

# **STUDIES OF VISITORS AT *THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY***

Prepared for the  
National Museum of American History, Behring Center  
Smithsonian Institution

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Carole M. P. Neves, Director  
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## **Background**

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The National Museum of American History, Behring Center (NMAH) asked the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to investigate the experience of visitors at *The American Presidency* (TAP), a 9,000-square-foot exhibition that opened on November 15, 2000. The exhibition includes over 900 artifacts, sound and video presentations, computer and mechanical interactives, and tactile experiences. The NMAH team designed the exhibition to emphasize the personal dimensions of the presidents; the multiple roles of the job; and the complex relationship between the office of the Presidency, the American people, and other institutions.

The museum developed a timed-entry system to regulate the number of visitors entering the exhibition. Visitors could obtain free timed-entry tickets through Ticketmaster, paying a small handling charge. In addition, same-day-entry tickets were available at NMAH information desks and at the entry to the exhibition.

OP&A was asked to assess the extent to which the exhibition achieved its aims, and to provide insights for possible changes and future exhibitions. The OP&A team designed three separate studies of the exhibition. In the first study, visitors' behavior was observed in the exhibition. In the second study, open-ended interviews were conducted with a small number of visitors. In the third study, survey questionnaires were administered to separate samples of visitors as they left the exhibition and the museum.

### **This Report**

This document includes the conclusions, results, recommendations, and supplementary materials from the three studies.

Section I is based on interviews that were conducted with 25 visitor groups (32 visitors) as they exited *The American Presidency* or left the shop across from the exhibition. Because of the way visitors were selected, and the nature of the interviews and analyses, the results are not representative of all visitors who saw TAP. Nevertheless, the interviews provide rich insights into the quality and nature of the visitors' experiences.

Section II is based on questionnaires that were administered to separate samples of visitors as they left the exhibition (557) and the museum (365). The results are representative of visitors in the museum and those who saw the exhibition at the time the data were collected.

Section III includes the results from an observation study. In this study, 87 individual visitors were randomly selected for observation as they passed through the ticketed entrance to the main exhibition space of *The American Presidency*. Their stops (locations and duration) were recorded from that point until they exited through the exhibition doors.

Section IV contains consolidated recommendations from the separate studies. The recommendations reflect the mission of OP&A, which is to provide Smithsonian staff with information, tools, and connections that can stimulate discussion and debate about how to improve exhibits, programs, activities, practices, and processes.

# **I. Interviews with Visitors to *The American Presidency***

June 2001

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# Interviews with Visitors to *The American Presidency*

## Summary

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This report summarizes personal interviews with 25 groups of visitors, 32 individuals, as they exited *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden* or its shop. Because of the way visitors were selected, and the nature of the interviews and analyses, the results are not representative of all visitors who saw TAP. Nevertheless, the interviews provide rich insights into the quality and nature of the visitors' experience.

- There was some confusion about what is available in Smithsonian museums. Within the Smithsonian, The National Museum of American History has the image of being static and unchanging.
- Since only a few visitors come specifically to see *The American Presidency*, banners and signs are important in drawing visitors. In addition, the draw of 'temporary' exhibitions and tickets is strong.
- In spite of diverse preferences, none of the visitors were dissatisfied in TAP. A powerful experience for many was reliving America's history and reliving one's own life.
- The timeline, the section on assassination, and the section on children in the White House were popular with visitors. The most powerful objects were Washington's Uniform, Lincoln's Hat, and the contents of Lincoln's pockets. The large number of objects in the exhibition were not a problem for visitors.
- Many of these visitors came away with ideas that the exhibition team intended, but no one thought that the exhibition had a main message.
- Crowding was a problem for many and some had accessibility problems (e.g., seeing things, maneuvering through the space).



## The Study

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The aim of this study was not only to investigate visitors' responses to *The American Presidency*, but also to understand those responses within the context of visitors' expectations and behaviors. The interviews were conducted in the first quarter of 2001 with 25 visitor groups (32 visitors) as they exited *The American Presidency* or left the shop across from the exhibition. The average interview length was 20 minutes and the interviews were tape-recorded. This report is based on an analysis of the tapes.

The interview guide is included in Appendix A, and a list of interviewees is in Appendix B, followed by extensive excerpts from the interviews in Appendix C. The study method is described in Appendix D.

## Findings

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### Visiting Museums

- *Museum-going has been a regular part of some visitors' lives.*

Some of these visitors only go to museums when they travel; others frequent museums in their hometowns. Washington area residents tended to visit when friends or relatives came to town. Some recalled coming to museums on school trips and with their families.

- *Visitors make personal connections in museums.*

Interviewees often related to settings or objects that recalled their experiences or that linked them to events that they had known about from reading or schooling.

### Visiting Washington, DC and the Smithsonian

- *The visit to the Smithsonian was part of exploring Washington.*

Visitors' agendas included a range of popular "sights," such as, the White House, the Washington Monument, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the FBI Tour. The Smithsonian was one among this set of options. In some cases the decision to visit a particular SI museum was a spur-of-the-moment decision. Many visitors gave the impression that a visit to Washington had so many attractive options that they could not be seen in one visit. The Smithsonian, and even individual SI museums, left them with the impression that there was still a lot more to see.

- *People had various reasons for coming to Smithsonian museums.*

Some of these visitors came to the Smithsonian because of specific objects or "American things," some came because it is a highlight of Washington DC or because others had recommended it, and some were just killing time or wondering what changed since their last visit.

- *There was some confusion about what is available in Smithsonian museums.*

Although these visitors used their individual interests to guide their paths through Washington and the Smithsonian, some of them were unsure what they might find in a particular museum or exhibition.

## **Visiting NMAH and The American Presidency**

- *The National Museum of American History has the image of being static and unchanging.*

Some had the sense that there is little change at NMAH and that infrequent visits are sufficient. At the same time, some visitors felt that constancy and continuity are valuable.

- *Banners and signs are important in drawing visitors.*

Most of these visitors came to TAP because they encountered a banner on the outside of the building, a sign on the Mall, or a sign inside NMAH.

- *The draw of 'temporary' exhibitions and tickets is strong.*

Some of these visitors made remarks suggesting that temporary exhibitions are especially attractive. The ticketing system helped give the impression that TAP is a temporary exhibition.

- *Only a few visitors came specifically to see The American Presidency.*

With a few exceptions, interviewees, even those who had heard of TAP or who had been recommended to see it by friends, had not come to the Mall or to the museum itself to see the exhibition. Typically they noticed the banner, signs in the museum, or were informed about the exhibition at the information desk. The impact of this on-site promotion was so strong that many of them started their visit to NMAH with the TAP.

## Experiences in The American Presidency

- *Visitors were very diverse in their preferences, but none were dissatisfied.*

Some visitors were very taken with the videos and others avoided them completely. Some liked the interactives and others ignored them. The objects fascinated some; others were more interested in the information. Some were drawn by abstract concepts, others by specific details. Some were looking for history, others for personal connections to famous people or incidents. They seemed to have found the type of experience that matched their personal preferences. No one felt excluded (one visitor was critical of physical accessibility in the exhibition although he did not have a disability himself). In general, the study team had the impression that the exhibition successfully attained its goal of providing experiences appropriate to different learning styles.

- *Interviewees rated the overall exhibition highly.*

When team members asked visitors to evaluate the exhibition overall, they scored it relatively high. At the same time, many of them cited exhibitions that they considered better, both nationally and internationally. One visitor suggested that the exhibition is too balanced to be considered exceptional.

- *A powerful experience for many was reliving history and reliving one's own life.*

While the older items reminded visitors of what they had heard or read about the past, more recent material, especially the video and audio, reminded visitors of events that they experienced in the media at the time that they happened. These were emotional experiences and also triggered thoughts about how life has changed.

- The educational value of the exhibition was important to some.*

Some visitors enjoyed seeing and learning new things or deepening their knowledge or understanding about a time or event. Learning was particularly valued for children.
- Visitors considered the experience of children and young people in the exhibition important.*

A number of interviewees discussed how to “make it fun” for kids, and focused on creating interest for a younger crowd. Some saw this as a reason for the interactives and videos. They felt these elements were more attractive to young people.
- The most popular displays for interviewees were the timeline, the section on assassination, and the one on children in the White House.*

The timeline was attractive because it gave a concise, comprehensive overview of the Presidency. Some visitors admitted that they did not remember all the Presidents or when they lived, and they liked the way the timeline gave the complete list in one place. The assassination sections were interesting because they brought alive events that they had heard about (as in the case of Lincoln), recalled events during their own lifetime (as in the case of Kennedy, Ford, and Reagan), or reminded them of assassinations and attempts they had forgotten about (as in the case of McKinley and Garfield). The display on children in the White House was especially attractive to visitors who wanted to find a link between the Presidency and their own lives. In this case the link was parenting and a sense of family.
- Washington's Uniform, Lincoln's Hat, and the contents of Lincoln's pockets were the most powerful objects for these visitors.*

Washington's uniform helped people realize how tall he was. Lincoln's hat was striking not only because it was worn on the night of his assassination,

but also because it was so simple and poor-looking, thus suggesting something about Lincoln's character. The contents of Lincoln's pockets on the night of his death suggested his concerns, including his worry about how his work was written about by the press.

- *Among the interactives, visitors mentioned the teleprompter and the opinion poll.*

The teleprompter seemed to be as attractive to adults as it was to children. Women and men were drawn to it. The opinion poll was interesting to these visitors not just because they could give their opinion, but because it made them think about other visitors. Several interviewees, for example, noted the prominence of President Clinton in the opinion of visitors and one of them felt that it might have reflected the fact that for young people, he was the only President they had known.

- *The videos were well received.*

In some cases it appeared that people were treating the videos as artifacts, in as much as they inspired memories, represented a direct connection to history, and gave rise to thoughts about meaning.

- *Some liked the section on the Presidents and the media; others cited it as the one thing they did not like.*

A few visitors were drawn to the images of the Presidents in popular culture. A teacher who identified himself as "a media guy" wished that the media representations had included some discussion of how accurate or inaccurate the images are.

- *None of these visitors had a problem with the number of objects on display.*

Even when researchers encouraged visitors to be critical of the exhibition,

they maintained that the high number of objects was not a problem. They felt that it was natural to choose from among a large number the items that interested them. Several visitors were curious whether this represented everything the museum had on the Presidents or was a selection.

- *No one thought that the exhibition had a main message, but many of these visitors came away with ideas that the exhibition team intended.*

Although none of the visitors we interviewed could cite a main message for the exhibition, a number mentioned themes compatible with or identical to the aims of the exhibition team. In particular, some of them said that the exhibition reminded them how hard it is to be President, how personally risky it is, how hard it is to be criticized, how many roles the President is expected to fill, how unique and special the Presidency is as an institution, and how some Presidents have normal family lives in the White House.

- *Some visitors had trouble seeing things, and many had a negative view of crowds.*

A few visitors felt that sections of the exhibition were too dark, and several mentioned that glare from overhead lights made it difficult for them to read some texts. The exhibition was not crowded during the times that these interviews were conducted, but a number of visitors were conscious of the problem of crowding. Some had deliberately chosen this time of year to visit so that they could avoid crowds. A few expected the exhibition to be more crowded and were mentally prepared for it, although they felt that if it had been crowded, they would not have enjoyed it as much.

- *There was some criticism of the pathway through exhibit.*

A few made critical observations about the “wayfinding” through the exhibit, suggesting that the path through the exhibition was not as smooth as they would have liked.

- *Some visitors provided suggestions for additional content or information, or improved organization.*

Visitors suggested additional objects, including more old photos, and suggested additional information, including more on the issues during the early Presidencies, on major historical events during each President's life, and on when each President was born and died. Several visitors found the organization of the exhibition to be disjointed, and recommended that the parts could have been better integrated, either through chronology or by associating particular Presidents with each major role or idea.

Two visitors suggested that the exhibition should have a map with lights indicating where the different Presidents were from. One suggested that this map might also have a chronological option, so that visitors could determine if there was a connection between different historical periods and the places where Presidents were from.

- *When asked how to increase the audience in the exhibition, some visitors suggested that history topics are not particularly popular.*

Although a number of these visitors were personally devoted to history and enjoyed the exhibition, few were surprised that it was not drawing more visitors.



## Recommendations

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- The Smithsonian should devise a better system of cross-referencing topics and objects across museums, and visitors to NMAH should be given more and better ways to find out what is on view in the museum.
- NMAH should post information about exhibitions planned for the future -- to encourage people interested in those topics to return, to spread the word about future projects, and to remind visitors that the museum is not static. The most effective locations would be near the exits and in the elevators.
- NMAH should use extensive publicity about the NMAH renovation, including design previews, to change its image as a staid, old-fashioned museum.
- Since many visitors do not mind sorting visually through large numbers of objects, NMAH should consider installing some open storage areas in its renovated galleries, particularly in areas where there is strong public interest and unique depth in the collection.
- Accessibility guidelines should be enforced more rigorously. Walkthroughs with representatives of populations with disabilities should be used to identify problems that are not apparent in plans (such as glare from lights). Alternative media, such as audio guides and large-print booklets of labels, should be made available for major exhibitions.
- Exhibits such as the Presidency should be installed in larger spaces, to facilitate access and improve the experience.
- In the future design of the renovated galleries, NMAH should provide some spaces that allow for quiet reflection as well as others that promote socialization.

## **Appendix A: Interview Guide and Interviewee List**

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**AWARENESS:** How did you find out about the President's exhibition? What did you hear?

**Marketing the exhibition:** How can we get more people to come? Why aren't they coming?

**EXPERIENCE IN THE EXHIBITION:** Did you like the exhibition? What did you like about it?

What was the high point for you? What should we be sure to put into the travelling version of the exhibition? What did you not care for? What could we leave out of the travelling version?

**Evaluation:** Was it o.k., pretty good, really good, fantastic? What exhibition WAS fantastic?

**Amount of stuff:** Too much stuff in the exhibition?

**Message:** Is there an overarching message in the show?

**EXPERIENCE IN THE MUSEUM:** What else did you see in the museum? What did you like the best?

**First Ladies:** Did you see it? Do you intend to? How does it compare?

**Servicescape:** Have you been to the museum when it was crowded? How did it affect your visit? Is it too dark in the exhibition? Can you read the texts easily?

**VISITING SI:** Where are you from? Is this your first time at NMAH? What other SI museums are you visiting?

**Asia and Asian Art:** Have you ever been to Asia? Do you know about the Smithsonian's Asian art museums? Ever been to one? Which one? Seen Asian art elsewhere?

**Contemporary and African Art:** Visiting any? How about Hirshhorn, African Art -- ever been there?

### **VISITING MUSEUMS**

Do you visit museums often? What kind? When did you start visiting museums?

## Appendix B: Interviewee List

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### Interviewee List and Characteristics

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No.	Gender	Characteristics	Residence
1	F	Retired Foreign Service officer	Washington area
2	M	Retired HUD program officer	Washington area
3	M	Construction supervisor /First visit to SI	Tucson, AZ
4	F	First visit to SI/In DC with #3	Tucson, AZ
5	F	Frequent SI visitor	California
6	M	Security guard for 25+ years	Washington, DC
7	M, M, M	Father, son, & friend on school trip	Great Falls, VA
8	M	Medical student/First visit to SI	New Orleans, LA
9	F	Irregular museum visitor	Illinois
10	F	Docent for 25+ years	Washington, DC
11	M, F	Retired financial analyst/Regular visitors	Albuquerque, NM
12a	M	Early retiree/Frequents historical sites	Washington, DC
12b	M	Unemployed/Frequents historical sites	Washington, DC
13	M, F	Young family on vacation	Cincinnati, OH
14	M	Businessman	New Jersey
15	M	Biology teacher	New Hampshire
16	M	Ex-serviceman	California
17	F, F	Mother and daughter/Museum people	Michigan and VA
18	M	30 year-old/First visit to SI in 18 years	West Virginia
19	M, F	Father with 11-year old daughter	Pennsylvania
20	M	14 year-old Home-school student	Washington, DC
21	M	College president	California
22	M	Retiree/Regular visitor	Florida
23	F, F	Woman with her mother	Alexandria & Boston
24	M	Banker/Rancher	Wyoming
25	M, F	First visit to SI	[Not Available]

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## Appendix C: Examples from the Interviews

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### Visiting Museums

*Museum-going has been a regular part of visitors' lives.*

"We go to Wash. DC every year around January and we stay for 3-4 days and we always go to museums, and we eat (at our favorite restaurants)...Usually we change (what museums we go to), but we go to some of them over again." - Father with 11 year-old daughter, Pennsylvania

"Young people have others things to do. There's Brittany Spears, for crying out loud. When you have Brittany Spears or the Museum of American History, what's it going to be? You have to wait until they get older, like me.... When I was young, this is the last place that would have interested me.... I was too busy in college, too busy raising kids and trying to earn a living and all of that. For me. And I might have been a late developer, but I was in my mid to late 30's when I began to become more interested.... We came here when my kids were young. But when you're doing it as a parent and you start showing the kids this, suddenly it begins to sink in more as to what the import of it is. Then it developed from that point on." - College president, California

"We have a son who lives in Boston, so we stop when we come through to visit him. This is the third time in the last two years that we've been here [at SI]. This is the second time in the three trips that we've been to this museum. We've been to all the Smithsonian museums. We were at the Library of Congress yesterday, spent time there, and enjoyed that very much. And we're going to go to the Navy and Marine Corps Museum on Thursday. We go to Congress tomorrow. We were at the FBI this morning...Today [at SI] my wife and my friend's wife will probably go to the art museum and my friend and I will probably go to the space museum. I haven't been to Air and Space in ten or twelve years, so I imagine it's changed some." - Retiree, regular visitor, Florida

"Here [in DC] we went to every new exhibition at NGA. The only historical site we have yet to do within a 100-mile radius is the new Office Executive Building. Difficult when you are working to get in. We've done John Booth's escape route and things like that." - Early retiree, frequents historical sites, Washington, DC

"When we first moved here I went to a number of museums, Air and Space a few times. Leave out the NGA, because we went there frequently. But the other museums, why for 20 years I didn't go to them. Well, I guess the NGA has the 'blockbuster' exhibitions, some of them are still vivid in my mind – like English Treasure Houses, the First Impressionists exhibit, so that's why I went there." - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

