

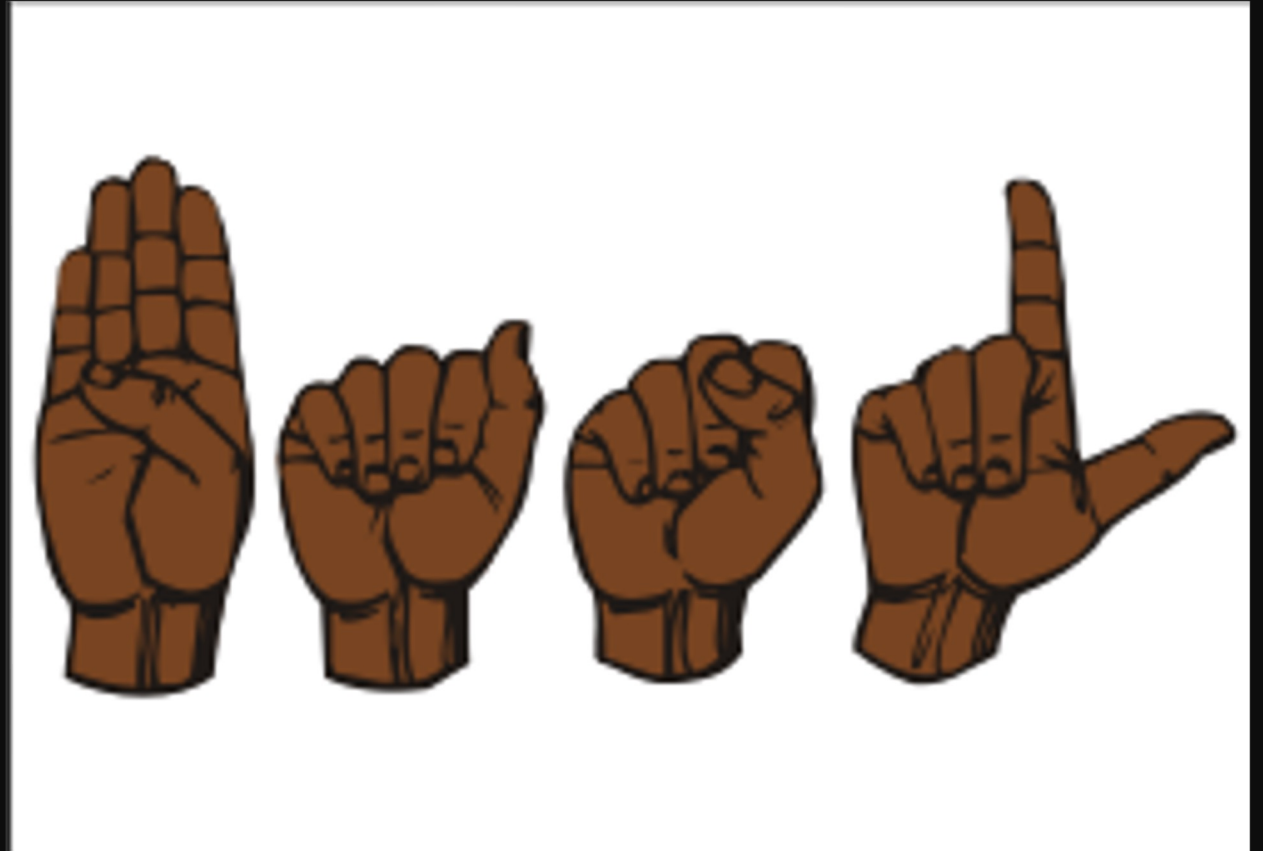
Why Black American Sign Language (BASL) Matters?

Carolyn McCaskill, Ph.D.

