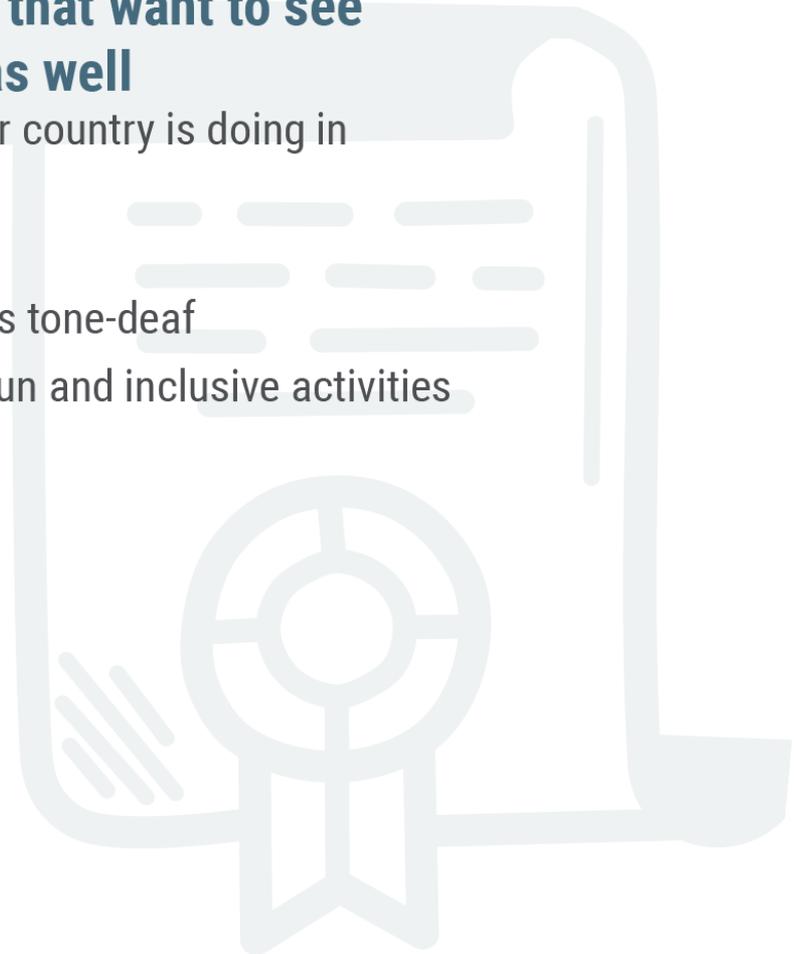
- Freedom
- Value of history
- And things we all enjoy ... food, fireworks, family



THE 250TH TAKEAWAYS

But there are many in the Neoteric cluster, which includes a significant part of the broader population, that want to see more inclusive, even meaningful content as well

- Ways that encourage critical assessment of how our country is doing in fulfilling our values
- And ways that are inclusive of a diverse population
- For them, a *purely* superficial celebration will read as tone-deaf
 - They are seeking a more thoughtful balance of fun and inclusive activities



This research was then used to assess potential messaging for the 250th.

The following is taken from a working document provided by Virginia history museums.

MORE TRADITIONAL

MORE NEOTERIC

Patriot/Patriotism

Heritage

Celebration

Nation/Nationalism

Founding Fathers

American dream

Justice-seeker

Liberty

Courage

Freedom

America

History

Past

Commemoration

Community

Knowledge

Culture

Togetherness

Diversity

Inclusion

Equality

Change-agent

Tolerance
(as acceptance)

Unity

POTENTIAL MESSAGING

MORE TRADITIONAL

In Virginia, connect your family to your country's roots.

Against all odds and in spite of overwhelming obstacles, the colonists [word choice?] defeated a global superpower.

Virginia has amazing stories to tell that include the all-star Founding Fathers George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Mason, James Monroe, and Patrick Henry.

The American dream. Through hard work, you can achieve what you want.

Party like it was 1776.

The American Revolution was a radical time when passionate activists, unafraid of challenging the established order, led a revolution that would change the world.