“I started to go to museums in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, at the Smithsonian Institution. It was school; it was a class trip. I remember it. It was the Army Medical Museum here on the Mall. We saw some interesting things. Now I think back on it and don’t think it was a nice place to take a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class. You think back about some of the things we saw in formaldehyde. ... I visited museums over in Europe [in military] I visited a lot of cathedrals, museums, other military places, I continued to visit -- not so much here. - Security guard for 25+ years, Washington, DC

“I have been to London, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and there is nothing there that I’ve seen that is better than here. ... I could spent a week in the London museum, one day at the NH was enough. One reason is that London is repetitive, there is much more of a lot of things.” - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

“I know people, who won’t step inside a museum, they think they’re dull and boring. We’ve done that to my brother, drag him to museums, and now he won’t come visit us anymore!” - Homemaker, Michigan

“Some of the worst were museums in Texas that had no labels, don’t know what. That was so frustrating, because there would be stuff, but you didn’t know connections, who it belonged to, its significance. I appreciate museums that do labels well. I was to a museum in Moscow and couldn’t read the labels anyway, but there was so much stuff, and only one label, and I was like, well, what is that?” - Homemaker, Virginia

“ I knock myself out to see them [museums] in foreign countries. ... Art museums more than anything. But I was in Wilmington, Delaware, for example, in December; I made it my business to go to Faberge exhibit. When I visited my son in San Jose over Christmas the only museum we went to was the art museum. If I had to choose I would say -- in this country -- art museums. ... [She visited other types abroad.] Because I don’t know as much about the history or culture abroad, starting at different level. It depends where one is. I spent three weeks on October in Italy and went to museums every day. - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

“I was saying at lunch that when I first moved here in 1961 I made it my business to do something sightseeing, something uplifting once a week. Now, not quite so much – I have to force myself unless there are visitors. Probably a lot of Washingtonians say the same thing.” - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

*Visitors make personal connections in museums.*

“ ... It [*Nation of Nations*] was a crowd pleaser; it had things that older people could relate to. It had a schoolhouse where you could sit on steps and say “I went to one like that;” it had an Italian kitchen that people could relate to. Army barracks that people could connect to.” - Docent for 25+ years, Washington area

“I related to Air & Space. As I walk through Air & Space I see uniforms that I wore. Uniforms on wax statues - that makes me feel like a relic. I lived through that era. Army Air Corps -- that really dates me. Prior to Air Force. It was founded in 1946 and I was in from 1945-46.” - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

“I’m more interested in Presidents now since – oh, I guess I shouldn’t call him a friend -- but an acquaintance of mine is Dick Cheney, the Vice-President of the United States. It gives me a lot of pride to see the Presidents of the past since I know the Vice-President.” - Banker/rancher, Wyoming

“I’ve been to the Holocaust Museum and I might go there again, but that’s a pretty heavy emotional load. I was in Japan. But anyway, in some of these museums like that I can only take about two hours and then I have to go; it gets to be much. ... It’s just like watching the Ethiopian children starving on television. You can’t sit there every night. You can’t function. You could get cold to the horrors of mankind because you have to put up your defenses.” - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

“I think, my experience is somewhat of a personal nature. Because I was at home ... and by the way, assassinations I find most interesting. I was at home viewing the motorcade in Texas when Walter Cronkite was the news reporter. I was watching the motorcade and Walter Cronkite saying something was wrong and the whole thing was somewhat unbelievable to me at that age – I was 14 years old – and I couldn’t fathom anyone doing such a horrible thing. I was ... I still am intrigued by that event. Of course a lot of kinds of events occurred after John F Kennedy. Of course, it was that particular one that really...” - Security guard for 25+ years, Washington, DC

“Seeing the Gunboat, imagine, looking at the stuff we have today, and this is the stuff that was used in the civil war, and further back. [...] At home I have an original “Harper’s Bazaar” newspaper from when Lincoln was assassinated. Got it in Savannah ‘a hundred years ago.’ I have it matted and framed with acid free paper. I was interested in looking in TAP to see if they had similar things from that time period.” - Ex-serviceman, California

“As a child, I went to a cotton farm. We had to try to get seeds out of cotton and slave children had to fill their boot before they went to bed. And it was nearly impossible. [It] gave me a whole different view of those children in the field, gave me a real personal view of how life was for that person and empathy for their situation.” - Homemaker, Virginia

"I liked the gadgetry [in TAP]. What they called a polygraph machine. You could use one pen but other pens are doing the same thing. That's because I'm an engineer and that sort of thing fascinates me." - Retiree, regular visitor, Florida

## Visiting Washington, DC and the Smithsonian

*For many of these visitors, the visit to the Smithsonian was part of exploring Washington.*

“We got here Saturday morning. We did as much as we could ... we saw Air and Space, did the Capital, did the museum of art, tried to go ... Oh yes, Library of Congress and had to run around Jefferson’s library in about 4 minutes, that was unfortunate. Vietnam Wall, pretty much all the highlights.” - Medical student, first visit to SI, New Orleans, LA

“We’re going to see the Lincoln Memorial, some of the sites, relax. We’ll possibly visit the Air and Space Museum.” - Young father, Cincinnati, Ohio

“I am in DC with Washington “Close Up.” This program brings students to DC for a week, to do all kinds of things, meet congressmen, monuments, etc. We’ll do cultural and political things [students are seeing FDR memorial and “Bye-bye Birdie,” battlefields, etc]. I came because I had never been to DC before.” - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"There's so many things that we want to see in Washington that we're still at a point where we can come here, drop in out of a parachute and say, well, o.k. fine, what'll we do today. There are still plenty of things to do." - Retiree, regular visitor, Florida

*People had various reasons for coming to Smithsonian museums.*

“My family is visiting from New York and they wanted to come and visit another exhibit, the ship, the *Philadelphia*, which was in the French Indian War. Somehow this is the first thing we came to.” - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

“We came to see other ‘American things,’ saw the sign and I asked her if she wanted to see it, so we came here first.” - Homemaker, Michigan

“(He) went to NMNH yesterday, and students from previous trips said he “had” to come to NMAH. They said ‘spend a day, you’ll like it’.” - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

“I am in town for a business meeting, and planned the trip to the Mall by natural orderly visit to the Smithsonian (Go to Natural History next, and to National Gallery if I have time)... I’m a pilot, so ten years ago I saw the aviation portion. I’m intending to see things I haven’t before.” - Ex-serviceman, California

“Just always wanted to come back and see things, see how things changed. ” - 30 year-old, first visit in 18 years, West Virginia

"I'm attending a meeting that starts this afternoon, so I had this morning to kill and decided to come down here. Yesterday I went to Natural History and today I decided to come here." - College president, California

*There was some confusion about what is available in Smithsonian museums.*

One visitor, for example, pointed out that he wanted more information about what was in the particular exhibitions at NMAH. For TAP, he thought that the listings should state that the exhibition contained primarily "personally owned artifacts" from the Presidents. - 30 year-old, first visit in 18 years, West Virginia

This same visitor suggested that the NMAH computer information terminals at the front desk were too hard to get to when the museum was crowded, and suggested kiosk maps of the sort used in shopping malls. - 30 year-old, first visit in 18 years, West Virginia

"It's confusing. There's a museum of American history and a museum of natural history, and sometimes the contents of them -- you can't tell what museum you're in by the contents. We like it all but you can't always associate it... There are science exhibits in here? This year we went to the National Archives. Is that part of the Smithsonian? Was the piano thing part of the Smithsonian?" - Father with 11 year-old daughter, Pennsylvania

### **Visiting the National Museum of American History and *The American Presidency***

*The National Museum of American History has the image of being static and unchanging.*

"I've been in this museum several times. The exhibits don't seem to change very much. They're pretty much the same. I think that boat [*Philadelphia*] has been there for 30 years, I guess. It's a wonderful thing, but once you've seen it, you've seen it.... [But] we need to be careful not to think about changing stuff so rapidly just to suit the current generation. There's another group of people twenty years from now who are coming up who haven't seen this stuff." - College president, California

"I have seen so much in the museum [NMAH]. It is permanent, so if you've seen it, you don't have to come back. When someone comes to visit Washington you just add the old." - Early retiree, frequents historical sites, Washington, DC

"I haven't been to this museum since I was in junior high school. When we come down we go to the Natural History museum. It was a pleasure to come back and see the trains, and so forth." - Father with school children, Great Falls, Virginia



*Banners and signs are important in drawing visitors.*

“Walked up front and saw the sign on the front. Other than the Flag, this is my first exhibit.” - 30 year-old, first visit in 18 years, West Virginia

"The outside banner [for TAP] was effective. A lot of people are like us. You're wandering around, you bump into it, and you go in. It's on the third floor, so you have to make an effort to come up here. Some people probably wander around the ground floor and shoot out. It wasn't hard to find or anything, but there would be a certain amount of just walk-through business if it was right in front of you." - Father visiting with daughter, PA

“I was coming over to the museums anyway and saw the large banner on the side of the building.” - Ex-serviceman, California

“I saw the signs outside on one of the days that I was driving by and one of the people at the committee said that they saw it in [a magazine].” - Banker/rancher, Wyoming

"We went to the Castle yesterday and it had signs advertising [TAP], and so we decided to come this morning." - Retiree, regular visitor, California

“I was coming over to the museums anyway and saw the large banner on the side of the building.” - Ex-serviceman, California

Indoor signs too:

"We didn't know it was here. When we were coming up the steps my mom saw [the sign].” - 14 year-old, home-school student, Washington, DC

Advance notice can also help:

"Last year they were advertising the Piano 300 exhibition, but it wasn't here yet. We remembered. And there's a big sign that said Piano 300." - Father visiting with daughter, PA

“ I saw it advertised. I’m from north Jersey and there was an article in the paper about it.” - Businessman, New Jersey

*The draw of ‘temporary’ exhibitions and tickets is strong.*

One visitor who wanted to see the Warhol exhibition at the Corcoran Museum made the drawing power of temporary exhibitions explicit: "If I don't go, I'll never get the chance again." - 30 year-old, first visit in 18 years, West Virginia

“Everybody that I know really, really, really liked it. Many of my friends took time off. I knew it was temporary. Yes, yes, I wanted to see it before it closes. Thought it was until

today. Didn't realize it was permanent. I thought today was the last day." - Early retiree, frequents historical sites, Washington, DC

"I had intended to see the Freer Museum and go down. It's been quite a number of years and I didn't know how long it [TAP] was going to be here ... I now know it's indefinite, I just read it over lunch." Elderly, frequent SI visitor, CA

"We saw it was a special exhibition. Since you had to get a ticket, we figured it was pretty special." - Father with daughter, PA

"How much longer is it going to be on? [Interviewer: It's going to be here indefinitely.] That's another thing, when something is on for a long time or indefinitely people don't feel a sense of urgency. You're going to see a lot of people here and last month or the last two weeks. I stood in line for six hours to go to some sort of Russian treasures thing ... I just figured it [TAP] would be here until the summer, it seems a logical time to have it after the Presidential election or inauguration." - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

"I like special exhibits. There seems to be ones they have all the time and then small ones they bring in for a short time. It is a topic of conversation. You can ask someone, did you go see the new exhibit? It might be something you wouldn't want to see all the time, but because you can only see it as a one-shot deal, it kind of lets you in to that world for a little bit." - Young couple, Cincinnati, Ohio

"I have visited before, around Christmas with my family (two kids and husband), since it's temporary, we wanted to come see it. ... We came to see other "American things," saw the sign and I asked her if she wanted to see it, so we came here first. ... There are topics that would interest me more, though since it's temporary I will make sure I go see it, and the topic does interest me." - Homemaker, Virginia

*Only a few visitors came specifically to see The American Presidency.*

"Oh yes, I heard about it some months ago when it first opened. I had a meeting at the National Academy of Public Administration and gave this priority to come and see the [Presidency] exhibition. I heard a lot about the interesting items that had been sequestered at the Smithsonian for years that were now being displayed. Interesting memorabilia." - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

"I live in Washington DC and I'm recently retired and finally getting to know my own city. And, it seems to me I saw it in the weekend section of the Washington Post. This is the only one I came to see today. [...] Recently the Gilbert Stuart painting of George Washington, that led me to the whole exhibition, knowing that it will not stay here much longer unless the museum comes up with the money." - Retired HUD program officer, Washington area

"This is my second time in the exhibition and catching things I missed last time." - Mother with daughter, Alexandria, Virginia

## Experiences in The American Presidency

*Visitors were very diverse in their preferences, but none were dissatisfied.*

"I would say, based on the way it goes when we walk around, [my 11 year-old daughter] was interested in there enough to stop and look at things herself, whereas a lot of times she's ready to move on faster than in there. So based on that it is a really good exhibit. Your interactive stuff makes it really good." - Father with daughter, PA

"I'm a history buff. For me the historical aspects of it were the most interesting.... I found it was an interesting exhibit -- reasonably well done.... On a scale of one to ten, I would rank it at a five or a six. It wasn't a homerun...I think it was well balanced. I think one of the problems is, like in anything else, when you balance it too much you deal to a lower common denominator.... The problem with everything that is well-balanced is that it is average." - College president, California

"I appreciate in this exhibit that everything was labeled. You knew what it was used for, why it had been picked for this exhibit, why I was to think it was significant, and why "you" thought it was important enough to include. - Homemaker, Virginia

"I liked the carriage, learning about Taft." - Young mother, Cincinnati, Ohio

*Interviewees rated the overall exhibition highly.*

"I thought it was just spectacular and I would like the younger members of my family to see it. Because it certainly brings to mind the different aspects of our country and the different Presidents and their terms of office." Elderly, frequent SI visitor, CA

"The Presidency exhibit is just overwhelming, compared to First Ladies. The Presidency exhibit – visitors can make association with certain time periods and certain events – when certain Presidents held office. I can go back as far as Eisenhower and make association with some of the things that he did during his Presidency and the Kennedy Presidency and the Johnson Presidency. People come in and make associations. High school kids come in and can make association with certain Presidents because of their knowledge." - Security guard for 25+ years, Washington, DC

"Would be a good, solid good." - Businessman, New Jersey

“I thought it was between “excellent,” I thought it was “high excellent.” - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

“I think it is hard to compete with some of the exhibits. Like when you go to the Holocaust Museum, that is going to affect you the most – the sheer horror of it. The Presidency is more of a general interest-- to just getting an idea of American History in general rather than a specific event.” - Medical student, first visit to SI, New Orleans, LA

“This was better than my expectations ... I thought it was done very well, I’ll probably go through it again some day.” - Banker/rancher, Wyoming

“I would place it in the middle of the road. It just gives an overall view of the Presidency and how it starts out and progression through the years and what they encounter. Life of the Presidents- Construction supervisor, first visit to SI, Tucson, AZ

“Really good. As good as anything I’ve seen in the US, and travels to Europe. Well laid out, with new types of plexi, angles for good accessibility, and the audio domes keep rooms quiet, but you are still able to listen.” - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

“I would rate the exhibition a 10 (out of 10).” - Ex-serviceman, California

“It wasn’t like great, it was good. I liked it.” -11 year-old daughter with father, PA

“It was pretty balanced. I was looking for a bias toward something, but it looked pretty balanced. Our media has a slant toward certain philosophies, I was wondering if that would show up, but it seemed pretty factual.” - Young father, Cincinnati, Ohio

*A powerful experience for many was reliving history and reliving one’s own life.*

“Of course, it’s hard for me to see exhibits about JFK’s assassination. And always for people of my age it burns bright in the soul. ... I’m 72 years of age and a lot of these Presidents I know about. A lot of it is reliving my own life, you might say. But I was telling Janice [his wife] here when I was a kid things were fixed. There was one President, FDR, and one heavyweight champ, J Lewis. Life is not like that anymore. We’ve changed.” - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

“With lots of things for example, you know how you’re going to feel -- when you see Lincoln’s -- I have been to lots of museums and get the same emotions, kind of imagining the object at the time the event took place – just imagining all the history that has gone by. For example it is fascinating to see the pyramids – the pageant of history that’s gone by – they were 2000 years old when the Battle of Hastings took place.” - Medical student, first visit to SI, New Orleans, LA

"I remember watching Nixon on television give his speeches, and now you see him again. It is different, but you enjoy reliving history, it's great." -Father with daughter, PA

"We spent a lot of time watching the video on deaths, not just assassinations. I remember FDR's death, I was alive the length of his term, he was elected when I was born, and when he died I thought it was the end of the world. I remember seeing him when I was about 8, in a parade, he was on the back of a car and he turned and waved at me. It was a high point of my life to that point" - Homemaker, Michigan

"I listened to Reagan give his speech to Gorbachev about the Berlin wall. It was the same speech that some kids happened to be reading at the teleprompter. That brought some memories back. I'm not old enough to remember all of it, but do remember from Carter on, and some of the things that went on. In elementary school, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, kids made badges/buttons on to declare whom they would vote for, had peanuts on them for one candidate." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"I vividly remember the assassination attempt on Reagan, and what my parents and grandparents said about Kennedy, was very well done." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"I enjoyed catching up on memories and being sad – on the Kennedy side." - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

"I come to this with a few more years than she [Daughter] does, because I was born at the time that Herbert Hoover was President in 1930. ... I can remember hearing President Roosevelt's voice on the radio. Like hearing the Fireside Talks and gathering around the radio and you can look back further. I can't remember Herbert Hoover but certainly Roosevelt, he had three terms. ... My parents were very staunch Republicans and made a lot of fun of Roosevelt. Some of the successive ones, of course the assassination of President Kennedy which was a big national tragedy and television had come in and we were living in Iowa, like many people you can remember where you were when it happened and like reliving that." - Mother with daughter, Alexandria, Virginia

*The educational value of the exhibition was important to some.*

"I would like more info, personally, but I'm a science teacher, I'm a data collector. Kids may like it or not." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"I didn't realize there were so many attempts had been made on Presidents. I knew the successful ones but didn't know all the attempts." - Ex-serviceman, California

"I would liked to have seen more historical things about the earlier Presidents. There wasn't an awful lot on the individual earlier Presidents, what they did, what the major issues of those times were. They tried to do it in certain places. But personally I would liked to have seen more ideas. What it was that motivated the earlier Presidents. But I guess you have to be careful not to just make it a history lesson, too." - College president, California