Black Deaf Studies Symposium

Gallaudet University

March 30, 2023



Acknowledgments:

- Dr. Yerker Andersson, former Professor of Deaf Studies Dept (1995-1996).
 - Petition filed by students in 1996.
 - 1997 first Black Deaf People Studies (DST 401) course offered at Gallaudet.
 - 2022 Center for Black Deaf Studies
-



Black Deaf People Studies (DST 401)



History

Education

**Community
& Culture**

Language



- **Dissertation Committee: Chair, Dr. William Marshall, Administration & Supervision Ph.D. Program**
- **My Dissertation: “The Education of Black Deaf Americans in the 20th Century: Policy and Implications for Administrators in Deaf Schools” (2005)**
- **Collaborated with Dr. Ceil Lucas, professor in Gallaudet University Linguistic Dept.**
- **Grants from the Spencer Foundation & Nation Science Foundation.**



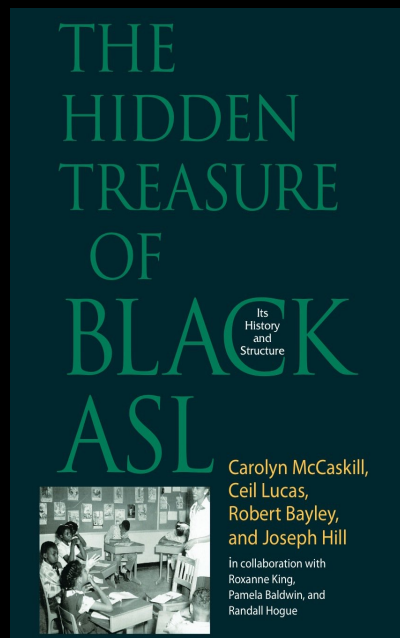
The Black ASL Team



Dr. Ceil Lucas



Dr. Carolyn McCaskill



Dr. Robert Bayley



Dr. Joseph Hill

Coming in 2011! **Welcome** Intro Presentations Reflections

The Black ASL Project

Text and DVD COMING SOON!
Click [HERE](#) to see the book's cover!



Black ASL project team members, back row from left to right: Pamela Baldwin, Joseph Hill, Roxanne Dummett, Carolyn McCaskill, front row Mary Herring Wright (interviewee) and Ceil Lucas

Visit our website:
blackaslproject.gallaudet.edu

Black ASL: Definition and Theories of Origin.

What is BASL?



- **Black ASL is the variety of American Sign Language that developed in the segregated schools for Deaf African American children in the pre-Civil Rights era.**
- **It shows differences from the ASL used by most White signers in lexicon, phonology, syntax, and discourse.**
- **In some respects, Black ASL is a conservative dialect. Specifically, a number of phonological features are more likely to be realized in the standard (or citation) form taught in ASL classes and used in ASL dictionaries than is the case in most White varieties of ASL.**

The Black ASL Project (2007 – 2013)

Sites visited in order of the year in which schools for Black Deaf children were founded:

Raleigh, North Carolina (1869)