The Revolutionary experiment continues. The story of America is one of continually finding common ground to create something better.

Virginia has amazing stories to tell about ordinary men and women in an extraordinary time.

Virginia's revolutionaries transcend time and place from George Washington to Ella Fitzgerald to Pharrell.

Virginia's natural beauty inspired the Founders. Let it inspire you.

Birthplace of revolutionary thinking in all areas from food to music to...

MORE NEOTERIC

Find America's inspiration in Virginia. Visiting Virginia historic sites creates a more perfect union today.

Throughout our history, the Revolution's ideas have inspired and legitimized the ongoing fight for freedom and equality, even though millions were excluded from the Revolution's promise of equality.

Virginia has amazing stories to tell about change makers who were women, African American and Native American revolutionaries.

Americans are optimistic and hopeful. We take charge to make changes. This key identity comes from the Rev War period.

THINGS TO AVOID



Identity



Virginia is the birthplace of American identity. Exploring the richness and complexities of our identity makes us a more perfect union.



If you miss Virginia, you miss the 250th. Celebrate America's 250th birthday where America began. Get away to celebrate the 250th birthday of the United States.



America's creative directors came from Virginia.

So consider how to frame the 250th
in ways that Traditional audiences
feel good about ... while also giving
more skeptical Neoteric audiences
something to feel pride in.



POTENTIAL MESSAGING THEMES



The 250th as a “Commemoration”



Exploration of freedom



Sense we are striving to achieve freedom and equality of opportunity for all in America



But we have to know history to achieve those values



And Americans can help be part of that process of making that better American future... through history



Inclusion of all stories

POTENTIAL MESSAGING

Because the Traditional Cluster is all in anyway for the 250th ...

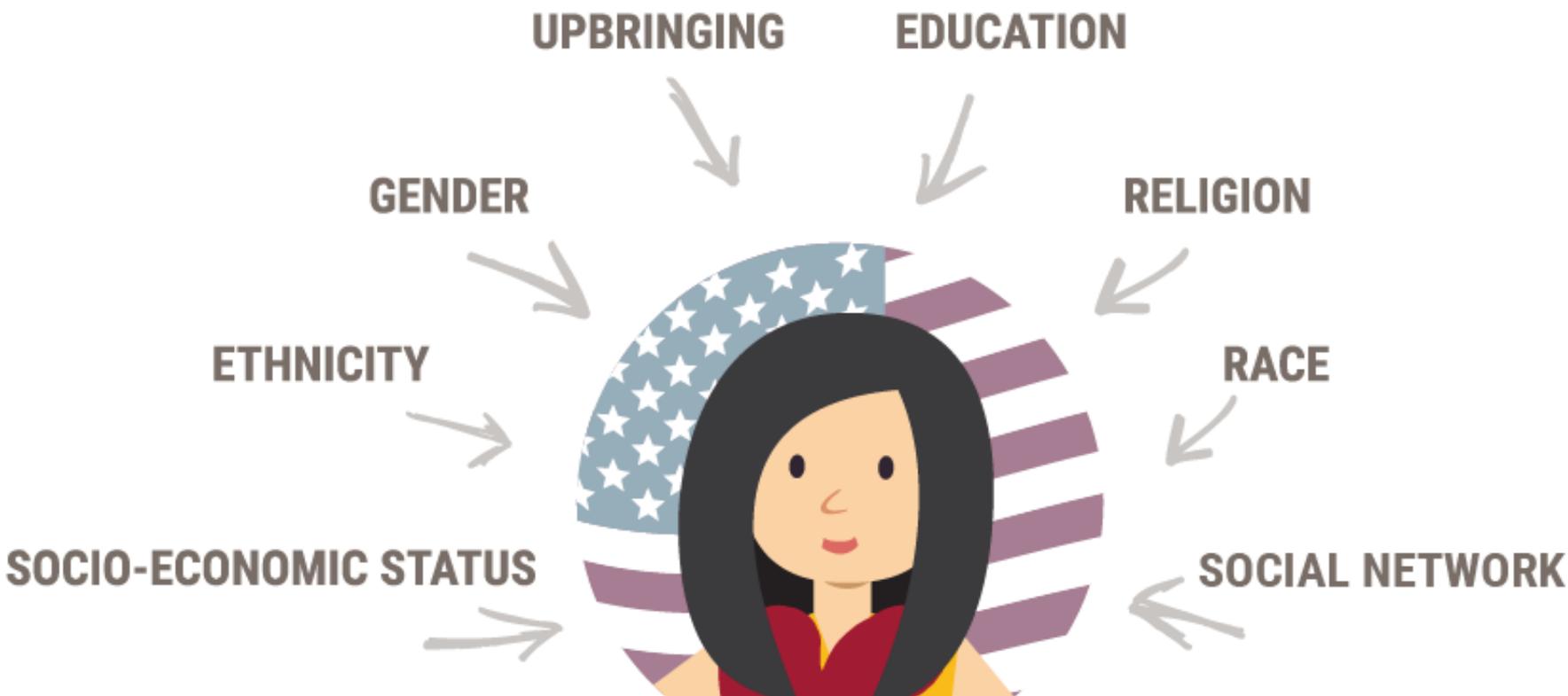
- And Traditional non-visitors are least likely to become visitors