"It was particularly good because we just sat down and watched all the past Presidents who are still living talk about what's important, what they want to be remembered for, and all that business. I didn't realize that [my daughter] couldn't name the Presidents based on what they looked like. I just assumed everybody would know who Gerald Ford was, but when you're eleven, you weren't born for ten years after he was there. So it was a good lesson in just 'who's who.'" Father with daughter, Pennsylvania

"Many times I'll take something away [from an exhibition] that tells me there is something I want to learn more about. Then it has really been worthwhile when that's the case. In this exhibition it probably causes me to want to learn more about the Presidents themselves. That is, I should take the pains and go as far back as Washington and make sure I read a fairly detailed biography of Washington and move on to Adams and Jefferson and Monroe, and the whole gang." - Retiree, regular visitor, California

"Of all the things I saw, the most interesting tidbit of information was James K. Polk sending the clerical staff home during the hot summer and doing all the clerical work himself. Which shows the difference between what the Presidency is like today and what it might have been in that era. And the type of guy that had the job. I thought that was pretty funny." - Retiree, regular visitor, Florida

"I like the way it is educationally presented in terms of young people. There are a lot of lessons there about our democracy here and the separation of powers and all that." - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

"I made a mistake when I was raising my kids, I didn't bring them to Philadelphia and Washington, DC. It's the kind of the history that every junior high kid ought to have, at least if that opportunity presented itself. ... We're losing our tradition in America, and its something we shouldn't lose." - Banker/rancher, Wyoming

*Visitors considered the experience of children and young people in the exhibition important.*

"Probably too much stuff for kids, but nothing you couldn't get past. Too much visual scatter will confuse them. That's why the museum would have a program, which they could send ahead to the teachers, a packet that they could go over before the visit." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"The high school and younger kids seemed to like the audio-visual. I saw kids giving a speech

at the teleprompter. [These types of things] would draw kids more. That kind of thing would interest kids more than “old clothes” or something that would interest older people.” - Ex-serviceman, California

“If you want people – if you really want to attract the young people – I’m not sure how you are going to do it. My impression is that they were more interested in pressing buttons. It was more trying to sort of see oneself behind the Presidential podium without paying attention to what the speeches were about. Who was on the video screen.” - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

“I wonder how much anyone under 35, unless he is a student, how much he cares about the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup>. But I think it’s a shame that they don’t. [...] I stood next to a man in front of one of the Kennedy videos who said ‘isn’t it too bad that we know all the words and nobody under the age of 35 cares.’ It was one of those things ‘we want to go to the moon and those other things, not because it’s easy but because it was hard...’ - and we were both mouthing it and both knew it and delighted to see it again and wistful. But he’s the one who made the comment about the under age 35.” - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

“I loved a couple of things. The guides that are leading the kids around; the little school kids, and the guides are very knowledgeable and know how to deal with kids. I know that a lot of attention is paid and they know how to teach them. I like the displays geared at young people.” - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

"If you can take this to rural America and show it to 10-year-olds to 16- and 17-year-olds, then I think you're doing the right thing." - Banker/rancher, Wyoming

*The most popular displays for interviewees were the timeline, the section on assassination, and the one on children in the White House.*

“ I liked the wall that has all of the Presidents.” - Homemaker, Virginia

“ I really liked the original wall listing them all, that was great, the time-line was great. The most powerful part was the assassination room. Another great thing was the speeches in the next room.” - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"The part I was most interested in was the part about the attempts on the lives of the Presidents through the years.... I would have expected a little more information on McKinley than was there.... Back in my memory I believe that this occurred in Buffalo, where I was born and raised. And I believe there was more to the story than was presented there. It said it occurred but it didn't say more about it, at least not that I noticed.” - Retiree, regular visitor, California

“(Husband): I hope it’s not morbid, but I like the assassination things. I think because its those story you always heard and it makes it a little more real. Like the Holocaust, seeing the real

thing, it's morbid, but it makes it more real. It's not a fairytale thing, it really happened." - Young father, Cincinnati, Ohio

"(My favorite was) the assassination area. It held me the longest. I spent the most time there; the rest just went into the "database". It made me stop because I heard as I went by something about "other assassinations attempts have been made..." - Ex-serviceman, California

"Another interesting thing to me, was about the deaths of the Presidents. Yes, we spent a lot of time watching the video on deaths, not just assassinations." - Homemaker, Virginia

*Washington's Uniform, Lincoln's Hat, and the contents of Lincoln's pockets were the most powerful objects for these visitors.*

"What have the most meaning was seeing things that actually belonged to the Presidents. Washington's uniform, Woodrow Wilson's cloak or FDR or Woodrow Wilson. Things that actually belonged to them I go to a lot of exhibits and to a lot of historic houses, but I'd not seen something that belonged to George Washington." - Early retiree, frequents historical sites, Washington, DC

"... the personal objects more than the videos or current movies about Presidency. That's ok but it was George Washington's uniform and the cape that really grabbed me." - Early retiree, frequents historical sites, Washington, DC

"Also, I liked some of the personal effects, seeing GW's uniform." - Homemaker, Virginia

"Lincoln's Top hat, he was my Presidential hero growing up...It's like I know him more as a person [now], not just a figure." - 30 year-old, first visit in 18 years, West Virginia

"I'm a history buff. I'm there mostly to see the historical things. I think the pieces of memorabilia from previous Presidents were interesting, Lincoln paraphernalia that was with him when he was shot was kind of interesting." - College president, California

"I think the highlight would be ... some of the minor articles, like the Presidents' every day stuff ... I guess I liked the stuff from [Lincoln's] pocket over the hat. The pockets tell you what kind of a man he was; he kinda wore the hat as an emblem. Found it interesting that he had a Confederate \$5 bill in his wallet." - Medical student, first visit to SI, New Orleans, LA.

"I liked the Lincoln part, his hat, things from assassination even the newspaper drawings they had. Seeing the actual ticket, see the things actually from that time period. It made it seem more real. I don't know, I guess you grow up learning about the story, and it's nice to see the real things from that time." - Young father, Cincinnati, Ohio

"... items found in Lincoln's coat pocket when he was assassinated ... but there were like nine different newspaper articles that he had in his pocket talking about what a good job he was doing



as President. ... That's really interesting that the President carried it around in his pocket ... to me that says he was he was kinda struggling with whether he was doing a good job and be reminded that some people think he was doing a good job." - Mother with daughter, Alexandria, VA

"The parts I like best are the things the Presidents actually touched, the parts that I may remember the best are the clips of hair of the Presidents in their frames ... I was amazed that they weren't all gray haired ... The gun that shot Lincoln, that was interesting. He wasn't as lucky as Jackson. - Banker/rancher, Wyoming

*Among the interactives, visitors mentioned the teleprompter and the opinion poll.*

"She liked getting behind the teleprompter." ... "I started maybe first ten seconds, but then I saw and thought oh, people are starting to look!" - Young couple, Cincinnati, Ohio

"I like that, like listening to the speeches, there was a TV and it showed you the speeches of some of the Presidents, I liked that." - 11 year-old with father, Pennsylvania

"I personally like the TV opportunity for us to stand in front of the TV camera. I took advantage." - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

"I liked the part of where you get to go in -- when I was here with my husband -- and be the person making the speech. ... My husband made it holding the baby, the President and the first baby you know." - Mother with daughter, Alexandria, VA

"One thing we didn't like was the survey thing. It might be a kid thing, but Clinton ranked very high, I was surprised to see him ranked higher than Lincoln was. It just kind of like huh?" - Young father, Cincinnati, Ohio

"There was a questionnaire thing asking you to rate who was the most effective President, and it had Bill Clinton as number two, just after George Washington. Now my political persuasion does not lead toward Bill Clinton. But I think that can kind of give you a feeling of who is coming to see [the exhibition.] I think they are mostly Clinton advocates." - College president, California

*The videos were well received.*

"The videos, what previous Presidents had done and said about things were interesting." - College president, California

"The video that's there is good. As far as video is concerned I am more used to sitting for an hour at a time getting more detailed beginning-to-end-story type presentation. I am seeing more

sound bite or brief-speech-type information here, I think. Which is interesting and is in context, but it is not the same. I don't think I learn as much from that situation as I would from the longer presentation. If I had the time to do only one of the two, I would probably go to the exhibition unless somebody really raved to me about the video, because if I go to the video and put all my time in that and it isn't that good, then I've wasted my time. I would like both, is what I'm saying. But I know there will be a variety of ideas that I can grasp in this type of a presentation. You're not going to see any one in great depth necessarily." - Retiree, regular visitor, Florida

"I don't know I watched a lot of the speeches by Presidents, great speeches by Presidents. I was a great admirer of Harry Truman when he fired McArthur; because he restored the power of the Presidency. Americans have a love affair with generals and he put the civilian control back in proper balance." - Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

"I liked the videos a lot, you know the one at the end where they interviewed the Presidents, I liked that the best. The videos." - First visitor to Washington, DC, Tucson, AZ

"One of the best things I saw was the video on personalities of the Presidents." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

*Some liked the section on the Presidents and the media; others cited it as the one thing they did not like.*

"What I would have liked to see in the video on the media is how accurate these portrayals are of the Presidency. Like a channel on cable that does "History or Hollywood," analyzing how accurate the content and context of the TV show or movie is. Have a little blurb about accuracy, such as the West Wing, how realistic is it? Tell us what is dead on, and what is for dramatic affect. They say this is the closest anyone has ever come, but what does that mean? If we're 90% off and West Wing is only 80% off, then that still isn't even close. Newspaper portrayals have obviously been slanted. The political cartoons, I would have liked more analysis on the slant of the newspaper: Here is the picture, who is drawn, what the newspaper's political slant/agenda was, e.g., this is a time when the newspaper's editor was a fervent supporter of X. This would give even more credence to why it was published or not." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"For me there was a lot of it having to do with movies of the Presidency, which I didn't find very helpful. From my point of view I would be more interested in the historical part rather than who played the President most recently. They had a pretty big section devoted to that, which didn't do an awful lot for me." - College president, California

*None of these visitors had a problem with the number of objects on display.*

"No museum can have too much good stuff in it." - 14 year-old, home-school student, Washington, DC

“(There wasn’t too much in the exhibit,) You didn’t have to fight with your eyes and your mind to sort things out” - Ex-serviceman, California

“My house is full of stuff. Yes, this is a pack-rat exhibit and I’m delighted to see all this stuff that was accumulated. I do think that people who don’t have a whole lot of time, or have one day, if they really focussed on this they wouldn’t have time for anything else even in this museum.” - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

“I don’t think you could ever have enough as long as it has a certain relevancy to it. I was reading what interested me but less towards the end as I was thinking about lunch. If I was back in Washington, I’d see it again and spend more time.” - Medical student, first visit to SI, New Orleans, LA.

"A lot of different people are interested in a lot of different things, so you have to put stuff in that's interesting to a broad range of people." - College president, California

“It was interesting to see all the artifacts, to see what people (the museum) chose as important ... Did they show everything they have?” - Young mother, Cincinnati, Ohio

“It was outstanding. Very interesting with the wide range of objects. It is impressive to see how much we have on all the Presidents. - Businessman, New Jersey

“For me there was too much stuff, if I wanted to stop to listen to all the audio-visual things I wouldn’t have time to do other things I want to do. Some people will stop to see everything, but I just stop for things that catch my eye. Since I have limited time, I’m trying to cram in as much as I can.” - Ex-serviceman, California

“The number of “things” in the exhibit is fine for what we’re here for, since we’re here for a limited time, not spending a lot of time in one place...we don’t want to take time to see in detail all the things.” - Young father, Cincinnati, Ohio

*No one thought that the exhibition had a main message, but many of these visitors came away with ideas that the exhibition team intended.*

"No one particular thing really grabbed me. Just a lot of different information about the Presidency over a period of time, but there's wasn't any specific theme I saw there." - Retiree, regular visitor, Florida

"I think it does well to help us to see the uniqueness of the Presidency. They could have done more about explaining the difference between the Presidency and the monarchy from which it was spawned. I think people nowadays take it more for granted that we have this type of

government. Maybe it would be helpful to highlight to a greater degree the difference between this type of government and why it came to be as it is." - College president, California

"I didn't see a message per se, except the complexity of roles of the Presidency. This isn't just a man who wields great power (I say 'man' because that's all there has been so far.) He is also a person with great limitations. There are limits to the power; not just of the office, but of the person also. Such as Nixon (his 'dis-ease' behind the microphone), and Reagan (by disease). And it tries to portray them as people (the room with the children of the Presidents). The assassination room tried to portray how the family felt for Kennedy." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"Air & Space and American History they both tell us where we've been and where we're trying to go as a people. I find it exciting. We've been there. This one tries to do that. It tells us where the Presidency has been, its accomplishments, and of course we've all been exposed to some of the negative things in their terms of office. But yet, the office of the Presidency I think for this country gives people great hope – especially as an American citizen you have the right to say 'we don't want you in office anymore.'" - Security guard for 25+ years, Washington, DC

"I think one is reminded that the Presidency is an extraordinary special institution and one that has endured and will endure and that it hasn't been bloodied by the events of the last decade. Maybe." - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

"... All those different roles, working with Congress, disrupt your life, can't come out of there without being struck at how many successful and unsuccessful attempts at assassination. Stunning to see what happens to their personal life ... the complexity of being that role. "- Retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

"We should be eternally grateful to the people who want to take that role. When you look at it, it's hard to think that anyone wants that job. It's impossible to do and yet... Because it is so complex and there are people who want to do it." - Wife of retired financial analyst, Albuquerque, NM

"Glorification of American History – much easier when you look at one man – American history and WWI and Roosevelt – more complex when dealing with history of elite – easier to talk about the powerful, and the rich, easier when you talk about American Presidents. I guess a celebration especially of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I guess you talk about how the world has depended on America – especially WWII and then helping out in WWI, I guess our way of doing things and showing it to the rest of the world – seems to work for us." - Medical student, first visit to SI, New Orleans, LA

"It's history. The history of the Presidency and how it was established and they want us to understand and why he was a President instead of king." - Security guard for 25+ years, Washington, DC

"Well, for myself, whatever comes last ... the problem and challenges, Carter who I personally

admire because I think he's the best ex-President we've ever had, and they spend a lot of time with Carter and talking about the challenges and disappointments. I enjoyed it a lot because it's kind of wrapping up, Carter and Ford, challenges and difficulties. The overview of the Presidency. I don't know of a particular thing, because there is so much there." - Retired HUD Program officer

"To show commonality between Presidents. Things have changed, but it's still the same job. There is commonality, continuum." - Businessman, New Jersey

"I don't think it had a real message ... For me it brings it closer to home to what being President is like. You've heard the phrase 'it's like riding a tiger.' ... Most of us aren't close enough to that Office and never even think what it would be like. ... In the last election I thought I wouldn't want that job or being the First Family. ... You have lots of influence but also a lot of responsibility. For me it was getting an understanding or what it would be like to be President or Presidential family." - Mother with daughter, Alexandria, VA

*Some of these visitors had trouble seeing things, and many of them had a negative view of crowds.*

"One thing I don't like about the Smithsonian is that sometimes they're just so full of young people that are -- if you're five years old you can't help yourself -- and it is so distracting. But today's great. It's quiet. Even picking the day. Like on the weekends there are a lot of people. I don't think we've ever been in the museum on a Monday. This is really nice. You have it more to yourself and there is less distraction. We were in the Museum of Natural History one day and it was a rainy day, and I would just leave because there was a din of kids screaming." - Father with 11 year-old daughter, Pennsylvania

"You have to come here when it's not too crowded." - Retiree, regular visitor, California

"The one thing personally I wanted to read and there were the constant voices, giving inauguration speeches. ... I grew up in a time that if you wanted to read ... even my wife can watch television and do something else and I have to go to another room. So that's the only part I found distracting." - Retired HUD Program officer

"This particular exhibit, if it was crowded I would not have liked it as much. ... I read and watched and ... " - Retired Foreign Service officer, Washington area

"The only thing that was distracting to me was the glass reflected -- more difficult to read. It's reflecting everything in the room." Elderly, frequent SI visitor, CA

"It's kind of dark in there. It's hard to read some of this stuff and my eyes aren't so good anymore either." - College president, California

"I'm somewhat visually impaired and would have to get pretty close. I missed out on some of [the texts] I would have read twenty - thirty years ago." - Mother with daughter, Alexandria, VA

I had a little bit of a hard time because of the reflection; I couldn't read some of the writing. - Homemaker, Michigan"

One visitor mentioned that it is too hard for disabled people to get from one SI building to another. He would like to bring his mother, but she's in a wheelchair and he can't get from one museum to the other. He wanted a shuttle bus, or even a tunnel. - 30 year-old, first visit in 18 years, West Virginia

*There was some criticism of the pathway through exhibit.*

"Since I'm not familiar with the order of the Presidency, I think it could have been organized better, to give the exhibit more flow, like a timeline. It goes from here are all the Presidents, to their roles, to assassination, and this and that. It seems disjointed; it goes from one topic to another. You could do it in a timeline flow, instead of having commander in chief in a big room with all these other things; you could pick a President that exemplifies that role. And in a timeline flow show that here is an aspect of the Presidency and a President that really took it to heart." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"I have been to some [exhibits] where there was a definite flow, and in there, there were some places, to see everything you had to go two directions. That may have helped to keep people from crunching all into one place. But I remember thinking there is something over there and I don't want to keep going on the right side and miss what was over there." - Homemaker, Virginia

"The one characteristic [of the exhibitions that I consider outstanding] is that they were chronologically organized. Here you'll have in one area media, and within that this may be chronological. You have attempts on the President's life, but that is not media. Now, whether it would improve to have from the day Washington first took office to George W's inauguration, to have everything chronologically established, I can't say. It probably wouldn't." - Retiree, regular visitor, California

*Some visitors had suggestions for additional content or information, or improved organization.*

"The part that I would eliminate was the comic section at the end, the TV and it is really irrelevant." - Early retiree, frequents historical sites, Washington, DC