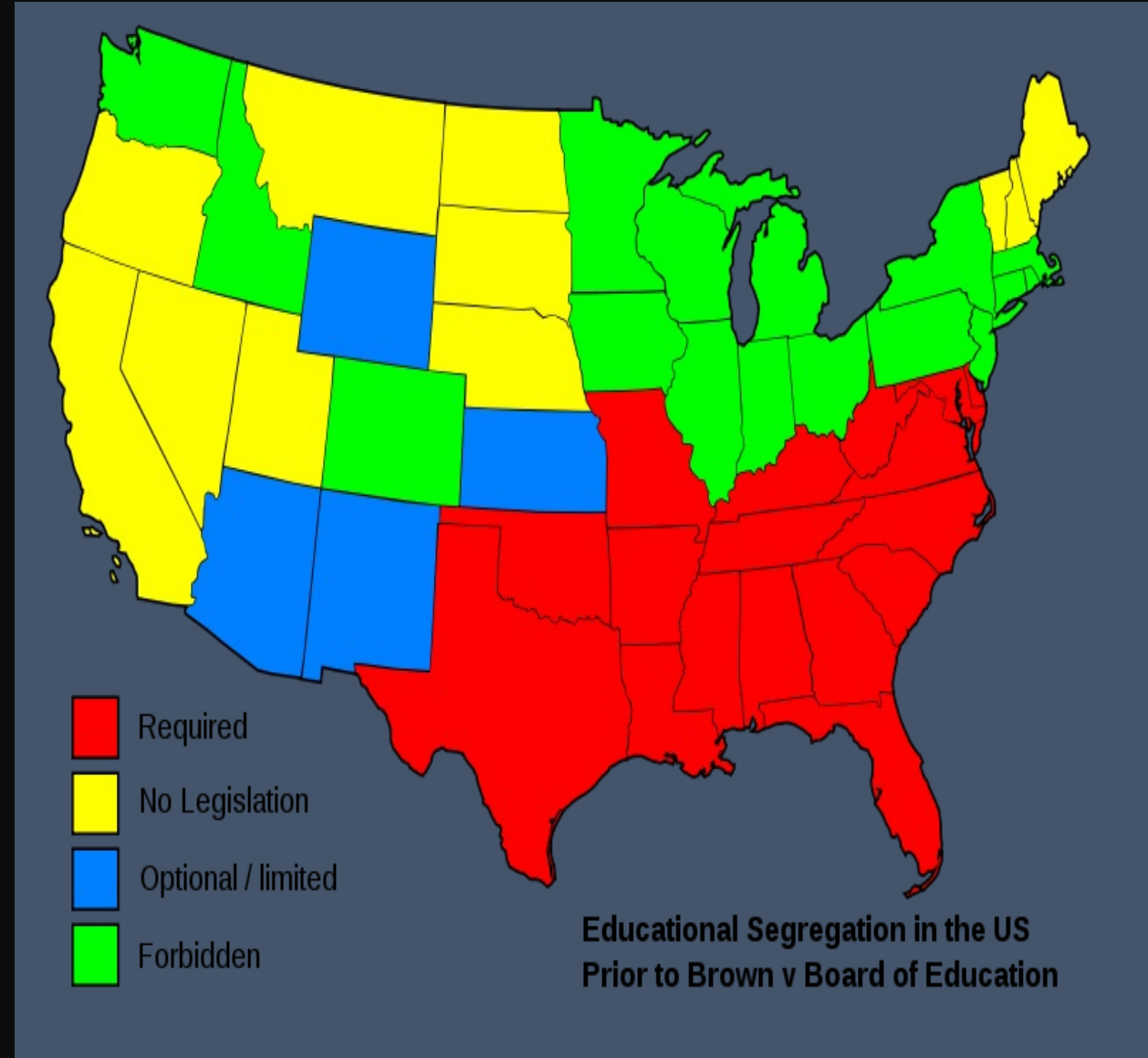
Houston, Texas (1887)

Little Rock Arkansas (1887)

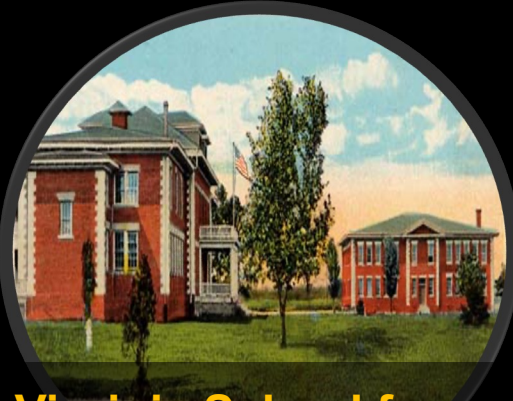
Talladega, Alabama (1892)

Hampton, Virginia (1909)

New Orleans, Louisiana (1938)



Black/Negro Deaf Schools



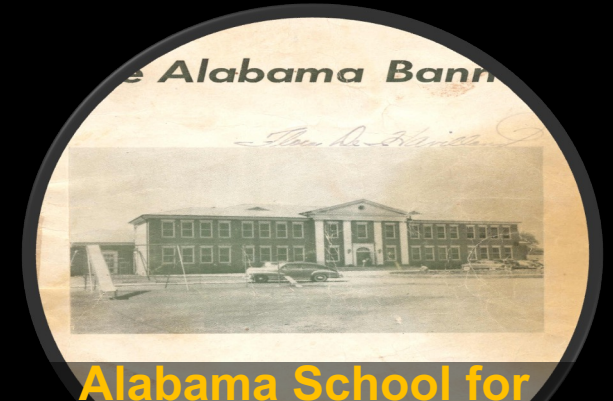
**Virginia School for
Colored Deaf & Blind**