While growth can be found with the Neoteric cluster in the broader population ... who want that inclusive history and admission that we are still striving for a more perfect union



A Practical Guide to Sharing History in a Divided Country



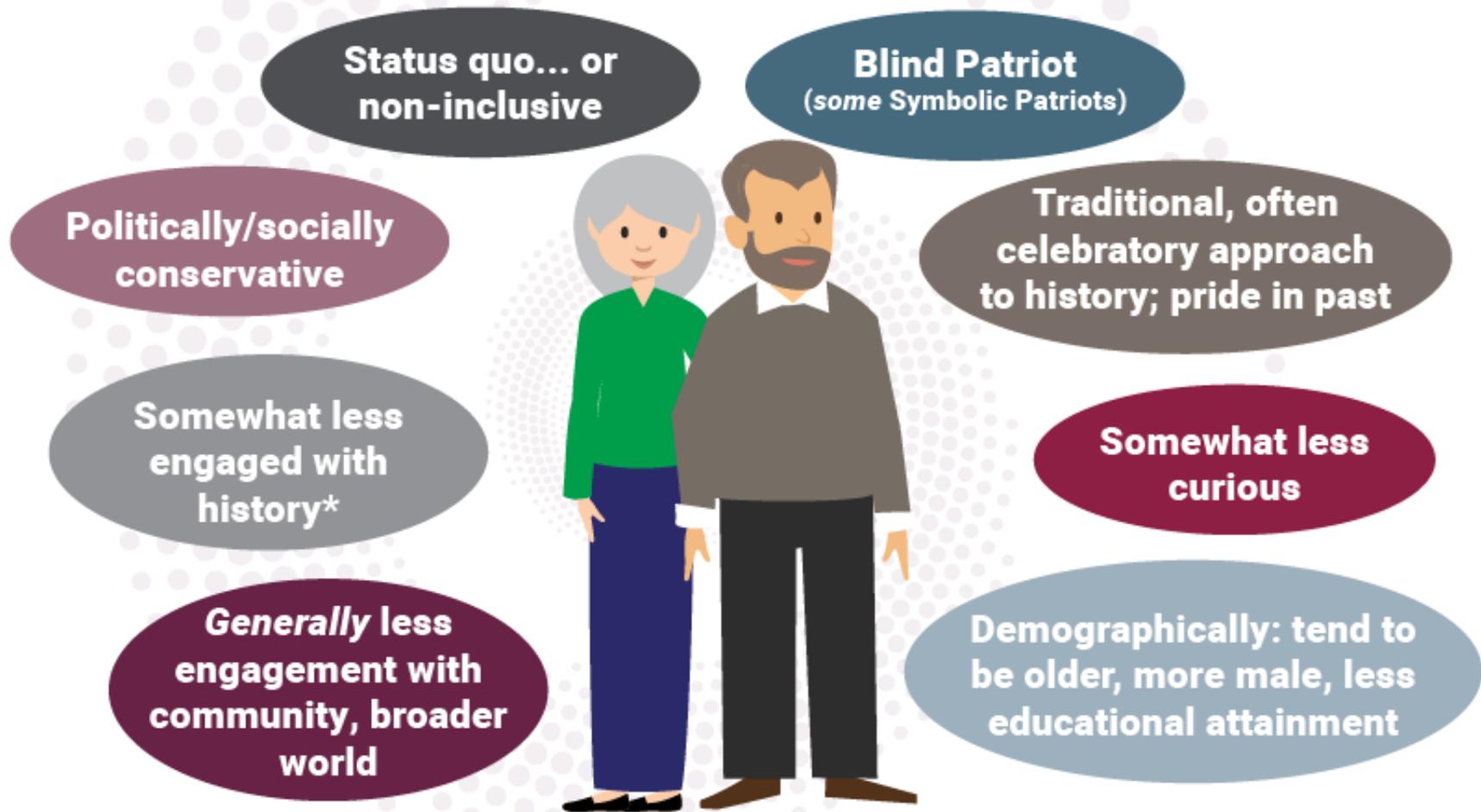


VALUES – ATTITUDES – BELIEFS

Thinking about history specifically, we all practice intuitive epistemology and approach the past with different