"I guess one of the things I felt it is definitely a reading exhibition, awful lot of reading, more signs of reading than stuff. It bothered me to a degree. I like looking at things. If I wanted to

read I'd get a book. There was too much text, especially if you are trying to hold the attention of young people. I would condense the text, especially if you are trying to get young people. For a young person today reading is not a strength." - Early retiree, frequents historical sites, Washington, DC

"(A way to avoid large groups with loud tour guides) is to have audio phones in various languages. You are not able to ask questions, but there is something good about it... Good for certain exhibits, not the whole museum. Also good for the visually impaired. In this exhibition, it would benefit it. As well as museums with high flow, such as Natural History. You would have re-programmable units." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

"Might be interesting to know a major historical event during each of their lives, to anchor that President to a time. Particularly some that we didn't know so well, especially Polk and Arthur. You kind of ask, yourself, gee, that was President?" - Homemaker, Virginia

"What Presidents did, I don't know a whole lot about Presidents, other than Clinton. To learn about what they did, would be like, useful, and that would be good to know. I didn't know much about Nixon, I knew that he had to resign, but I learned a little more...because he was a crook." 11 year-old with father, PA

"Here is a comment, they gave you pictures of each President and the years they were President but they didn't give you the years of birth and death. That's not the purpose. That would have helped me." - Retired HUD program officer, Washington, DC

"A good idea might have been, given all the Presidential facts, tidbits, a light up map of the US that shows where Presidents were from. If you press a button, it shows the order of the election of the Presidents." - Biology teacher, New Hampshire

*When asked how to increase the audience in the exhibition, some visitors suggested that history topics were not particularly popular.*

"I don't know how many average Americans are interested in the Presidency. It could be what we've gone through the last years and a half in the Clinton administration, just want to turn away from it for a while and hope it is only temporary and especially with the counting of the election. Just guessing." - Retired HUD program officer, Washington, DC

I don't know why, but people don't rush to see American History – I would think that the election would draw them in – whether it's related it to school – they think why see something we already know. Why not see something we've never seen before – like Vermeer like the Vikings - People from outside Washington maybe – people from Washington are not ready to rush down.” - Docent for 25+ years, Washington area

"With the business of the last four years, I think people are just worn out [with the subject of the Presidency.] .... Just hold on a while. Give it a couple of years. Museums have to do with large time frames and I think you just have to have some time." - College president, California

## **Appendix D: Method**

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During the first quarter of 2001, the three members of the research team intercepted and interviewed 25 visitor groups (32 visitors) as they exited *The American Presidency* or left the shop across from the exhibition. The exhibition was not very busy during this period and the average interview length was 20 minutes. Interviews were conducted at the benches just outside the exhibition area, nearby the display of the gunship *Philadelphia*, and were tape-recorded. Interviewers made use of the interview guide in Appendix A, but relied on the responses of visitors rather than the guide to structure the interview. The main topics for the interview were awareness of the exhibition, visitor experience in the exhibition, visitor experience in the museum, visiting the Smithsonian, and visiting museums in general. The aim was not only to investigate visitors' responses to this exhibition, but also to understand those responses within the context of visitors' expectations and behaviors. When an interview was completed, the researcher returned to the exhibition exit area and recruited the next available visitor.

The tapes of the interviews were entered into the computer as digital files and indexed or partially transcribed. The team jointly constructed a categorization of the main points raised by interviewees. That document then became the basis for this report, supplemented by further repeated reviews and analyses of the tapes.



## **II. Visitors' Experiences at *The American Presidency***

July 2001

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# Visitors' Experiences at *The American Presidency*

## Summary

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This report describes visitors' experiences at *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden*, at the National Museum of American History. The results are based on questionnaires administered to 922 visitors as they exited the exhibition or the museum.

- *The American Presidency* attracted a typical NMAH audience, i.e., there were few statistically significant differences between the people visiting the exhibition and those visiting the whole museum.
- Most visitors first became aware of *The American Presidency* (TAP) through information sources at the museum such as banners, signs, or museum staff, rather than through off-site promotion or personal recommendations.
- TAP visitors rated the exhibition highly, although not as highly as museum visitors rated NMAH as a whole.
- Most visitors perceived a distinct message in the presentation and about two-fifths said that they learned something specific during their visit.
- Visitor experiences in TAP are nearly identical to those in NMAH as a whole. TAP did not provide a new, unique kind of experience for visitors.
- Women were more attracted to TAP than men and were more likely to pick it as their best-liked exhibit in the museum.

## The Study

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This study, conducted in May 2001, investigates the attracting power and quality of *The American Presidency*. Attracting power is the ability of an exhibition to draw visitors. The quality of the exhibition is the impact that it has on its visitors; that is, the range and depth of their experiences with the exhibition.

To explore the exhibition's attraction, we asked visitors if they came to NMAH to see something in particular and whether they had seen the exhibition during their visit. Those that did not see TAP were asked why they had not seen it.

The quality of the visit experience was determined by asking questions about satisfying experiences. We also asked questions about exhibition messages, the physical environment in the exhibition, and an overall rating. By asking visitors to choose their favorite among six of NMAH's major exhibitions, we placed TAP in the context of the visit.

The questionnaires are included in Appendix A, supplementary tabulations are shown in Appendix B, and the study method is described in Appendix C.

## Findings

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### The Draw of the Exhibition

- ***The American Presidency* drew a typical NMAH audience except for foreign tourists and school groups.**

Slightly more than half of the visitors were at NMAH for the first time, another fourth had been at the museum 1-3 times previously, while nearly one-fifth had visited four or more times. Whereas 5% of the TAP audience was foreign tourists, 11% of the NMAH audience were foreign (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup> Ten percent of the TAP audience was school groups, although 21% of visitors in NMAH overall were school groups.

- **Two out of five NMAH visitors saw *The American Presidency*.**

Visitors exiting from NMAH were asked which of six major exhibits they had visited. In order of attendance, the six exhibits were<sup>2</sup> :

- First Ladies (59% of all visitors and 71% of the women).
- Transportation Hall (44% of all visitors and 56% of men).
- Star Spangled Banner (44% of all visitors).
- *The American Presidency* (39% of all visitors).
- Information Age (31% of all visitors).
- *Science in American Life* (29% of all visitors).

In addition, 4% of all visitors had seen TAP on a previous visit.

- **Over half of NMAH visitors come to see something in particular.**

Over half (53%) of NMAH visitors came with a clear idea of a particular exhibit that they wanted to see in the museum (Table 2). Women were more likely to report having a specific NMAH destination in mind (63% of women) in comparison with men (42% of men). One reason for this difference is the strong attraction of First Ladies among women.

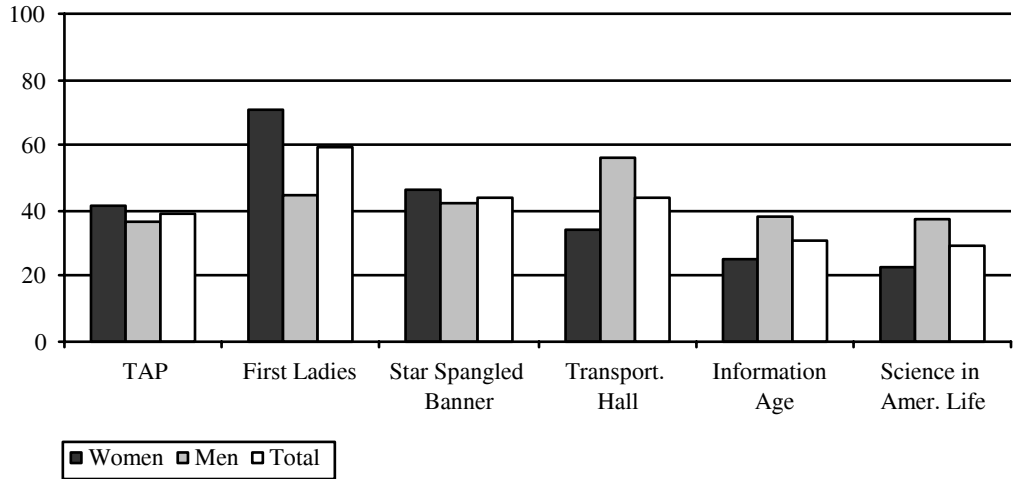
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<sup>1</sup> In this report, the chi-square test of significance is used to compare whether one set of proportions is different from another (e.g., if the proportions of different age groups in TAP were different from those in the museum). A non-significant test means that no effects were discovered and chance could explain the observed differences. Table 1 also shows the results of chi-square tests for the demographic characteristics.

<sup>2</sup> According to previous research, these exhibitions had attracted substantial audiences in the past

Among all visitors, women indicated that they specifically wanted to see First Ladies and TAP (16% and 13%, respectively); while men named Transportation subjects and TAP equally (9% and 8%, respectively).

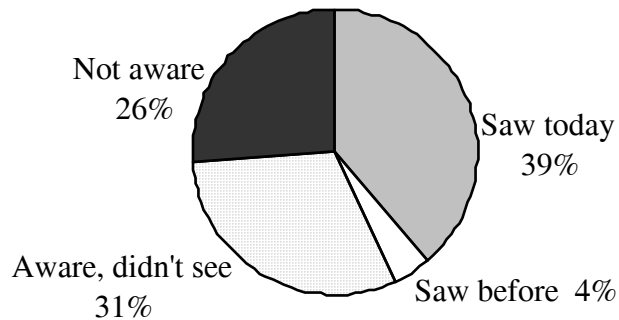
Figure 1. Exhibitions Seen on NMAH Visit, by Gender (In Percent)



- **Museum promotions in and around the building, such as banners and signs, are important in drawing visitors to the exhibition.**

Only one-quarter of the visitors leaving the museum claimed not to be aware of TAP, while about one-third were aware of the exhibition, but did not see it (Figure 2 and Table 4).

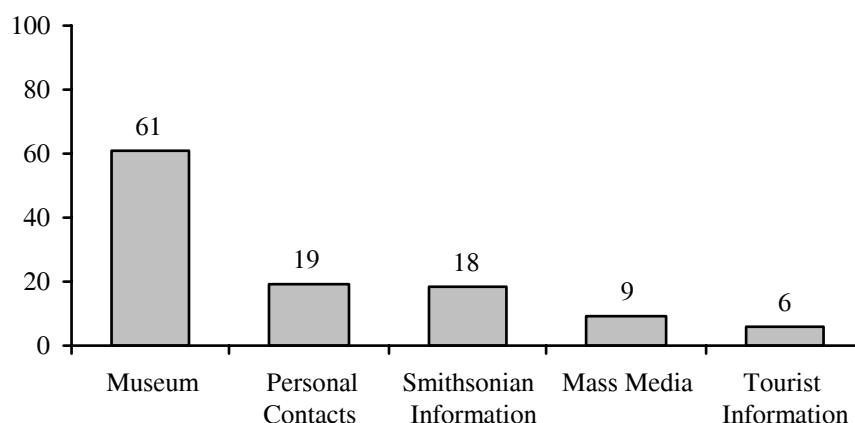
Figure 2. Visitors' Awareness of TAP



The major reasons for not seeing it included lack of interest, ticket availability, and time constraints. Overall, ticketing was not a serious barrier to seeing TAP.

The majority of visitors (61%), both those who saw TAP and those who did not, first became aware of the exhibition from a sign inside NMAH, a banner on the outside of the building, or museum staff. Recommendations from family and friends, Smithsonian and tourist information and the mass media were less effective sources of information (Figure 3 and Table 5).

Figure 3. Sources of Information about TAP (In Percent)



Local residents were much more likely to report hearing about TAP from the mass media (22%) or from friends, family members, or other personal contacts (25%) than non-local residents (8% and 18% respectively). Conversely, non-local residents were more likely to report a museum sign or banner or Smithsonian information as their source of information about the exhibition compared to area residents.

## Exhibition Quality

- **Both *The American Presidency* and NMAH were highly rated.**

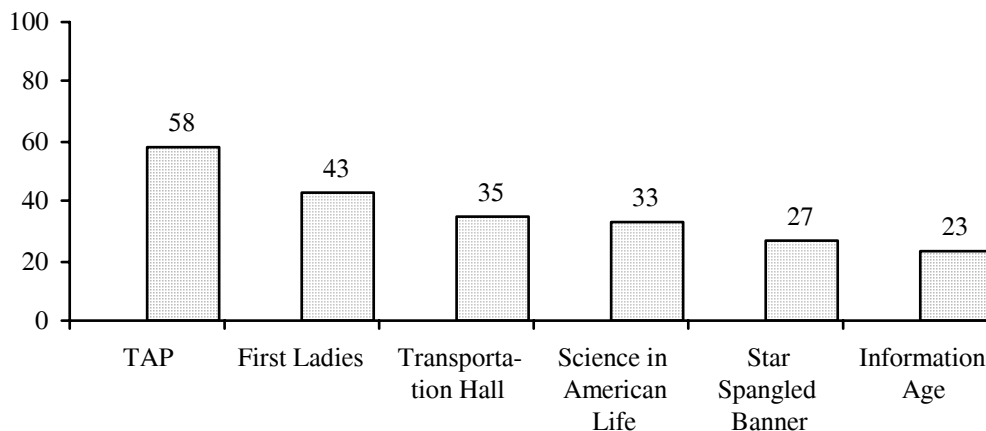
Overall, NMAH visitors rated their exhibition and museum experiences favorably, although the museum ratings were higher than the TAP ratings. The mean rating of visitors exiting NMAH was 8.4 (out of a possible 10 points) compared with 8.1 for those exiting TAP. Nearly half (46%) rated their NMAH visit as either 9 or 10 compared to one-third for TAP (Table 6).

- **TAP was highly rated compared to other major exhibitions at NMAH.**

Over half of all visitors who spent time in TAP said that it was their ‘best-liked’ exhibition among the six major exhibitions (54%) (Figure 4 and Table 7).

Overall, two-fifths of those who saw First Ladies rated it as their ‘best liked’ of the visit. Among *Science in American Life* or the Transportation Hall visitors, about one-third rated each of those exhibitions as their ‘best liked.’ Information Age and the *Star Spangled Banner* were rated as ‘best liked’ by about one-fourth of their visitors.

Figure 4. Selection of Exhibitions as “Best Liked” among Visitors who Saw Each Exhibition (In Percent)



- **Women, in particular, were pleased with TAP.**

More than three-fifths of women who visited TAP picked it as their favorite exhibition (63%) compared to half of the men (51%).

There were distinct differences in the exhibition preferences of men and women in NMAH. Women showed a distinct attraction towards First Ladies in visit rates. Men displayed a stronger draw towards the Transportation Hall, Information Age, and Science in American Life. The pattern of ‘best-liked’ exhibits also showed preferences among men for science and among women for the more personality-oriented exhibits.



- **Visitor experiences in TAP are nearly identical to those in NMAH as a whole. TAP did not provide a new, unique kind of experience for visitors.**

The survey respondents were handed a card listing ten possible experiences. Each respondent was asked to select those experiences that he or she had found satisfying while visiting the museum or TAP. From the list of experiences identified, respondents selected the one experience that they had found most satisfying during the visit. They were also asked where in the museum or exhibition they noticed the most satisfying experience.<sup>3</sup>

The ten satisfying experiences were clustered into four types of experiences:

- Object (Seeing real things, Seeing rare things, Being moved by beauty)
- Learning (Gaining knowledge, Enriching understanding)
- Reflective (Imagining, Reflecting on meaning, Recalling memories)
- Social (Spending time with friends/family, Seeing children learning)

A typical visitor selected three satisfying experiences from the list of ten, representing two clusters. The choices of satisfying experiences and most satisfying experiences were identical between TAP and NMAH — reflecting the fact that TAP duplicates the larger museum in the reactions of visitors.

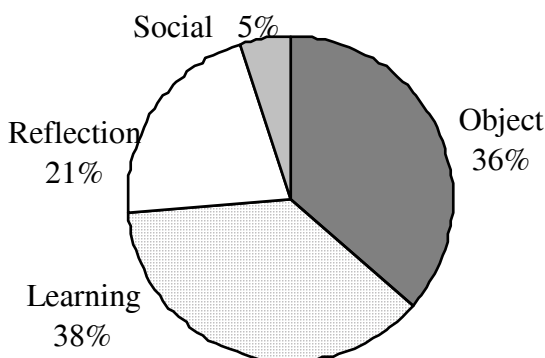
- ***The American Presidency*, as well as NMAH as a whole, was most satisfying to visitors because of learning and object experiences.**

The most satisfying experiences for one-third of visitors were related to learning (37% of TAP visitors and 36% of NMAH visitors). Another third identified their most satisfying experience as one related to the collection (36% and 32%).

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<sup>3</sup> See A. J., Pekarik, Z. D. Doering, and D. A. Karns, “Exploring Satisfying Experiences in Museums.” *Curator* 42(2) 152-173 (1999).

Figure 5. Most Satisfying Experience in TAP



Although seven out of ten visitors choose a reflective experience as one of their satisfying experiences in the exhibition, only one-fifth said that a reflective experience was their most satisfying experience.

Approximately four-fifths of NMAH visitors come to the museum with other people including children. However, only a quarter of visitors mention a social experience as one of their satisfying experiences and fewer than one out of twelve visitors mentioned a social experience as their most satisfying one.

- ***The American Presidency* was the leading location for most satisfying experiences.**

The most frequently mentioned location in the museum for experiencing a most satisfying experience was TAP (17% among visitors exiting NMAH). Transportation (15%), science generally (12%) and First Ladies (9%) are the next most frequently mentioned locations. However, listing these locations obscures the significance of gender in the location of most satisfying locations. For example:

- *The American Presidency* is the location for 21% of women's most satisfying experiences and 13% of men's.
- First Ladies is the location for 16% of women's most satisfying experiences and 2% of men's.
- The Transportation Hall is named by 24% of men as the location of their most satisfying experiences and only by 6% of women.

Within the TAP exhibition, artifacts associated with Abraham Lincoln (20%) and assassination generally (19%) are the most frequently mentioned locations of most satisfying experiences.

- **Large majorities of visitors reported that some aspect of the exhibit design enhanced their experience.**

Text panels and labels were widely perceived as enhancing the experience (90%). The videos (71%), the ticket system (65%) and the pathway through the exhibit (62%) were design aspects that most enhanced the visitors' experiences (Table 10).

At least a fifth of visitors acknowledged problems such as lack of seating (30%), crowding (29%) and spaces that were too hot (22%).