**Arkansas School for
Colored Deaf & Blind**



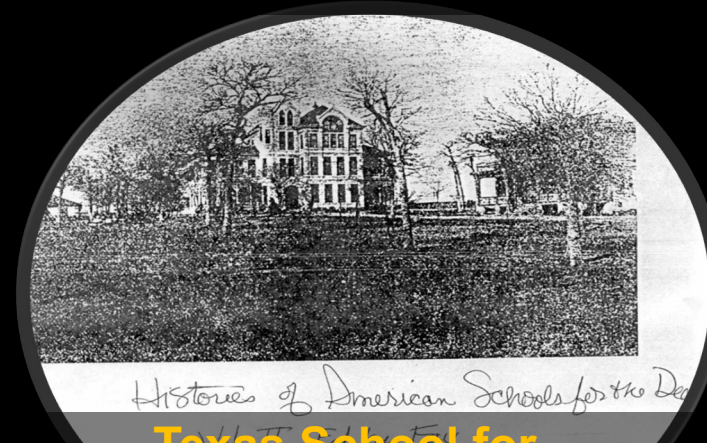
**North Carolina School
for the Negro Deaf**



**Alabama School for
the Negro Deaf &
Blind**

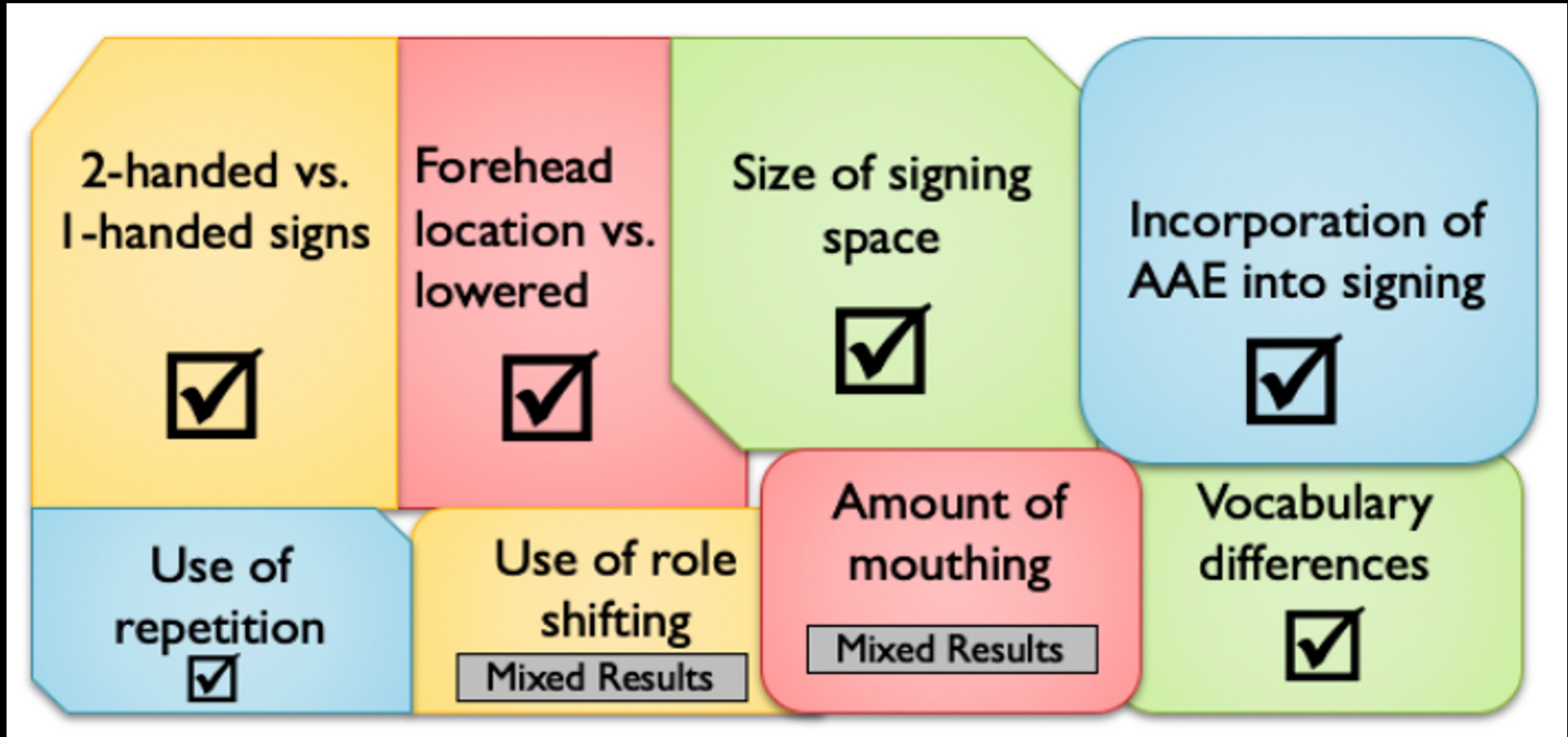


**Southern State School for the
Deaf & Blind**



**Texas School for
Colored Deaf Dumb & Blind
(BDO)**

Black ASL Mosaic



gated

students in the South, schools, were racially segregated. The states had separate schools for the Deaf, and the Oklahoma State School for the Deaf, one of the largest schools for the Deaf, had segregated dormitories on campus. Although these schools were generally well-funded and overcrowded, many students had fond memories of their years there. Desegregation came in the 1960s, and many deaf children, who often meant sharing a classroom, but a dormitory.

school, on the Gallaudet campus, where American and white students lived and had segregated dormitories. Kendall School and

Options in Education



In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act—Public Law 94-142—ensured that children with disabilities to an appropriate education in the “least restrictive environment.” This was generally interpreted to mean “inclusion” in public schools. While some deaf students flourished, others felt isolated and frustrated. Few students would encounter deaf teachers or adults in school who could serve as counselors or mentors. Programs in public schools designed specifically for deaf students continued to grow, but for many children, they were the only deaf student in their class.

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the National Institute for the Deaf and Blind Act on June 8, 1965, at the White House ceremony. The act provided for improved technology for deaf students and the founding of the National Institute of Technology for the Deaf and Blind in Rochester, New York.



Some questions to ponder about BASL?