sets of questions ... thus finding different sets of facts that support our values, attitudes, and beliefs.



TRADITIONALS: More likely to have these traits



* Exception: small segment of "history buffs" that are heavily engaged in history

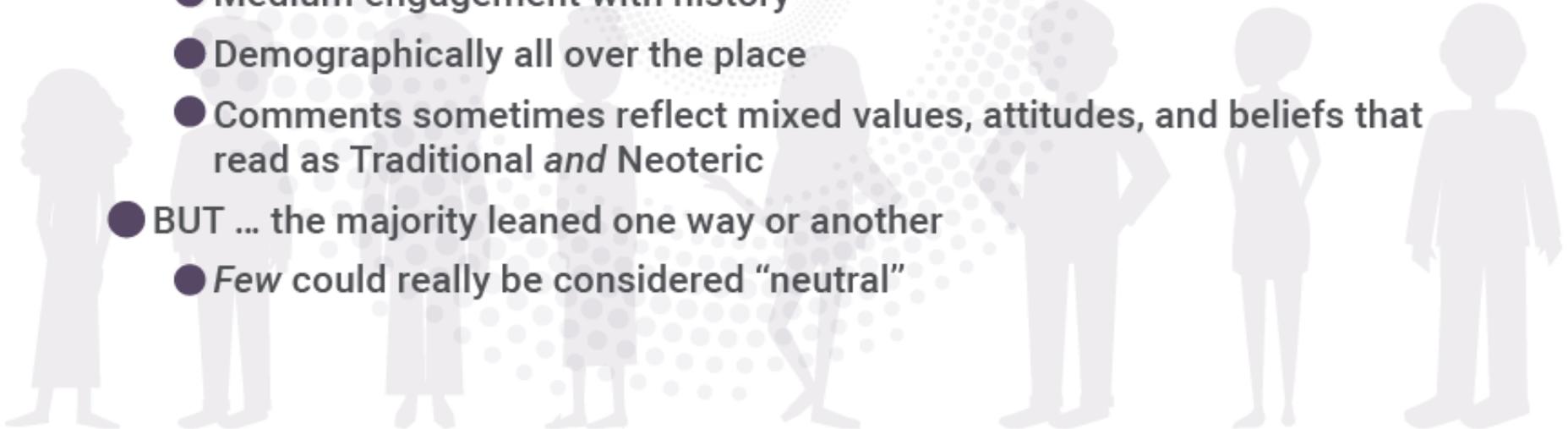
NEOTERIC: More likely to have these traits



Neoteric: adjective that describes new or modern ideas; from the Greek *neos*, for new

THE MIDDLE:

- Most people tend to lean towards the Traditional or Neoteric clusters
- Of those that do seem to fall in the middle:
 - More moderate politically
 - Symbolic Patriots
 - Status quo on inclusivity
 - More inclusive than Traditionals, less than Neoterics
 - Lower levels of engagement with community
 - Less curious
 - Medium engagement with history
 - Demographically all over the place
 - Comments sometimes reflect mixed values, attitudes, and beliefs that read as Traditional *and* Neoteric
- BUT ... the majority leaned one way or another
 - Few could really be considered "neutral"



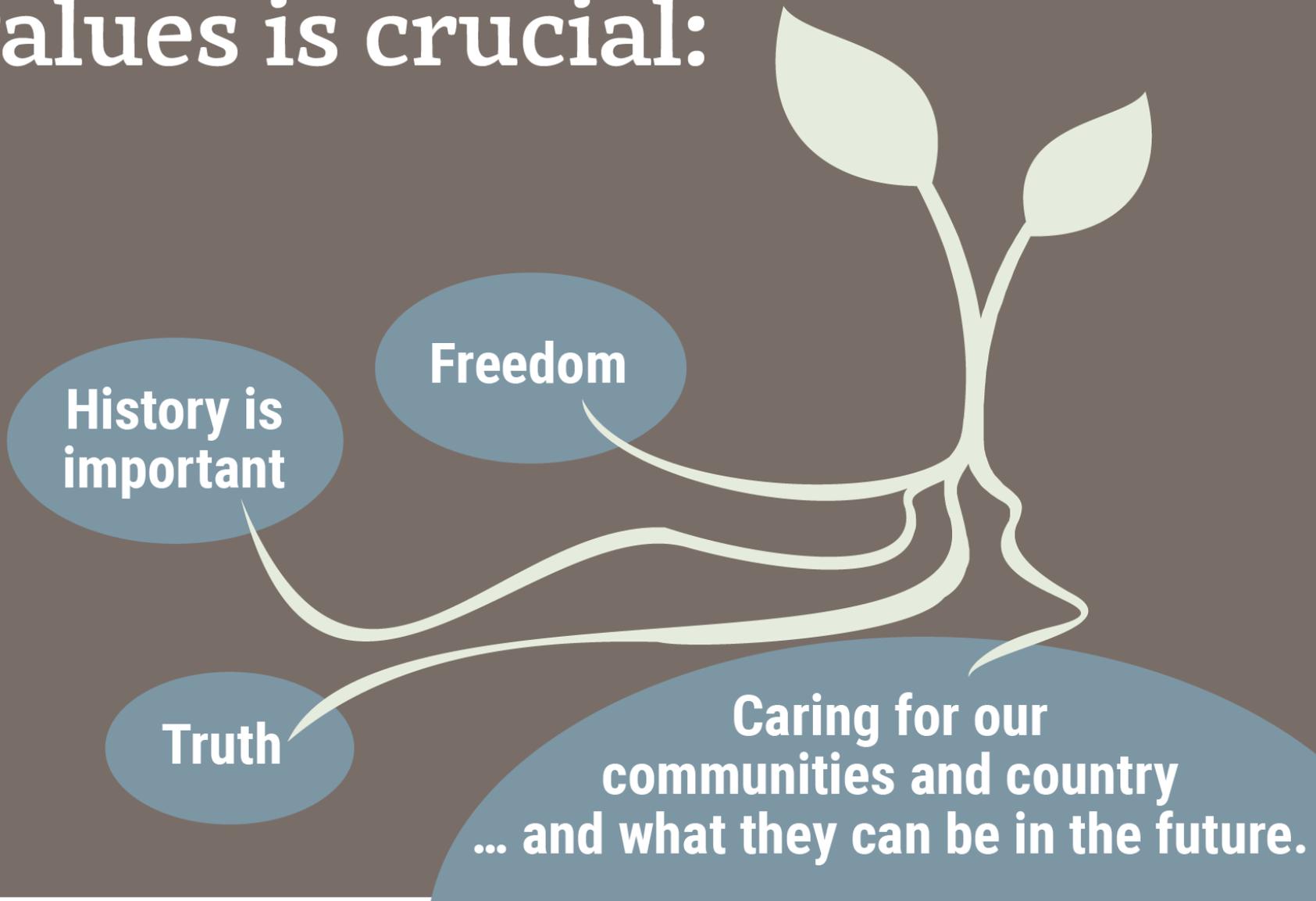
SPECTRUM OF VALUES, ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS

Likely History-Museum Goers



So when we are considering how to engage these audiences across the spectrum, it becomes tricky fast.