- **The design of TAP is important to visitor enjoyment and satisfaction.**

The relative impact of design, experience, and demographics on the overall ratings of the exhibit were extracted using regression analysis. Five design elements, two satisfying experience variables and two demographic characteristics contributed to increasing or decreasing visitor ratings of TAP.

Design factors that increased satisfaction

- Liking the pathway through the exhibition space
- Liking the colors
- Liking hands-on activities and interactives

Design factors that decreased satisfaction

- Feeling that the exhibition was too crowded
- Feeling that there were too few places to sit

Experience factors that increased satisfaction

- Having a satisfying experience that was "very strong"<sup>4</sup>
- Having a satisfying object experience (seeing real/rare things)

Other factors

- Being a first-time NMAH visitor increased satisfaction.
- Being 22 to 34 years old decreased the visitor's satisfaction.

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<sup>4</sup> Visitors' were asked about the strength of their satisfying experiences. Visitors who responded that the experience was very strong were likely to be more satisfied.

- **The exhibition communicated specific ideas about the Presidency to most visitors.**

Three of four visitors indicated that the exhibition communicated specific ideas about the Presidency (Table 11). The major idea that was communicated—to a fourth of all TAP visitors—was the enormity of the role, i.e., its importance, power, and complexity. Another fifth of all visitors to the exhibition emphasized the weight of the office, citing responsibility, burden, and even risk. Other visitors emphasized the Presidents’ humanity and multiplicity of roles (including private life).

- **Some visitors came away from TAP having learned specific things.**

Almost two-fifths of visitors were able to cite something specific they had learned from the exhibition (Table 11). Information about assassinations and new facts about the Presidents were most frequently mentioned.

## Conclusions

---

- **Visitors consider *The American Presidency* a satisfying exhibition.**

Visitors were very pleased with the exhibition. They rated it highly, had strong satisfying experiences, and ranked it above other major exhibitions at NMAH. But they did not rate it as highly as the overall experience of the museum.

The audience finds more learning and collection-related satisfying experiences in NMAH than reflective or social experiences. This is due in part to the expectations of visitors and in part to the kinds of experiences available in the museum.

- **TAP is not a strong draw for visitors.**

One in ten visitors came to the museum with an interest in seeing TAP, and less than two in five museum visitors entered the exhibition. Despite the extensive marketing of the exhibition in the museum, more visitors see First Ladies than TAP. In part, this may reflect the correct perception of prospective visitors that the experience of the exhibition will not be significantly different from the experience of the museum as a whole.

- **The extensive media publicity for TAP is not reflected in the awareness of NMAH visitors.**

Media promotion has significantly more effect on local visitors. Local residents are more likely to read *The Washington Post* and other media that have focused on TAP. There is no way to know whether press coverage outside Washington has an impact. It does not appear that tourists are making TAP a destination.

- **TAP does not broaden the appeal of NMAH.**

The demographic profile of TAP visitors is very close to the profile of NMAH visitors. It does not provide a male-oriented alternative to First Ladies. In fact, TAP overlaps First Ladies' audience. Men and women are equally interested in seeing TAP; however, men find other exhibits more satisfying.

The satisfying experience profile of TAP visitors is also the same as the profile of NMAH visitors. In particular, TAP does not broaden the appeal of NMAH to families and groups of visitors. The percentage of visitors (in this survey) selecting a social experience as most satisfying is small. The percentages in this survey are consistent with other NMAH studies.

TAP might not be working as well for children as the rest of the museum. Fewer respondents visiting TAP with children indicated that seeing children learn was their most satisfying experience compared to visitors in NMAH overall.

## Recommendations

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- Some aspects of the design are compromising the experience of visitors to TAP. For example, crowding is a problem that could be alleviated by more stringent control of the number of tickets issued during peak periods. More seating could be provided inside the exhibition. When NMAH is renovated, the exhibition could occupy more square feet.
- The plan for redesigning the Transportation Hall should include an investigation of the experience of visitors to the current space, as well as studies focussed on the features that could draw new audiences. The re-design offers NMAH the opportunity to create an exhibition that will draw greater numbers of men, much as First Ladies does women; or, the exhibition may be re-designed to attract more women or other targeted audiences.
- The museum should investigate the experience of visitors in the First Ladies exhibition—which remains the most visited exhibition in the museum—in order to better understand its unique and enduring draw.

Appendix A : Questionnaires



id

interv  1  3  5  
 2  4  6

Count: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for the Smithsonian and I'm talking to visitors today.

1. Is today your first visit to this museum, the National Museum of American History?   times

Yes [Go to Q2]  No 1a. How many times have you been here before today?

\*2. Where do you live?  
 DC  Foreign: \_\_\_\_\_ [Go to Q3]  
 MD/VA Suburbs  Other US: \_\_\_\_\_

2a. What is your zip code?       statecity

zip

3. Today, did you come to the Mall only to visit American History, or as part of a general visit to the Smithsonian?

- Smithsonian
- NMAH only
- NMAH, others if time

4. Was there something in particular you wanted to see or do in this museum today?

No  Yes: What was that? \_\_\_\_\_

partwhat

Mark if applicable:  
 TAP  First Ladies  SSB

8b. Where did you hear about this exhibition, "The American Presidency?" [Probe] Anywhere else?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

[Mark All]

- Banner outside
- Pillar/street post
- "Castle" info
- Other SI Info
- From family/friends
- News/Mag Ad
- TV
- Web
- Airport/Train station
- NMAH info desk
- Sign inside museum
- AH staff/guard/museum tour
- SI Mag
- School/teacher
- Metrobus/train Ad
- News/mag article
- Tourist Info

<b>ADMIN BOX</b>		segment	card 1	<input type="radio"/> a	<input type="radio"/> b	<input type="radio"/> c	
session	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> 4	location	<input type="radio"/> Interview	<input type="radio"/> Ref: lang		
		<input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 5	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Exhibition	<input type="radio"/> SI staff	<input type="radio"/> Ref. other		
		<input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 6		<input type="radio"/> Inelig.			

6. On this card are some experiences that people have told us were satisfying to them in "The American Presidency." [SHOW CARD 1] Which of these were most satisfying for you in this exhibition today? Choose all that apply. [Mark All] Anything else?

- B. moved by beauty
- C. children learning
- G. spending time with
- J. seeing real thing
- K. gaining knowledge
- I. imagining
- M. recalling memories
- R. see rare, valuable things
- U. enrich understanding
- W. reflecting on meaning

6a. Which one of those was MOST satisfying to you in this exhibition? \_\_\_\_\_ satist

6b. How strong was your satisfaction with that experience, was it:  
 not so strong,  strong, or  very strong?

6c. Where in this exhibition did you most notice having that experience? \_\_\_\_\_ satwhere

20. Do you think this exhibition communicates specific ideas about the Presidency?

- No [Go to Q21]
- Yes What are some of the ideas it communicated to you? [Probe] Anything else?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

q20a   q20b   q20c



21. In thinking about the Presidents exhibition, did the videos ENHANCE your visit, DETRACT FROM your visit, or HAVE NO IMPACT on your visit [Mark]. How about the labels and text panels, [Mark]...?

- |  | E                     | D                     | N                     | N/A                   |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Videos  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| b. Labels and text panels                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Hands-on activities                             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Colors used in the walls, cases, and/or carpets | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. Pathway through the exhibit space               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. Ticket system                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

NOTE: Interviewers #1, and #3 ask 12c. Interviewer #2 ask Q12d.

12c. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is the best exhibition you've ever seen and 1 is the worst exhibition you've ever seen, anywhere, how would you rate this Presidents exhibition?

q12c [ ] [ ]

12d. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the worst exhibition you've ever seen and 10 is the best exhibition you've ever seen, anywhere, how would you rate this Presidents exhibition?

q12d [ ] [ ]

22. Now I'd like your opinion of some other things inside the Presidents exhibition:

Was it,

- a.  too crowded,  too empty, or  neither
- b.  too dark  too bright or  neither
- c.  too hot  too cold or  neither

Did it have,

- d.  too many objects  too few or  neither

Were there,

- e.  too many places to sit  too few or  neither

Now just a few questions about you...

13. What time did you enter this history museum?

\_\_\_\_\_ q13time [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

\*14. Who are you here with today?

- Alone  2+ teens
- 2 adults  School group [Go to Q16]
- 3+ adults  Tour group [Go to Q16]
- Adult(s) with child(ren)

15. Did you come to the Mall as part of an organized tour group or school group?  No  Yes

\*16. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

age [ ] [ ]

17. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- HS grad or less  Bachelor's degree
- Assoc/Jr/Tech  Some graduate study
- Some college  MA/Ph.D/Profess.

\*18. What is your racial/ethnic identity?

- African American/Black  Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Pac. Islander  Native Am./AK Native
- Caucasian/White  Multiple
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

\*19. Mark gender:  Female  Male

THANK YOU!

10. Was there anything about the presentation that was especially bad?

- No [Go to Q10a]  Yes, What was it?

\_\_\_\_\_ whatbad [ ] [ ]

10a. Was there anything about the presentation that was especially good?

- No [Go to Q11]  Yes, What was it?

\_\_\_\_\_ whatgood [ ] [ ]

11. Was there something specific you learned during your visit to this exhibition?

- No [Go to Q12c/d]  Yes, What was that?

\_\_\_\_\_ learn [ ] [ ]



id

interv  1  3  5  
 2  4  6

Count: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for the Smithsonian and I'm talking to visitors today.

1. Is today your first visit to this museum, the National Museum of American History?  times

Yes [Go to Q2]  No 1a. How many times have you been here before today?

\*2. Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_  
 DC:  Foreign: \_\_\_\_\_ [Go to Q3]

MD/VA Suburbs:  Other US: \_\_\_\_\_ statecity

2a. What is your zip code?

zip

3. Today, did you come to the Mall only to visit American History, or as part of a general visit to the Smithsonian?

Smithsonian  NMAH only  NMAH, others if time

4. Was there something in particular you wanted to see or do in this museum today?

No  Yes: What was that? \_\_\_\_\_

partwhat

Mark if applicable:  
 TAP  First Ladies  SSB

5. Have you ever visited the website of this museum, The National Museum of American History?

No [Go to Q6]  Yes

a. Did you use it to plan your visit here?

No  Yes

b. Did you look at on-line exhibitions?

No  Yes

c. Did you do anything else?

No

Yes 5d. What? \_\_\_\_\_

ADMIN BOX  
segment card 1  a  b  c  
location status  
session   
 1  4  Mall Side  Interview  Ref. lang  
 2  5  Constitution  SI staff  Ref. other  
 3  6  Inelig. \_\_\_\_\_

6. On this card are some experiences that people have told us were satisfying to them in the American History Museum. [SHOW CARD 1] Which of these were most satisfying for you in this museum today? Choose all that apply. [Mark All] Anything else?

- B. moved by beauty  I. imagining
- C. children learning  M. recalling memories
- G. spending time with  R. see rare, valuable things
- J. seeing real thing  U. enrich understanding
- K. gaining knowledge  W. reflecting on meaning

6a. Which one of those was MOST satisfying to you in this museum?

sat1st

6b. How strong was your satisfaction with that experience, was it:

not so strong,  strong, or  very strong?

6c. Where in this museum did you most notice having that experience?

satwhere

Mark if applicable:  TAP  First Ladies  SSB

7. [SHOW CARD 2] On your visit today, which of these exhibitions did you see? [Mark All]

- F. First Ladies [gowns]
- B. Star-Spangled Banner [flag preservation]
- S. Science in American Life [Nagasaki photos/Pill]
- I. Information Age [computer history]
- T. Transportation Hall [trains/autos]
- A. The American Presidency (TAP)\*\*

7a. [If more than one]: Which one did you like best? \_\_\_\_\_

q7abest

\*\* If TAP marked in Q7 go to Q8b.

**8. Have you ever heard of the exhibition "The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden" or seen it before today?**

- No, NOT heard/NOT seen [Go to Q9]
- Yes HEARD, NOT seen [Go to Q8a]
- Yes, SAW before [Go to Q8b]

**8a. [SHOW CARD 3] Which letter best describes why you did not visit the Presidents exhibition today?**

- I. Not really interested in the subject
- F. Could not find it
- D. Could not wait for next avail. tickets q8aother
- A. Tickets not avail. today
- L. Ticket line was too long.
- C. It seemed too crowded
- O. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8b. Where did you hear about this exhibition, "The American Presidency?" [Probe] Anywhere else?**

\_\_\_\_\_

[Mark All]

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Banner outside        | <input type="radio"/> NMAH info desk             |
| <input type="radio"/> Pillar/street post    | <input type="radio"/> Sign inside museum         |
| <input type="radio"/> "Castle" info         | <input type="radio"/> AH staff/guard/museum tour |
| <input type="radio"/> Other SI Info         | <input type="radio"/> SI Mag                     |
| <input type="radio"/> From family/friends   | <input type="radio"/> School/teacher             |
| <input type="radio"/> News/Mag Ad           | <input type="radio"/> Metrobus/train Ad          |
| <input type="radio"/> TV                    | <input type="radio"/> News/mag article           |
| <input type="radio"/> Web                   | <input type="radio"/> Tourist Info               |
| <input type="radio"/> Airport/Train station |  |

**9. Was there anything in the museum that you wanted to see or do, but had trouble finding or couldn't find?**

- No [Go to Q12a/b]
- Yes 9a. What was it? \_\_\_\_\_

q9a

NOTE: Interviewers #1, and #3 ask 12a.  
Interviewer #2 ask Q12b.

**12a. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is the best museum you've ever been to and 1 is the worst museum you've ever been to, anywhere, how would you rate this museum?**

q12a

**12b. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the worst museum you've ever been to and 10 is the best museum you've ever been to, anywhere, how would you rate this museum?**

q12b

**Now just a few questions about you...**

**13. What time did you enter this history museum?**

q13time

**\*14. Who are you here with today?**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Alone                    | <input type="radio"/> 2+ teens                 |
| <input type="radio"/> 2 adults                 | <input type="radio"/> School group [Go to Q16] |
| <input type="radio"/> 3+ adults                | <input type="radio"/> Tour group [Go to Q16]   |
| <input type="radio"/> Adult(s) with child(ren) |  |

**15. Did you come to the Mall as part of an organized tour group or school group?  No  Yes**

**\*16. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ age**

**17. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> HS grad or less | <input type="radio"/> Bachelor's degree   |
| <input type="radio"/> Assoc./Jr/Tech  | <input type="radio"/> Some graduate study |
| <input type="radio"/> Some college    | <input type="radio"/> MA/Ph.D/Profess.    |

**\*18. What is your racial/ethnic identity?**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> African American/Black | <input type="radio"/> Hispanic/Latino      |
| <input type="radio"/> Asian/Pac. Islander    | <input type="radio"/> Native Am./AK Native |
| <input type="radio"/> Caucasian/White        | <input type="radio"/> Multiple             |
|  | <input type="radio"/> Other _____          |

**\*19. Mark gender:  Female  Male**

**THANK YOU!**

## Appendix B: Supplementary Tables

Visitors Exiting The American Presidency Exhibition (TAP) and the National Museum of American History, Behring Center (NMAH)

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Visitors (In Percent)

Characteristics	<u>TAP Exit</u>	<u>NMAH Exit</u>
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	55	54
Male	<u>45</u>	<u>46</u>
Total (%)	100	100
Chi-sq.		0.8337
<u>Age of respondent</u>		
12 to 21	8	8
22 to 24	5	2
25 to 34	16	15
35 to 44	19	25
45 to 54	26	22
55 to 64	16	16
65 & over	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>
Total (%)	100	100
Chi-sq.		0.1420
<u>Composition of visit group</u>		
Alone	17	22
Two adults	41	35
Three or more adults	16	9
Adult(s) w child(ren)/teen	11	6
Group of teens	0	1
School trip	10	21
Tour group	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>
Total (%)	100	100
Chi-sq.		<.0001
<u>Residence</u>		
Washington DC	2	3
MD/VA Suburbs	10	6
Other U.S.	84	80
Foreign	<u>5</u>	<u>11</u>
Total (%)	100	100
Chi-sq.		0.0004
Number of Interviews	557	363

(cont.)

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Visitors (continued)  
(In Percent)

Characteristics	<u>TAP Exit</u>	<u>NMAH Exit</u>
<u>Race and/or ethnic identity</u>		
African American	5	6
Asian	2	3
White	91	89
Hispanic/Latino	1	2
Native Am/AK Native	0	0
Multiple	1	0
Other	0	0
Total (%)	100	100
Number of Interviews	557	363
Chi-sq.		0.2958
<u>Education of respondent (Over 25 years old)</u>		
HS grad or less	12	12
Assoc/Jr/Technical	1	2
Some college	13	19
Bachelors degree	34	34
Some graduate work	4	4
MA/PhD/Professional	<u>35</u>	<u>29</u>
Total (%)	100	100
Number of Interviews	481	321
Chi-sq.		0.1557
<u>Number of previous visits to NMAH</u>		
First time	54	57
1-3 times	28	26
4+ times	<u>18</u>	<u>17</u>
Total (%)	100	100
Number of Interviews	557	363
Chi-sq.		0.6720
<u>Self-reported Time in the Museum*</u>		
Less than one hour		10
One to two hours		32
Two to three hours		14
Three to four hours		23
More than four hours		<u>21</u>
Total (%)		100
Number of Interviews		363
Mean visit length (min.)		177
Median visit length (min.)		155

\*Asked only at the NMAH Exit.