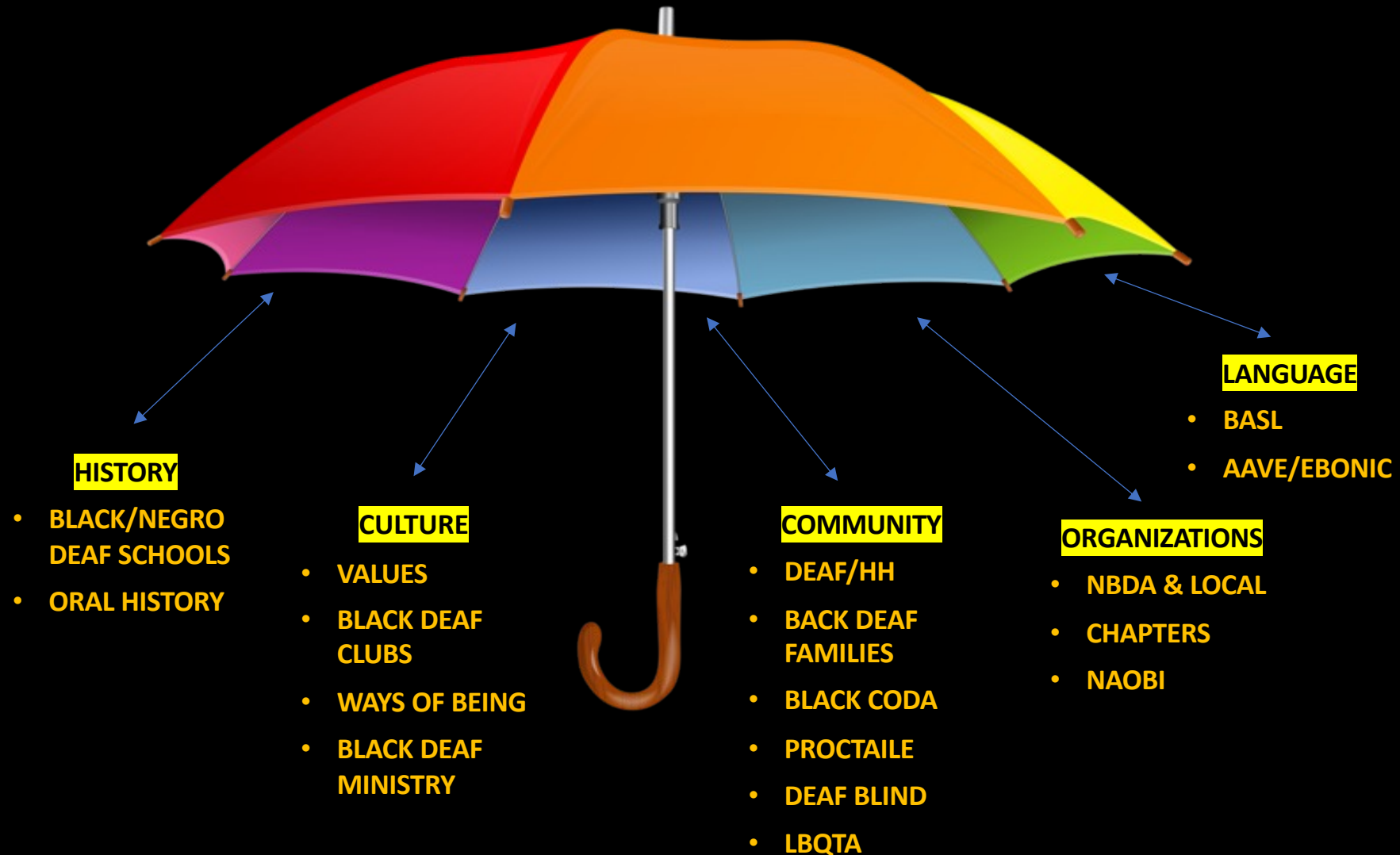
Is it from the Black Deaf Families?

Is it influenced by African American English?

Is it from only segregated Black Deaf communities?

Is BASL class available?

THE IMPACT OF BASL



The Black Deaf Community: WHO ARE WE?

Black Deaf people are a **minority within a minority**.

“The Black Deaf community can be described as a group of individuals who lives in a **hearing and color-conscious society**”. (Anderson, 1972, Anderson & Grace, 1991)

Younkin (1990) described Black Deaf individuals as being caught between **two** worlds.



Signing Black in America

- “Signing Black in America” was produced by NC State’s Language & Life Project (LLP), a non-profit that focuses on research, education and outreach programs related to language.
- “Signing Black in America” is the first episode of a four-part miniseries that follows the feature-length 2017 documentary “Talking Black in America.” 27 min on YouTube.
- “Signing Black in America” highlights the history and development of Black ASL, explores relevant topics such as code switching, interpreting and language change, and celebrates the important role that Black ASL plays in the lives of its users.”