Rooting our work in shared values is crucial:



And consider how we can use **radical curiosity** and **courageous empathy** in practice and interpretation ...



... while also expanding our audiences to those who desperately want a more inclusive and equitable history shared.

And remember: museum professionals are much more likely to be part of the Neoteric Cluster.

MUSEUM PROFESSIONALS ARE:

Compared to museum-goers, museum professionals are:...

- 1.5x more likely to seek an inclusive history
- Half as likely to be a Blind Patriots
 - And twice as likely to not identify as patriotic at all
- Nearly 2x more likely to want slavery thoroughly explored ... even if it means less emphasis on more prominent figures of history
- 1.6x more likely to identify as liberal
 - And half as likely to identify as conservative

If we don't want to alienate
Traditional audiences...

...pacing is key.

And the inclusive history primer* continues to hold true ... especially when it comes to engaging Traditional audiences, but also to earn the trust of more skeptical potential Neoteric audiences.

THE PRIMER



STEP 1:

Acknowledge your bias from the beginning ...
... and then encourage your visitors to do likewise.

STEP 2:

Create a plan to address your bias, e.g., advisors, team approach, etc., and be upfront about it to your audiences.

STEP 3:

Give them the facts. ALL the facts.

STEP 3A: That includes multiple perspectives.

STEP 3B: And it includes telling the truth even when it changes our understanding of the past.

STEP 3C: This means trusting audiences with the facts, the perspectives, and our changed understandings.

But trust cuts both ways, so you need to ...

STEP 4:

Show your work.

This includes sharing your process, sources,
and identifying advisors.

STEP 5:

Context. Context. Context.

STEP 6:

Understand the history you share may be difficult for some visitors – especially if it represents a change from what they thought they understood about the past.

STEP 6A: Do not make them feel dumb.

STEP 6B: Do not preach.

STEP 7:

Engage in dialogic questions

STEP 7A: Present them with questions that their worldviews may not have considered.

STEP 7B: “Consider this ...”

STEP 7C: And practice courageous empathy by being open to their answers

STEP 8:

Do not apologize for being inclusive.

STEP 9:

Be a forum for civil discourse.

STEP 10:

Accept that your visitors are human ... as are you.
There will be bias on both sides.
There will be controversy.

STEP 10A: Accept that, despite your best efforts,
you will not be 100% successful.
A few will simply not accept a more inclusive (and
“changed”) history.

Final Thoughts



1

Our values, attitudes, and beliefs affect how we approach the past ... and the divisions in our country extend to history.

2

That history is highly valued ... but a lack of inclusion is a barrier to engagement.

3

Yet the majority hold values about our country that they honor and respect ... and will want to acknowledge in 2026.

The 250th is an opportunity to
engage broader audiences
meaningfully ... but we can start
now.

“ Hopefully, we will have given up the divisiveness that dominates today and will be reaching for a better understanding and empathy for the experiences, contributions and sacrifices within the diversity that contributes so much to the greatness of our country. We will also recognize that, as humans, we have made mistakes and will continue to admit to them, learn from them and continue to strive for that 'more perfect Union' for everyone in our diverse population.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

”

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WILKENING CONSULTING RESEARCH

ANNUAL
SURVEY
OF
MUSEUM-GOERS

ANNUAL
BROADER
POPULATION
SAMPLING

“MUSEUMS
AND PUBLIC
OPINION”
(WITH
AMERICAN
ALLIANCE
OF MUSEUMS)

ONGOING AND
COMPLETED
CLIENT
RESEARCH

INCLUSIVE
HISTORY
IN AMERICA

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NEWSLETTER



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Museums and the COVID-19 Pandemic



“ It is baffling to think of the issues and divides today that are separating our society further and further existing during a time like WWII or the Great Depression. It begs to question if it takes a catastrophic event, where the effects are universal across our nation, the same to all, in order to bring us all together.