Table 2  
 Interest in Seeing Something in Particular during NMAH  
 Visit and Exhibitions of Interest, by Gender  
 (In Percent)

Interest in seeing something in particular	NMAH Exit		Total (%)
	Female (%)	Male (%)	
No	37	59	47
Yes:	63	41	53
<u>Specific exhibits:</u>			
TAP	13	8	11
First Ladies	16	3	10
Popular culture (general)	5	6	6
Transportation (general)	2	9	5
Other	7	2	5
Star Spangled Banner	5	4	4
Military (general)	5	2	4
Within These Walls	4	1	3
Paint-by-Number	3	1	2
Science (general)	1	2	2
Social issues (general)	1	1	1
Total (%)	100	100	100
Number of Interviews (Yes/No)	195	167	363
Chi-Sq. (Yes/No) (Between Genders)			<.0001

Table 3  
Visitors Use of NMAH Website  
(In Percent)

	<u>NMAH Exit</u> %
<u>Ever visited NMAH Website</u>	
Yes	13
No	<u>87</u>
Total (%)	100
Number of Interviews	363
 <u>Used NMAH website to plan visit</u> (Asked only of those who ever visited Website)	
Yes	38
No	<u>62</u>
Total (%)	100
Number of Interviews	46
 <u>Used NMAH website to look at on-line exhibitions</u> (Asked only of those who ever visited Website)	
Yes	46
No	<u>54</u>
Total (%)	100
Number of Interviews	46

Table 4  
Awareness of The American Presidency  
(In Percent)

Awareness of TAP	<u>% of All Visitors</u>	<u>NMAH Exit</u>	
		<u>Residence</u>	
		Not Local	Local
Saw on this visit	39	40	34
Saw on previous visit	4	2	24
Not aware of TAP	26	27	12
Aware, but did not see	31	31	29
Not really interested in subject	7	8	0
Could not wait for available tickets	5	1	0
Seemed crowded	2	5	3
Could not find it	1	0	0
Ticket line too long	1	1	4
Tickets not available	0	2	2
Other (including time constraints)	15	15	21
Total	100	100	99
Number of respondents	363	329	34



Table 5.  
Sources of Information about The American Presidency  
(Visitors who Saw and/or Heard about TAP)  
(In Percent)

Source	NMAH Total %*	Residence	
		Not Local %*	Local %*
<u>Museum sign/banner</u>			
Sign inside museum	40	43	22
Banner outside	18	17	22
NMAH info desk	6	7	4
Pillar/street post	2	2	0
NMAH staff/guard/museum to	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>
Any museum source	61	63	46
<u>Smithsonian information</u>			
Web	8	8	2
Other SI Info	7	7	3
SI Mag	4	3	5
Castle info	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
Any Smithsonian source	18	19	10
<u>Mass media</u>			
News/mag article	6	4	19
TV	4	4	3
News/Mag Ad	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Any mass media	10	8	22
<u>Tourist information</u>			
Tourist Info	5	6	0
Airport/Train station	0	0	0
Metrobus/train Ad	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Any tourist source	5	6	0
<u>Personal contacts</u>			
Family/friends	14	13	22
School/teacher	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>
Any personal contacts	19	18	25

\*Total equals more than 100%, as some respondents gave more than one response. See Q.8b.

Table 6  
Rating of TAP Exhibit and NMAH  
(In Percent)

Rating	<u>TAP Exhibit</u> %	<u>NMAH</u> %
1-Worst	0	0
2	0	0
3	1	0
4	1	0
5	2	3
6	6	3
7	15	14
8	43	33
9	19	21
10-Best	<u>14</u>	<u>25</u>
Total(%)	100	100
Number of interviews	555	363
Chi-Sq.		0.0001
Mean	8.08	8.38
Median	8	8
F-value		0.0001

Table 7.  
Exhibits Seen and Best Liked By Gender: NMAH Exit Only  
(In Percent)

Exhibit Seen	Gender	% of Visitors Seeing Exhibit	% Reporting		Total %
			Exhibit Seen was "Best Liked"	Another Exhibit was "Best Liked"	
<b>American Presidency</b>					
	Female	41	63	37	100
	Male	36	51	49	100
	Total	39	58	42	100
<b>First Ladies</b>					
	Female	71	57	43	100
	Male	45	18	82	100
	Total	59	43	57	100
<b>Star Spangled Banner</b>					
	Female	46	21	79	100
	Male	42	36	64	100
	Total	44	27	73	100
<b>Transportation Hall</b>					
	Female	34	22	78	100
	Male	56	44	56	100
	Total	44	35	65	100
<b>Information Age</b>					
	Female	25	19	81	100
	Male	38	27	73	100
	Total	31	23	77	100
<b>Science in American Life</b>					
	Female	23	23	77	100
	Male	37	41	59	100
	Total	29	33	67	100

Table 8  
Satisfying Experiences: TAP Exhibition and NMAH  
(In Percent)

Cluster	Satisfying Experience	TAP Exhibition		NMAH	
		Visitors Reporting Experience %	Most Satisfying Experience %	Visitors Reporting Experience %	Most Satisfying Experience %
Object		77	36	75	31
	Seeing real thing	57	24	54	20
	Seeing rare things	53	12	46	11
	Moved by beauty	9	1	13	1
Learning		84	37	81	36
	Gaining knowledge	71	23	67	23
	Enriching understanding	59	14	54	12
Reflection		70	21	71	26
	Imagining	41	8	47	11
	Reflecting on meaning	34	9	27	9
	Recalling memories	25	5	31	6
Social		24	5	26	7
	Spending time w/ friend	18	3	18	4
	Children learning	9	2	12	3

Table 9  
Strength of Most Satisfying Experiences: TAP Exhibition and NMAH  
(In Percent)

Cluster	TAP				NMAH					
	Most satisfying experience %	Strength of Most Satisfying Exp. Very strong %	Strong %	Not so strong %	Total	Most satisfying experience %	Strength of Most Satisfying Exp. Very strong %	Strong %	Not so strong %	Total
Object	36	50	48	1	100	31	50	49	1	100
Learning	37	46	52	2	100	36	38	57	5	100
Reflection	21	41	54	5	100	26	29	70	1	100
Social	5	39	57	4	100	3	62	38	0	100
All visitors		46	51	2	100		41	56	3	100

Table 10  
 Visitor Evaluation of TAP's Design and Presentation\*  
 (In Percent)

<u>Effect on visitor experience:</u>					
Design aspect	Enhanced %	Detracted %	Neither %	Not Noticed %	Total %
Videos	71	2	23	3	100
Labels/text panels	90	4	5	1	100
Hands-on activities	36	1	36	26	100
Colors used	55	2	33	10	100
Pathway through space	62	13	23	3	100
Ticket system	65	5	29	1	100

<u>Too crowded or too empty?</u>		<u>Too hot or too cold?</u>		
Too crowded	29	Too hot		22
Neither	71	Neither		78
Too empty	0	Too cold		0
Total %	100	Total %		100

<u>Too dark or too bright?</u>		<u>Too many places to sit or too few?</u>	
Too dark	13	Too many	1
Neither	86	Neither	70
Too bright	1	Too few	30
Total %	100	Total %	100

<u>Too many objects or too few?</u>	
Too many objects	10
Neither	85
Too few	5
Total %	100

\*Based on responses to Question 21 and Question 22.

Table 11.  
 Communication Aspects of The American Presidency  
 (In Percent)

<u>Communication Aspects</u>	
<u>Does exhibition communicate specific ideas about the President</u>	
<u>Visitor response</u>	<u>%</u>
No specific ideas	26
Yes	<u>74</u>
Total (%)	100
	<u>% of All</u>
<u>Specific ideas communicated</u>	<u>Visitors*</u>
Importance/complexity/power	24
Responsibilities/burdens/risk	18
President humanity	12
Roles of President	9
President personal life, problems	9
History of the presidency	6
Glory of presidency	5
Presidents interest in/care for the country	4
President has no private life	3
Difference/Comparison between president	3
Government systems	3
<u>Learned something specific from exhibition?</u>	
<u>Visitor response</u>	<u>%</u>
No	62
Yes	<u>38</u>
Total (%)	100
	<u>% of All</u>
<u>Ideas learned</u>	<u>Visitors</u>
Assassination	12
New things about President/artifacts	11
Personal life of Presidents	7
Presidency and government systems	5
Forgotten dates, times, periods	<u>4</u>
Total (%)	38

\*Total equals more than 74%, as some respondents gave more than one response. See Question 20.

## Appendix C: Study Methods

---

Data for this study were collected during personal interviews with respondents who were selected using a "continuous" systematic sample design.<sup>1</sup> A contractor used teams of three or four people, one to select respondents for interviewing plus two or three interviewers. Interviewers administered a questionnaire containing both pre-coded and open-ended questions, and thanked participants with bookmarks provided by the museum.

Data were collected from two systematic samples: (1) visitors exiting the TAP exhibition; and (2) visitors exiting NMAH. Interviews were conducted between Wednesday May 2, 2001 and Tuesday May 22, 2001, on a total of 14 days.

Interviews were conducted on each day of the week over the period. Surveys were coordinated so that the same people could not be selected for both entrance and exit surveys. Visitor cooperation with the study was extremely high. Overall, 93% of eligible respondents completed interviews (96% percent of those exiting TAP and 88% of those exiting NMAH). Altogether 922 interviews were completed out of 995 attempts (557 at the Exhibition Exit and 365 at the Museum Exit).

---

<sup>1</sup> The procedure and its rationale are described in Z. D. Doering, A. E. Kindlon and A. Bickford, *The Power of Maps: A Study of an Exhibition at the Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design Report 93-5*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1993)



### **III. Tracking of Visitors at *The American Presidency***

March 2001

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# Tracking of Visitors at *The American Presidency (TAP)*

## Summary

---

In late February 2001, 87 individual visitors were randomly selected for observation as they passed through the ticketed entrance to the main exhibition space of *The American Presidency*. Their behavior in the exhibition, specifically the locations and duration of all the stops they made, was recorded. This report presents the results of the study.

- These visitors spent an average of 36 minutes in the exhibition. Most of the time, 85%, was spent viewing the objects or videos, reading text, or using interactives. The remaining 4 minutes, on average, was spent between stops, doing such things as speaking with friends, stopping to tie a child's shoe, etc.
- On the whole, stops were brief – 1.3 minutes on average. The Presidential Timeline stopped 7 of 10 visitors for an average of almost two minutes.
- The Stuart painting of George Washington, his uniform and the cases describing the origins of the Presidency attracted between 40-66% of visitors.
- The section label discussing the *Limits of Presidential Power* attracted 58% of the visitors. Two cases in this area, *Congress and the Supreme Court* and *Impeachment*, also attracted similar percentages of visitors.
- In the central portion of the exhibition, it was the case of objects best described as *White House as Home* and the wall area containing Abraham Lincoln's hat that attracted seven of ten visitors. The room discussing attempts and assassinations of Presidents, and the video (and adjacent cases) showing the nation mourning assassinated Presidents, drew an equal proportion.
- Videos held visitors the longest, an average of 2.9 minutes for those that stand alone and 2.4 minutes for those that are part of cases.

## The Study

---

The purpose of this study, conducted as the first phase of the larger exhibition study, was to collect data that would aid in understanding how and where visitors spent their time in the exhibition. These data could be used to test some of the assumptions that went into the planning.

A detailed map was used for the study. A total of 64 exhibition units were included in the observation protocol. A unit was defined as either a distinct museum artifact ("real thing," e.g., Jefferson's desk), a grouping of items (e.g., a case titled *Inauguration*), or a communication medium (e.g., a section label, video loop, or interactive).

The map and descriptions of exhibition units are in Appendix A. Appendix B. contains supplementary tables and Appendix C describes the method and gives the technical definitions used in the study.

## Findings

---

### Overall Behavior<sup>1</sup>

- **These visitors spent an average of 35.7 minutes in the exhibition rooms, an overall area of approximately 9,000 sq. ft. (excluding the non-ticketed area).**

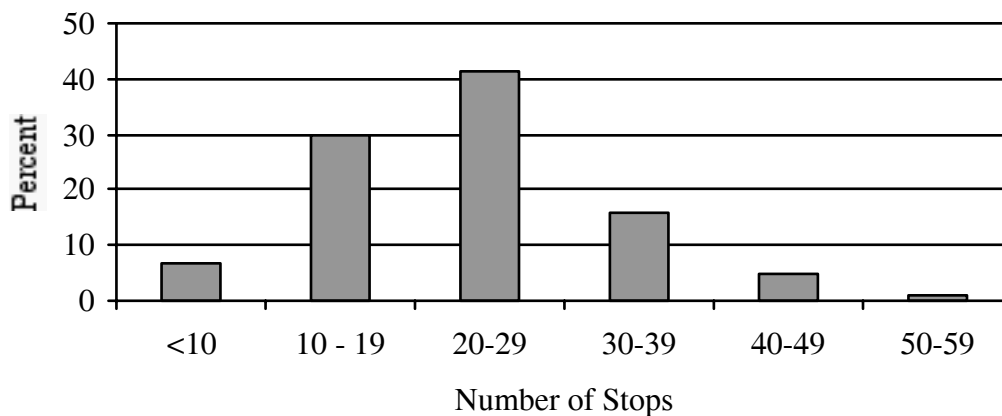
Half of the visitors spent more than 30.5 minutes visiting *The American Presidency*.<sup>2</sup> (See Appendix B, Table 1 for details of visitor behavior in the exhibition.)

The majority of visitor time (85.1%) was spent engaged with an exhibition unit (e.g., viewing the objects or videos, reading text, or using interactives). The remaining time, slightly more than 4 minutes, on average, was spent between stops, doing such things as speaking with friends, stopping to tie a child's shoe, etc.<sup>3</sup>

- **The average number of stops was 25.1.**

Overall the visitors made 2,022 stops. The number of stops ranged from 2 to 58. Figure 1 shows the distribution of stops;

Figure 1  
Number of Stops Made in *The American Presidency* (TAP)  
(Percent)



---

<sup>1</sup> The terms used in this report are defined on pages 93-94.

<sup>2</sup> The middle 50 percent spent between 19.8 and 49.1 minutes.

<sup>3</sup> On average, 31.4 minutes were spent attending to exhibition units.

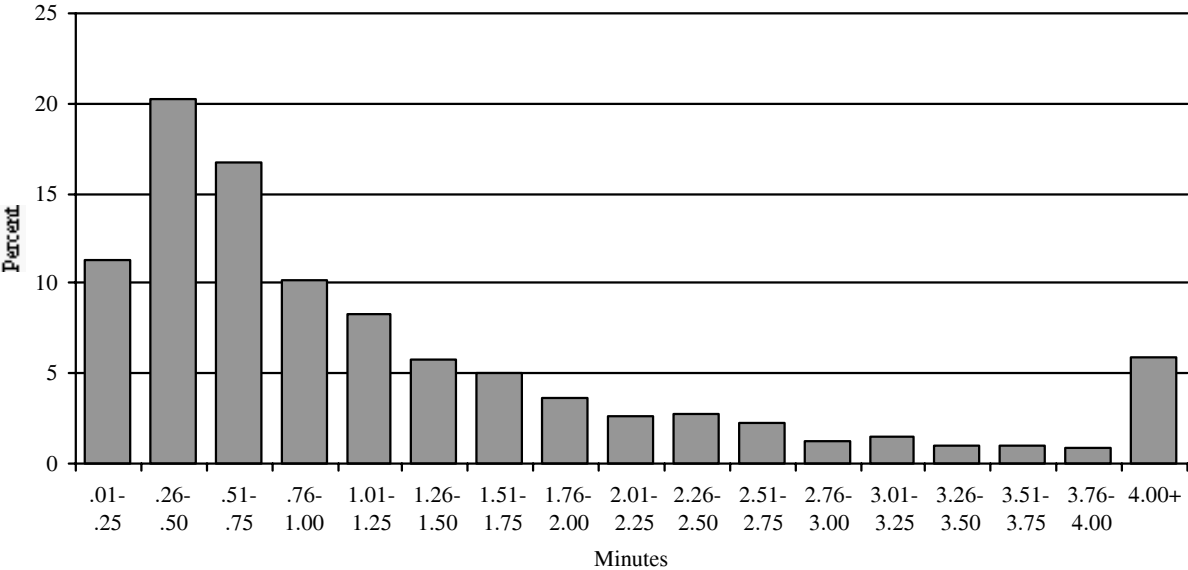
On the whole, the different social groupings we observed (e.g., women alone, men alone, men or women in adult groups, and men or women with children) spent very similar periods of time in the exhibition and made similar numbers of stops. As shown in Appendix B, Table 1, an exception were men who were observed as part of adult groups. These 22 men spent more time in the exhibition and made more stops than other types of groups.<sup>4</sup> Men visiting alone and men visiting in groups also spent the most time at each location they stopped at (1.6 minutes and 1.5 minutes, respectively).

Movement through the exhibit was not always linear. One-third (34.5%) of the visitors returned to see a particular exhibition unit more than once.

- **On the whole, stops were brief – 1.3 minutes on average<sup>5</sup>.**

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the length of stops. Half of the stops were less than three-quarters of a minute, while half were more than one minute. A small percentage of the stops, less than six percent, were longer than 4 minutes.

Figure 2  
Length of Stops in *The American Presidency* (TAP)  
 (Minutes)



<sup>4</sup> They spent an average of 43.2 minutes in the exhibition and made an average of 28.9 stops.  
<sup>5</sup> The median was 0.8 minutes.

## Patterns of Visiting the Exhibition

- **In the first sections of the exhibition, the Presidential Timeline stopped 7 of 10 visitors (71.3%) for an average of almost two minutes**

Upon entering, nearly six out of ten (57.5%) visitors stopped at the Bible, with the rest passing by. Less than half as many (21.8%) stopped to read the exhibition Introduction label (Appendix B, Table 2, contains information about each stop location, in spatial order, from the Bible and its stand to the last video).

The Stuart painting of George Washington, his uniform and the cases describing the origins of the Presidency attracted between 40-66% of visitors. It was the Presidential Timeline, however, that stopped 7 of 10 visitors (71.3%) for an average of almost two minutes.

A substantial number of visitors stopped at each of the cases highlighting a Presidential role (between 47.1 and 64.4%), while less than a third (29.9%) were engaged by Thomas Jefferson's desk.

- **In the central sections of the exhibition, the family aspects of the Presidency, Lincoln's hat, and the area discussing assassinations also stopped 7 of 10 visitors.**

In the central portion of the exhibition, the section label discussing the *Limits of Presidential Power* attracted 57.5% of the visitors.

Two cases in this area, *Congress and the Supreme Court* and *Impeachment*, also attracted a majority of visitors (62.1% and 56.7%, respectively). The case of objects best described as *White House as Home*, in the *White House as Symbol and Home* area, and the area containing Abraham Lincoln's hat that attracted seven of ten visitors (71.3% and 72.4%, respectively).