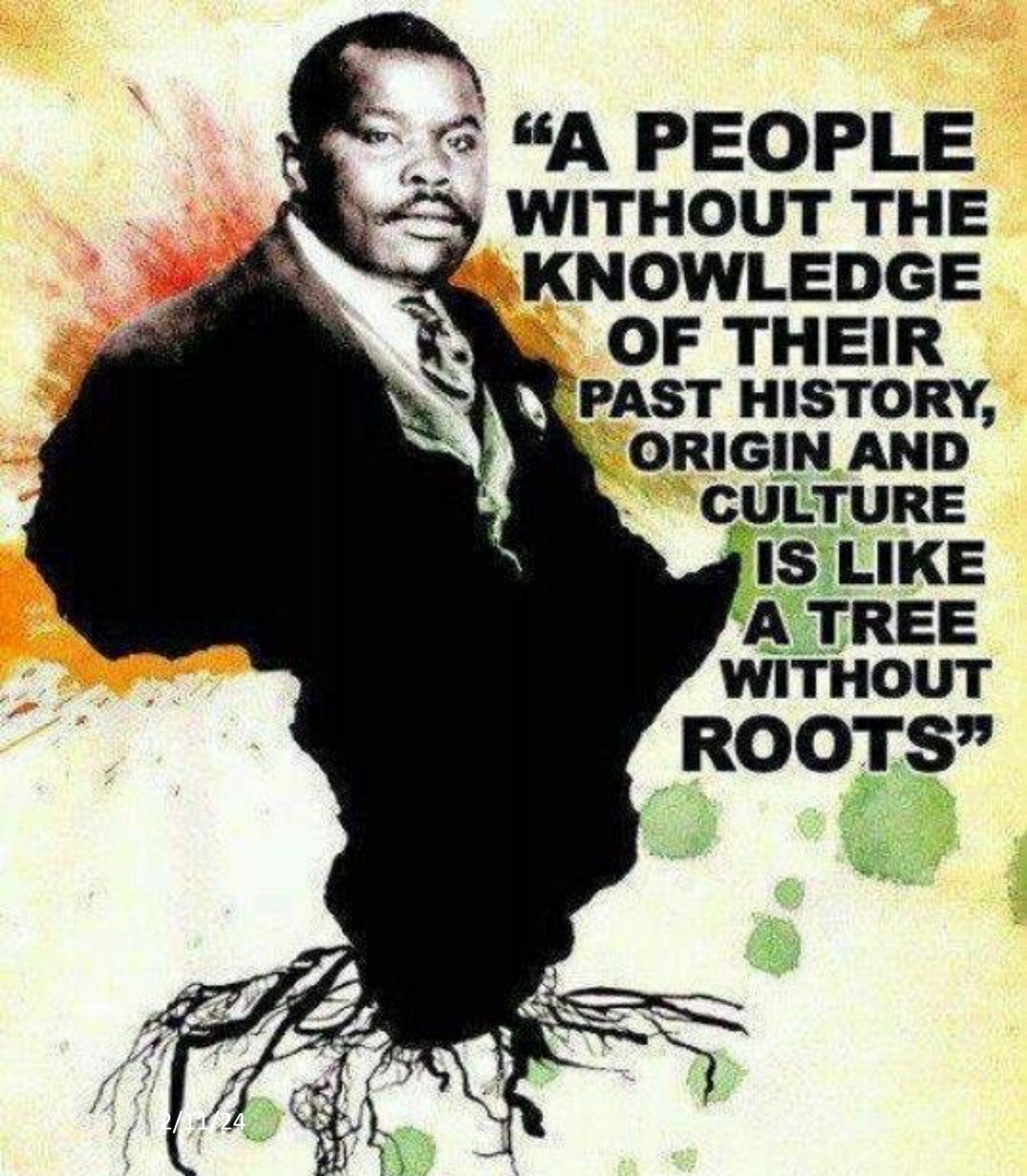


Black American Sign Language Matters

- More research is needed on Black ASL.
- BASL is clearly evolving.
- Preserve our Oral History.
- A legacy to pass on to the younger generation of Black Deaf signers.



“Black ASL helps validate the Black Deaf community's sense of who they are — their language, history, culture and experience. I want the world to know about us,”
(McCaskill, 2023)



***That's why
Black American
Sign Language
Matters!***

Questions?



References

1. Anderson, G. B. (1972). Vocational rehabilitation services and the black deaf. *Journal of Rehabilitation of the Deaf*, 6 (2), 126-128.
2. Anderson , G. & Grace, C.A. (1991). Black deaf adolescents: A diverse and underserved population in O.P. Cohen & G. Long (Eds.), *Selected Issues in Adolescence & Deafness*, *Volta Review*, 93 (5), 73-86.
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5. Younkin, L. (1990). Between two Worlds. *The Disability Rag*.

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