– KYLE (BROADER PANEL)

”

While a desire for unity wasn't uncommon in our original research (before the COVID-19 pandemic), there were a few comments that pointed to how tragic events can catalyze unity ... mostly among political *moderates*.

I would like to see all segments of society to come together in the same way that we did on September 12th, 2001. No more us and them, only we.

– MUSEUM-GOERS SURVEY

Ideally, I fantasize of people coming together and being less divided politically. We are the UNITED States of America. I remember how united we all were after 9-11. Yes, we were united in fear and hatred, but at least we were all on the same page for a little while. I wish something happy, like the 250 Anniversary, would bring people together instead of it taking tragedy. Here's hoping.

– RASHA (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

I remember the solidarity and patriotism after 9/11 and while I don't expect the same sort of effect from 2026, I use this as a model for what we should strive for.

– JOE S. (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

I often find myself wishing that people around me would be as patriotic as I feel (like people were in WWII, for example.)

– JAIMEETJESPERE (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

I would hope our country would have that sense of togetherness similar how we felt after 911. The country came together, and it seemed like people cared about each other.

– LISAE54 (BROADER PANEL)

It is unclear if this pandemic will have that long-term effect, but a month after the qualitative panels closed, we reopened them to ask panelists four more questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

American Rights and Freedom During the Pandemic

Generally, most panelists agreed that what was being asked of us (i.e., staying home, shuttering businesses) was reasonable

Exceptional time

“Pandemics and war are the two breakers of liberty ... At other times, freedom should reign, but this is the exceptional time.”

– NK (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

Our rights end when they infringe on another

“No one has the right to make somebody else sick, or to kill someone by a selfish use of public space.” – FOUNDING_FATHERS (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“Our personal rights end where they impact someone else or someone else's rights. I think the debate is over where that line is.”

– JOE S (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

“During a pandemic, when people's actions can endanger themselves and others, there needs to be more emphasis on protecting public health. People who are dead cannot exercise their individual rights.”

– HMJ1283 (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

But there were varying levels of concern about the long-term ramifications.



CONCERNS ABOUT LOSING RIGHTS

MORE TRADITIONAL

CONCERNED RIGHTS **WILL** BE LOST

“ The more I hear officials and pundits repeat the phrase, 'this is the new normal,' the less confident I become that these restrictions are temporary ... Once they have power, they are usually loathe to relinquish it.

– BROTHER MOON (BROADER PANEL)

We can't assure that these limitations will not become a permanent shrinking of our rights, unless we have an elected government that respects our rights.

We do not have that now.

– PAT (BROADER PANEL)



MORE NEOTERIC

NOT CONCERNED ABOUT LOSING RIGHTS

“ I am not worried about losing my rights as a citizen. What does some physical separation have to do with my rights?

– AMBER (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

Americans are fairly ungovernable. I just don't see a big threat here.

– JOHNNY ONE (BROADER PANEL)



And there were hopes this would
unify us.

“
It is the
pride of the
American
people in
such times
that we be
together in
spirit if not
in person.

– PAT W (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

We still need to
be purposeful
about putting
society back
together. It is
actually an
opportunity to
make it better.
Ironically the
common
experience of
our current
isolation will
actually be a
great way of
unifying
everyone.

– ROBERT L. (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

I am incredibly
heartened by
the way
citizens,
business, and
government are
all coming
together to deal
with this. This
is what America
does best: come
together in a
time of crisis.

– ASHB (MUSEUM-GOERS PANEL)

”

Panelists were also asked about the financial stresses museums are experiencing, as well as what would make them feel safe and comfortable upon reopening.

Those results mirrored national findings fielded on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums, and infographic *Data Stories*, including any updates as events unfold, can be found at <http://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.html>.