The room discussing attempts and assassinations of Presidents, and especially the video (and adjacent cases) showing the nation mourning assassinated Presidents, interested many visitors (69%).

- **Some items, perhaps due to placement, draw a small number of visitors.**

Some items did not draw much attention, although they were surrounded by units that were drawing a high percentage of visitors. In the section on assassinations, for example, the *Drum* and the display on *News of Assassinations* drew less than 30% of visitors when the units all around them were drawing over 50%. Another example is the small number that stopped at *Jefferson's desk*.

From here to the end of the exhibition, only two locations (the video *The Presidency and Popular Culture* and the case containing *Life After the Presidency* artifacts), engaged almost six out of ten visitors (57.5%). Overall, more than half of the visitors made stops at one-third (21) or more units. (Appendix B, Table 3 contains the stop locations rank ordered by the percent of visitors who stopped at each.)

## Types of Exhibition Units

- **Videos held visitors the longest, an average of 2.9 minutes for those that stand alone and 2.4 minutes for those that are part of cases.**

Although units of the same type vary in size, complexity, design and function, we can get a sense of how visitors respond to different types of exhibition units by looking at average time visitors spent with them (Appendix B, Table 1, panel E.). Data show, for example, that videos (some of which stand alone and some of which are part of cases), held visitors the longest (an average of 2.9 and 2.4 minutes, respectively).

Case(s)/Object(s) had the highest amount of stops, and an average pause of 1.1 minutes. By contrast, the main section labels held visitors for the shortest amount of time (0.5 minutes) and most visitors bypassed them, with 8% or less of visitors stopping at 5 of the 8.

Each of the interactives was stopped at by 40% or fewer visitors. (Appendix B, Table 5, shows the frequency of stops at each unit by type of unit.)



## Specific Units

- **The exhibition unit containing Abraham Lincoln’s Hat, the Presidential Timeline, and the case showing *White House as Home* rank highest in terms of the percent of visitors who stopped there.**

As we see in Appendix B, Table 3, some locations rank high because they contain an object of special interest to many visitors, such as *George Washington uniform*. Other locations may rank high because they cover such a wide and varied display of items and different visitors are drawn to different items within the display, such as *White House as Symbol*.

- **When we look at the length of stops, it is three videos - *Behind the Scenes at the White House*, *Life After the Presidency*, and *Assassination and Mourning* - that hold visitors longest.**

These three videos engage visitors for 3 or more minutes (on average). (Appendix B, Table 4, shows the stops ranked in terms of average length of time.) Videos also predominate when we look at the units that hold visitors for two to three minutes. Seven of the ten elements stopped at for two minutes or more were videos. The only two exhibition units that held visitors as long as the videos were the case *Assassinations & attempts*, and the *Timeline*.

- **Among videos, for example, the *Assassination and Mourning* video and adjacent cases ranked the highest in combined visit time and length of visit, with 69% of visitors observing for an average of 3.1 minutes.**

The *Presidency and Popular Culture* video attracted 57% of the visitors for 2.7 minutes on average. The remaining video presentations were of lesser interest to visitors. (We can look at the exhibition units by type of unit (see Appendix B Table 5) and identify, within types, the ones that drew the most visitors.)

- **Among the interactives, the opportunity to express an opinion (*Opinion Poll* interactive) was accepted by four of ten visitors (40%), while giving a speech engaged a far smaller percent (15%).**

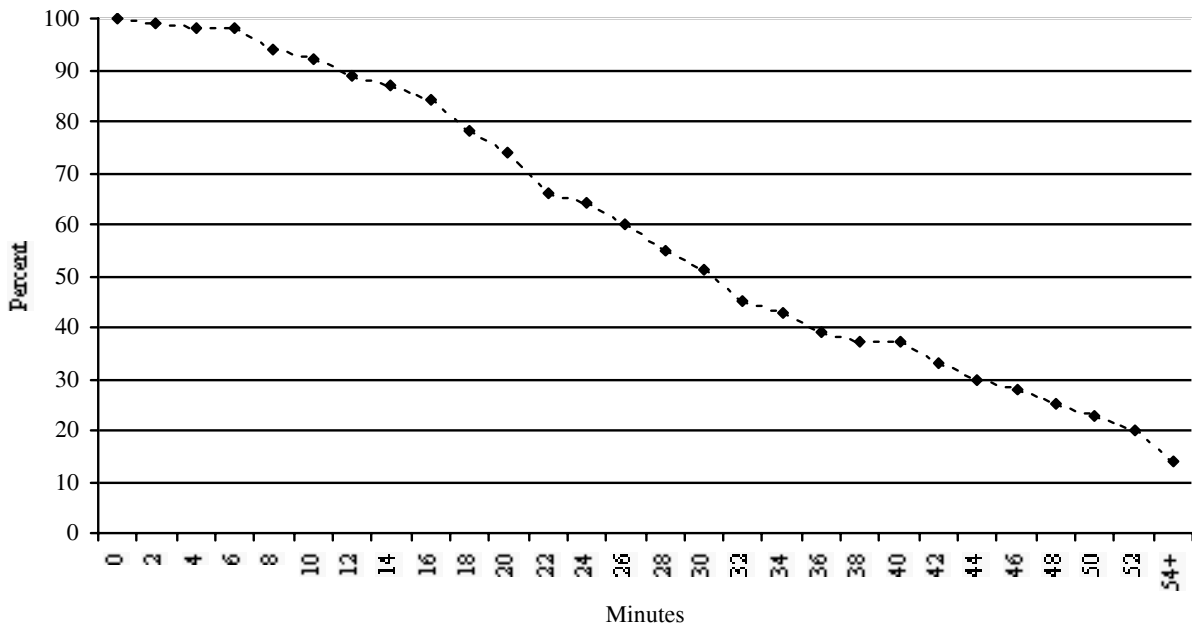
One section label, *Limits of Presidential Power*, was read by nearly 6 of ten visitors (57.5%); one-third or fewer of the visitors stopped at the rest of the labels.

## Time in the Exhibition

- **Almost all the visitors spend at least 6 minutes in the exhibition. After 20 minutes, one-fourth has left and after 45 minutes 30% remain. The average is 30.5 minutes.**

Figure 3 below shows the decrease in the audience in the exhibition as a function of time. This can be visualized by first assuming that all of the tracked visitors entered at the same time. Thus, before any time has elapsed, the audience is intact (i.e., 100% are present). There is a minor drop-off until 6 minutes, when 98% of the visitors are still there. Thereafter, the decline is somewhat steady as the visitors make their way through the exhibition, gradually dropping off along the way. At 20 minutes after entry, one-fourth of the audience is gone and by 30 minutes half has left, reflecting the median visit time of 30.5 minutes. After 45 minutes, about 30% remain and after one hour, 13% of the visitors remain.

Figure 3  
Visitors Remaining in Exhibition by  
Minutes Elapsed from Entry  
(Percent)



## Who Visited The American Presidency?

- **Visitors to the exhibitions reflect a winter visitorship to the museum quite well.<sup>6</sup>**

Observers recorded some demographic characteristics of visitors. More men than women were randomly sampled (54% vs. 46%), and visitors ranged in age from teens to seniors, with an average estimated age of 40. The largest groups were adults and children (29%), approximately one-fourth were couples (24%) or individuals visiting alone (23%), followed by groups of 3 or more adults (22%).

## Comparison to Other Exhibitions

- **Comparison to other exhibitions must be made with considerable caution.**

In the past several years, two other observation studies at NMAH exhibitions used methods identical to those used for TAP. In June 1995, 163 visitors were observed in *Science in American Life* (SAL); in Summer 1997, a study was conducted in *Information Age* (INF Age) and 173 visitors were observed. There are major differences between these exhibitions and TAP. First and foremost, these other two exhibitions are not ticketed. Second, the total space and the type of presentation differed across exhibitions. Third, TAP had a high level of publicity through paid advertising, discussion in broadcast venues such as *Good Morning America* and National Public Radio, and attention from the coinciding election and Inauguration. Thus, any comparison of either the total visit time, the percent of exhibition units at which visitors stopped and the average stop time must be done with considerable caution.

- **Compared to other NMAH exhibitions, TAP holds visitors.**

Table A, below, includes the basic statistics from the three studies. Visitors to TAP spent more time in the exhibition space, spent a larger percentage of their time stopped in front of exhibition units, and made more and longer stops compared to the other exhibitions.

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<sup>6</sup> Kindlon, A. E., Pekarik, A. J., & Doering, Z. D. (1996). *Visitors to History: A Report Based on the 1994-95 National Museum of American History Visitor Study* (Report 96-3A). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.

Data collected by Beverly Serrell strongly suggests that when a fee is charged, or passes are required, visitors spend considerably more time in the exhibition.<sup>7</sup> A preliminary look at her data shows times of over 30 minutes to be common.

Table A.  
Comparison of Data From Tracking Studies Conducted at NMAH: *The American Presidency* (TAP), *Information Age* (INFO Age) and the *Science in American Life* Exhibition (SAL)\*

	TAP	INFO Age	SAL Exhibition
Number of visitors observed	87	173	108
Square feet	9,000	13,000	10,000
No. of elements included	64	90	95
Average length of visit (minutes)	35.7	18.9	14.7
Average time stopped (viewing)	31.4	14.3	9.6
Percent engaged	85.1	66.0	63.9
Median visit (minutes)	30.5	15.8	
Average number of stops	25.1	17.5	
Median number of stops	25	16	
Average length of stops (minutes)	1.3	0.9	0.8

\*Excludes the Hands-on-Science Center.

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<sup>7</sup> Serrell, Beverly (1998). *Paying attention : visitors and museum exhibitions* . Washington, D.C. : American Association of Museums and Personal Communication, March 26, 2001.

## Discussion

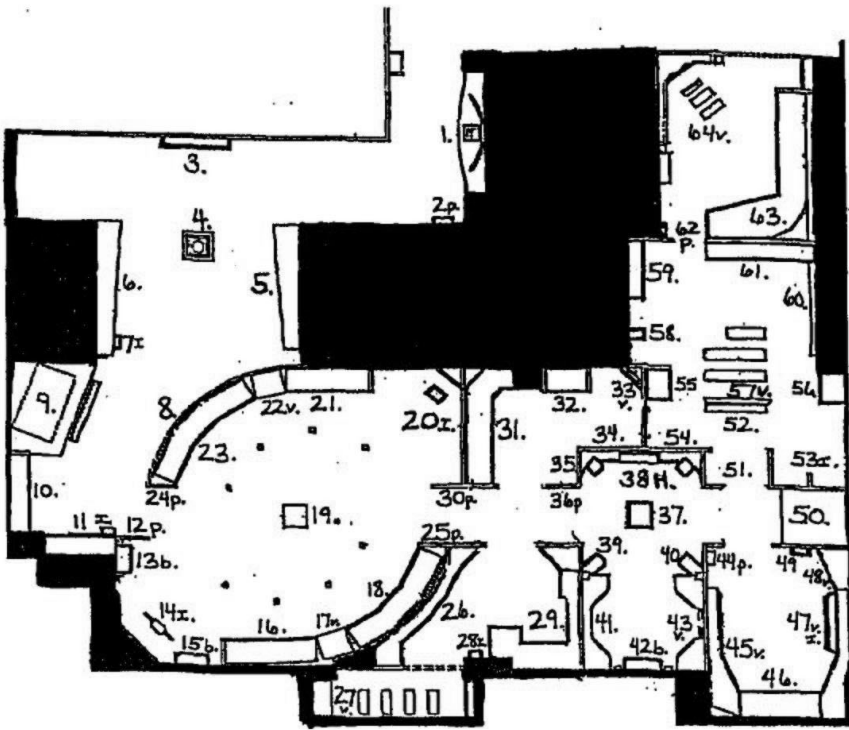
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By comparing the time and stop data for different elements in the exhibition we can identify patterns of visitor behavior that reflect their responses to content and design. Visitors show very strong interest in the opening and central areas of the exhibition, for example, and much less interest in the final sections. They were especially attracted to the *Assassination and Mourning* section, a relatively small area with such a high proportion of popular elements that it might become uncomfortably crowded at times.

This study also raises some questions about the commitment visitors make to a specific exhibition within the context of a larger visit to a museum or, in the case of the Smithsonian, in the context of a Mall visit. We do not know if visitors realized that it was a permanent installation, rather than a temporary exhibition.

Advance or on-site ticketing certainly raised people's motivation and commitment. In addition, the visitors who casually drop in-and-out of exhibitions or who stroll quickly through to assess an interest in returning are eliminated. Taken together, the enhanced motivation and interest may account for the comparatively long time that visitors spent in TAP and the attention they paid to a relatively large proportion of the exhibition units. The data are consistent with similar, non-Smithsonian exhibitions.

**Appendix A – Map and Key to Tracked Stops**



Gender: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Ethnic/Race: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Group Size: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Group Composit: alone  
 couple adults&kids  
 grp teen grp adults  
 Tracker: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Session: \_\_\_\_\_  
 ID #: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Office Use)

Activity Code					U = use	W = watch	H = Hat	Entry Time: _____	Exit Time: _____					
#	Locat.	Start	End	Activ.	#	Locat.	Start	End	Activ.	#	Locat.	Start	End	Activ.
1					16					31				
2					17					32				
3					18					33				
4					19					34				
5					20					35				
6					21					36				
7					22					37				
8					23					38				
9					24					39				
10					25					40				
11					26					41				
12					27					42				
13					28					43				
14					29					44				
15					30					45				

Enter Store Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Smithsonian Institution  
 Office of Policy & Analysis

Tracking of Visitors at  
 The American Presidency

## Appendix A: Map and Key to Tracked Stops

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### Key to Tracked Stops

<u>Number</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	Case/Objects	Bible and stand
2	Section Label	Exhibition Intro Label
3	Case/Object	George Washington painting
4	Case/Object	George Washington uniform
5	Cases/Objects	Establishing the Presidency
6	Cases/Objects	Creating the Presidency
7	Interactive	Constitutional Convention Interactive
8	Case/Object	Presidential Timeline
9	Case/Object	Carriage
10	Case/Objects	Inauguration
11	Case/Objects	Celebration (with dress interactive)
12	Section Label	Celebrating Inauguration Label
13	Bench	Bench
14	Interactive	Opinion Poll Interactive
15	Bench	Bench
16	Cases/Objects	Roles#1:Command-in-Chief, Military Hero
17	Video	Video - Personalities of the Presidents
18	Cases/Objects	Roles #2: Head of State, Chief Diplomat
19	Case/Object	Jefferson's desk
20	Interactive	Give a Speech Interactive
21	Cases/Objects	Roles #3: National Leader
22	Video	Video - Leadership by the Presidents
23	Cases/Objects	Roles #4:Chief Exec./Party Leader/EconMan
24	Section Label	Presidential Roles Label
25	Section Label	White House as Symbol & Home Label
26	Cases/Objects	White House as Symbol
27	Video	Video - White House/Behind-the-scenes
28	Interactive	President's children Interactive
29	Cases/Objects	White House as Home
30	Section Label	Limits of Pres. Power Label
31	Cases/Objects	Congress/Supreme Court
32	Case/Objects	Impeachment
33	Video	Video - Limits of Power
34	Case/Objects	Public Opinion
35	Case/Objects	The Press
36	Section Label	Assassination & Mourning Label

## Appendix A: Map and Key to Tracked Stops

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### Key to Tracked Stops

<u>Number</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Description</u>
37	Case/Object	Drum
38	Cases/Objects	Hat Wall (Funerals & Mourning)
39	Case/Objects	News of Assassination
40	Case/Objects	Assassins
41	Cases/Objects	Assassinations & attempts (Teddy, FDR, J.Garfield, A.Jackson)
42	Bench	Bench
43	Cases with video	JFK & Secret Service (with Assassination and Mourning video)
44	Section Label	Communicating the Presidency Label
45	Case with video	Recording the Spoken Word
46	Case/Objects	Radio
47	Cases with videos	The Pres. & the Media (with Interactive)
48	Video	Web Video
49	Case/Object	Web cam
50	Case/Objects	Meet the Press
51	Cases/Objects	Street Signs
52	Cases/Objects	Political Cartoons
53	Interactive	Music (with Interactives)
54	Case/Objects	Movie posters
55	Case/Object	Air Force One costume
56	Case/Object	Independence Day costume
57	Video	Video - The Presidency & Popular Culture
58	Case/Objects	Movies Props (Primary Colors flier)
59	Case/Objects	Ads & Presidential Images
60	Case/Objects	TV & Movie stills
61	Case/Objects	Relics/Icons/Souvenirs
62	Section Label	Life after the Presidency Label
63	Case/Objects	Life After the Presidency artifacts
64	Video	Video - Life After the Presidency

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## Appendix B: Supplementary Tables

Table 1  
Behavior in *The American Presidency (TAP)* Exhibition: Subgroups of Visitors\*

Tracked person...	A. Total Time in the Exhibition (Visit Times)				
	No. of Visitors	Avg. Visit Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation	Median	Maximum
Male Alone	11	32.1	31.8	19.1	107.1
Female Alone	9	33.5	16.4	29.1	53.6
Male in Adult Group	22	43.2	23.8	38.6	87.5
Female in Adult Group	18	35.2	21.7	33.9	94.5
Male in Group of Adult(s) & Child	14	33.2	12.8	31.8	52.8
Female in Group of Adult(s) & Chi	<u>13</u>	<u>31.0</u>	<u>18.8</u>	<u>21.8</u>	<u>64.9</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>107.1</b>

Tracked person...	B. Total Time Observing (Sum of Time at Stops)				
	No. of Visitors	Avg. Stopped Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation	Median	Maximum
Male Alone	11	29.1	30.4	17.1	102.0
Female Alone	9	29.8	16.0	26.2	49.6
Male in Adult Group	22	39.1	23.2	34.8	86.8
Female in Adult Group	18	30.8	20.6	27.9	84.9
Male in Group of Adult(s) & Child	14	26.9	10.3	25.2	48.3
Female in Group of Adult(s) & Chi	<u>13</u>	<u>26.7</u>	<u>17.8</u>	<u>20.2</u>	<u>61.7</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>102.0</b>

Tracked person...	C. Percent of Visit Time Spent at Stops (A./B.)				
	No. of Visitors	avg. % Stopped Tim (0.0-100.0)	Standard Deviation	Median	Maximum
Male Alone	11	84.4	15.4	86.0	93.0
Female Alone	9	85.1	14.8	91.0	97.0
Male in Adult Group	22	88.3	6.9	90.5	99.0
Female in Adult Group	18	85.7	10.1	89.5	98.0
Male in Group of Adult(s) & Child	14	81.7	9.5	81.5	93.0
Female in Group of Adult(s) & Chi	<u>13</u>	<u>83.4</u>	<u>7.9</u>	<u>85.0</u>	<u>95.0</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>85.1</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>99.0</b>

(Continued)

\*See pages 8-9 for Definitions of terms used in the tables.

Table 1 (cont.)  
 Behavior in *The American Presidency* (TAP) Exhibition: Subgroups of Visitors

<u>Tracked person...</u>	<u>D. Number of Stops</u>				
	<u>No. of Visitors</u>	<u>Avg. Number of Stops</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Maximum</u>
Male Alone	11	20.6	14.7	19.0	48.0
Female Alone	9	24.8	8.0	27.0	31.0
Male in Adult Group	22	28.9	13.1	27.5	58.0
Female in Adult Group	18	24.9	11.8	24	54.0
Male in Group of Adult(s) & Child	14	23.2	6.8	22.5	38.0
Female in Group of Adult(s) & Chi	13	24.8	10.5	24.0	45.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>58.0</b>

<u>Type of Unit</u>	<u>F. Stop Time</u>					
	<u>No. of Units</u>	<u>Stops</u>	<u>Avg. Stop Time (Minutes)</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Maximum</u>
Bench	3	16	2.1	2.1	1.6	7.5
Case(s)/Object(s)	38	1396	1.1	1.1	0.7	10.4
Case(s) with Video(s)	3	89	2.4	2.3	1.6	10.4
Interactive	5	242	1.3	1.3	1.0	10.4
Panel	8	81	0.5	0.5	0.4	2.6
Video	7	198	2.9	3.1	1.5	12.9
Total	64					
<b>All Stops</b>		<b>2022</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>12.9</b>

Table 2  
Stops in *The American Presidency* (TAP) Exhibition: Spatial Order\*

Stop	Type	Description	Statistics			
			Percent Who Stopped at Each Exhibit	Avg. Stop Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation	Median
1	Case/Objects	Bible and stand	57.5	0.7	0.6	0.4
2	Section Label	Exhibition Intro Label	21.8	0.4	0.3	0.3
3	Case/Object	George Washington painting	57.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
4	Case/Object	George Washington uniform	65.5	0.4	0.2	0.4
5	Cases/Objects	Establishing the Presidency	65.5	1.6	1.4	1.1
6	Cases/Objects	Creating the Presidency	41.4	1.1	0.9	0.8
7	Interactive	Constitutional Convention Interactive	29.9	0.9	0.8	0.7
8	Case/Object	Presidential Timeline	71.3	1.9	1.6	1.5
9	Case/Object	Carriage	49.4	0.6	0.3	0.6
10	Case/Objects	Inauguration	52.9	1.2	1.0	0.8
11	Case/Objects	Celebration (with dress interactive)	52.9	1.0	0.9	0.8
12	Section Label	Celebrating Inauguration Label	3.4	0.4	0.2	0.4
13	Bench	Bench	2.3	3.1	1.8	3.1
14	Interactive	Opinion Poll Interactive	40.2	1.9	1.6	1.8
15	Bench	Bench	4.6	2.2	1.2	1.9
16	Cases/Objects	Roles#1:Command-in-Chief,	55.2	1.6	1.5	1.2
17	Video	Video - Personalities of the	29.9	2.2	2.4	1.4
18	Cases/Objects	Diplomat	57.5	1.5	1.2	1.2
19	Case/Object	Jefferson's desk	29.9	0.6	0.7	0.5
20	Interactive	Give a Speech Interactive	14.9	1.6	1.9	1.0
21	Cases/Objects	Roles #3: National Leader	47.1	1.0	0.6	1.0
22	Video	Video - Leadership by the Presidents	26.4	2.1	1.3	1.9
23	Cases/Objects	Roles #4:Chief Exec./Party	64.4	1.8	1.6	1.5
24	Section Label	Presidential Roles Label	6.9	0.9	0.9	0.5
25	Section Label	Label	6.9	0.3	0.1	0.3
26	Cases/Objects	White House as Symbol	67.8	1.7	1.3	1.3
27	Video	scenes	33.3	5.4	3.4	5.8
28	Interactive	President's children Interactive	20.7	0.9	0.4	0.9
29	Cases/Objects	White House as Home	71.3	1.5	1.0	1.4
30	Section Label	Limits of Pres. Power Label	57.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
31	Cases/Objects	Congress/Supreme Court	62.1	1.1	0.6	0.9
32	Case/Objects	Impeachment	56.3	1.3	0.9	1.1

(continued)

\*See pages 8-9 for Definitions of terms used in the tables.

Table 2. Stops in *The American Presidency* (TAP): Spatial Order (continued)

Stop Type	Description	Statistics			
		Percent Who Stopped at Each Exhibit	Avg. Stop Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation	Median
33 Video	Video - Limits of Power	27.6	2.0	2.6	0.7
34 Case/Objects	Public Opinion	33.3	0.6	0.6	0.5
35 Case/Objects	The Press	21.8	0.6	0.6	0.5
36 Section Label	Assassination & Mourning Label	6.9	0.3	0.2	0.4
37 Case/Object	Drum	28.7	0.5	0.4	0.4
38 Cases/Objects	Hat Wall (Funerals & Mourning)	72.4	1.5	0.9	1.4
39 Case/Objects	News of Assassination	29.9	0.8	0.4	0.7
40 Case/Objects	Assassins	52.9	0.8	0.8	0.6
41 Cases/Objects	Assassinations & attempts (Teddy, FDR, J. Garfield, A. Jackson)	52.9	2.2	1.5	2.2
42 Bench	Bench	11.5	1.9	2.5	0.7
43 Case with video	JFK & Secret Service (with Assassination and Mourning video)	69.0	3.1	2.6	2.4
44 Section Label	Communicating the Presidency Label	8.0	0.7	0.8	0.4
45 Case with video	Recording the Spoken Word	33.3	1.0	0.6	0.9
46 Case/Objects	Radio	29.9	0.8	0.5	0.7
47 Case with video	The Pres. & the Media (with	41.4	1.4	1.2	1.1
48 Video	Web Video	11.5	0.9	0.6	0.6
49 Case/Object	Web cam	18.4	0.5	0.3	0.4
50 Case/Objects	Meet the Press	20.7	0.5	0.3	0.4
51 Cases/Objects	Street Signs	40.2	0.6	0.5	0.4
52 Cases/Objects	Political Cartoons	19.5	0.5	0.3	0.4
53 Interactive	Music (with Interactives)	27.6	1.3	0.8	1.3
54 Cases/Objects	Movie posters	12.6	0.6	0.4	0.6
55 Case/Object	Air Force One costume	18.4	0.3	0.2	0.3
56 Case/Object	Independence Day costume	20.7	0.5	0.4	0.4
57 Video	Video - The Presidency & Popular	57.5	2.7	3.1	1.1
58 Case/Objects	Movies Props (Primary Colors flier)	4.6	0.9	0.8	0.7
59 Case/Objects	Ads & Presidential Images	17.2	0.4	0.2	0.4
60 Case/Objects	TV & Movie stills	31.0	0.6	0.3	0.6
61 Case/Objects	Relics/Icons/Souvenirs	49.4	0.8	0.6	0.7
62 Section Label	Life after the Presidency Label	31.0	0.6	0.5	0.4
63 Case/Objects	Life After the Presidency artifacts	57.5	1.1	1.0	0.8
64 Video	Video - Life After the Presidency	41.4	3.5	3.8	1.6

Table 3  
 Stops in *The American Presidency* (TAP) Exhibition: Rank Order by Percent of Visitors who Stopped  
 (% of Visitors)

		Stops: Statistics			
Stop Type	Description	Percent Who Stopped at Each Exhibit	Avg. Stop		
			Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation	Median
38 Cases/Objects	Hat Wall (Funerals & Mourning)	<b>72.4</b>	1.5	0.9	1.4
8 Case/Object	Presidential Timeline	<b>71.3</b>	1.9	1.6	1.5
29 Cases/Objects	White House as Home	<b>71.3</b>	1.5	1.0	1.4
43 Cases with vic	JFK & Secret Service (with Assassination and Mourning video)	<b>69.0</b>	3.1	2.6	2.4
26 Cases/Objects	White House as Symbol	<b>67.8</b>	1.7	1.3	1.3
4 Case/Object	George Washington uniform	<b>65.5</b>	0.4	0.2	0.4
5 Cases/Objects	Establishing the Presidency	<b>65.5</b>	1.6	1.4	1.1
23 Cases/Objects	Roles #4: Chief Exec./Party	<b>64.4</b>	1.8	1.6	1.5
31 Cases/Objects	Congress/Supreme Court	<b>62.1</b>	1.1	0.6	0.9
1 Case/Objects	Bible and stand	<b>57.5</b>	0.7	0.6	0.4
3 Case/Object	George Washington painting Roles #2: Head of State, Chief	<b>57.5</b>	0.6	0.6	0.5
18 Cases/Objects	Diplomat	<b>57.5</b>	1.5	1.2	1.2
30 Section Label	Limits of Pres. Power Label	<b>57.5</b>	0.6	0.6	0.5
57 Video	Video - The Presidency & Popular	<b>57.5</b>	2.7	3.1	1.1
63 Case/Objects	Life After the Presidency artifacts	<b>57.5</b>	1.1	1.0	0.8
32 Case/Objects	Impeachment	<b>56.3</b>	1.3	0.9	1.1
16 Cases/Objects	Roles#1: Command-in-Chief,	<b>55.2</b>	1.6	1.5	1.2
10 Case/Objects	Inauguration	<b>52.9</b>	1.2	1.0	0.8
11 Case/Objects	Celebration (with dress interactive)	<b>52.9</b>	1.0	0.9	0.8
40 Case/Objects	Assassins	<b>52.9</b>	0.8	0.8	0.6
41 Cases/Objects	Assassinations & attempts (Teddy, FDR, J. Garfield, A. Jackson)	<b>52.9</b>	2.2	1.5	2.2

\* Note: Table includes only units at which 50% or more visited stopped.

Table 4  
Stops in *The American Presidency* (TAP) Exhibition: Rank Order  
(Average Time/Stop)

		Stops: Statistics			
Stop Type	Description	Percent Who		Standard Deviation	Median
		Stopped at Each Exhibit	Avg. Stop Time* (Minutes)		
27 Video	Video - White House/Behind-the-scenes	33.3	<b>5.4</b>	3.4	5.8
64 Video	Video - Life After the Presidency	41.4	<b>3.5</b>	3.8	1.6
43 Case with video	JFK & Secret Service (with Assassination and Mourning video)	69.0	<b>3.1</b>	2.6	2.4
13 Bench	Bench	2.3	<b>3.1</b>	1.8	3.1
57 Video	Video - The Presidency & Popular	57.5	<b>2.7</b>	3.1	1.1
41 Cases/Objects	Assassinations & attempts (Teddy, FDR, J. Garfield, A. Jackson)	52.9	<b>2.2</b>	1.5	2.2
17 Video	Video - Personalities of the	29.9	<b>2.2</b>	2.4	1.4
15 Bench	Bench	4.6	<b>2.2</b>	1.2	1.9
22 Video	Video - Leadership by the Presidents	26.4	<b>2.1</b>	1.3	1.9
33 Video	Video - Limits of Power	27.6	<b>2.0</b>	2.6	0.7
14 Interactive	Opinion Poll Interactive	40.2	<b>1.9</b>	1.6	1.8
42 Bench	Bench	11.5	<b>1.9</b>	2.5	0.7
8 Case/Object	Presidential Timeline	71.3	<b>1.9</b>	1.6	1.5

\* Note: Table limited to stops with average stop time of 1.9 minutes or more.

Table 5  
Stops in *The American Presidency* (TAP) Exhibition: Rank Order by Type of Stop  
(% of Visitors)

Stop Type	Description	Statistics			
		Percent Who Stopped at Each Exhibit	Avg. Stop Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation	Median
43 Cases with video	JFK & Secret Service (with Assassination and Mourning)	69.0	3.1	2.6	2.4
47 Cases with video	The Pres. & the Media (with Recording the Spoken Word)	41.4	1.4	1.2	1.1
45 Case with video	Recording the Spoken Word	33.3	1.0	0.6	0.9
57 Video	Video - The Presidency & Popular	57.5	2.7	3.1	1.1
64 Video	Video - Life After the Presidency	41.4	3.5	3.8	1.6
27 Video	Video - White House/Behind-the-	33.3	5.4	3.4	5.8
17 Video	Video - Personalities of the	29.9	2.2	2.4	1.4
33 Video	Video - Limits of Power	27.6	2.0	2.6	0.7
22 Video	Video - Leadership by the	26.4	2.1	1.3	1.9
48 Video	Web Video	11.5	0.9	0.6	0.6
38 Cases/Objects	Hat Wall (Funerals & Mourning)	72.4	1.5	0.9	1.4
8 Case/Object	Presidential Timeline	71.3	1.9	1.6	1.5
29 Cases/Objects	White House as Home	71.3	1.5	1.0	1.4
26 Cases/Objects	White House as Symbol	67.8	1.7	1.3	1.3
4 Case/Object	George Washington uniform	65.5	0.4	0.2	0.4
5 Cases/Objects	Establishing the Presidency	65.5	1.6	1.4	1.1
23 Cases/Objects	Roles #4: Chief Exec./Party	64.4	1.8	1.6	1.5
31 Cases/Objects	Congress/Supreme Court	62.1	1.1	0.6	0.9
1 Case/Objects	Bible and stand	57.5	0.7	0.6	0.4
3 Case/Object	George Washington painting	57.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
18 Cases/Objects	Roles #2: Head of State, Chief	57.5	1.5	1.2	1.2
63 Case/Objects	After the Presidency artifacts	57.5	1.1	1.0	0.8
32 Case/Objects	Impeachment	56.3	1.3	0.9	1.1
16 Cases/Objects	Roles#1: Command-in-Chief,	55.2	1.6	1.5	1.2
10 Case/Objects	Inauguration	52.9	1.2	1.0	0.8
11 Case/Objects	Celebration (with dress	52.9	1.0	0.9	0.8
40 Case/Objects	Assassins	52.9	0.8	0.8	0.6
41 Cases/Objects	Assassinations & attempts (Teddy, FDR, J. Garfield, A. Jackson)	52.9	2.2	1.5	2.2
9 Case/Object	Carriage	49.4	0.6	0.3	0.6
61 Case/Objects	Relics/Icons/Souvenirs	49.4	0.8	0.6	0.7

(continued)

Table 5. Stops in *The American Presidency* (TAP): Rank Order by Type of Stop (continued)

Unique Stops: Statistics					
Stop Type	Description	Percent Who Stopped at Avg. Stop			
		Each Exhibit	Time (Minutes)	Standard Deviation	Median
21 Cases/Objects	Roles #3: National Leader	47.1	1.0	0.6	1.0
6 Cases/Objects	Creating the Presidency	41.4	1.1	0.9	0.8
51 Cases/Objects	Street Signs	40.2	0.6	0.5	0.4
34 Case/Objects	Public Opinion	33.3	0.6	0.6	0.5
60 Case/Objects	TV & Movie stills	31.0	0.6	0.3	0.6
19 Case/Object	Jefferson's desk	29.9	0.6	0.7	0.5
39 Case/Objects	News of Assassination	29.9	0.8	0.4	0.7
46 Case/Objects	Radio	29.9	0.8	0.5	0.7
37 Case/Object	Drum	28.7	0.5	0.4	0.4
35 Case/Objects	The Press	21.8	0.6	0.6	0.5
50 Case/Objects	Meet the Press	20.7	0.5	0.3	0.4
56 Case/Object	Independence Day costume	20.7	0.5	0.4	0.4
52 Cases/Objects	Political Cartoons	19.5	0.5	0.3	0.4
49 Case/Object	Web cam	18.4	0.5	0.3	0.4
55 Case/Object	Air Force One costume	18.4	0.3	0.2	0.3
59 Case/Objects	Ads & Presidential Images	17.2	0.4	0.2	0.4
54 Case/Objects	Movie posters	12.6	0.6	0.4	0.6
58 Case/Objects	Movies Props (Primary Colors	4.6	0.9	0.8	0.7
14 Interactive	Opinion Poll Interactive	40.2	1.9	1.6	1.8
7 Interactive	Constitutional Convention	29.9	0.9	0.8	0.7
53 Interactive	Music (with Interactives)	27.6	1.3	0.8	1.3
28 Interactive	President's children Interactive	20.7	0.9	0.4	0.9
20 Interactive	Give a Speech Interactive	14.9	1.6	1.9	1.0
42 Bench	Bench	11.5	1.9	2.5	0.7
15 Bench	Bench	4.6	2.2	1.2	1.9
13 Bench	Bench	2.3	3.1	1.8	3.1
30 Section Label	Limits of Pres. Power Label	57.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
62 Section Label	Life after the Presidency Label	31.0	0.6	0.5	0.4
2 Section Label	Exhibition Intro Label	21.8	0.4	0.3	0.3
44 Section Label	Communicating the Presidency	8.0	0.7	0.8	0.4
24 Section Label	Presidential Roles Label	6.9	0.9	0.9	0.5
25 Section Label	White House as Symbol & Home	6.9	0.3	0.1	0.3
36 Section Label	Assassination & Mourning Label	6.9	0.3	0.2	0.4
12 Section Label	Celebrating Inauguration Label	3.4	0.4	0.2	0.4



## Appendix C: Method and Definitions

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### Method

Data for this study were collected by unobtrusively observing visitors as they entered the TAP exhibition after they turned in a ticket at the entrance. Data were collected on seven different days in late February. Three sessions of observations were conducted on each day.

Teams of two or three people were used during each session to track visitors. Observation was restricted to voluntary visitors (i.e., individuals clearly visiting the museum as part of a guided school group were not selected for tracking).

A total of 64 exhibition units were included in the observation protocol. A unit was initially defined as a distinct museum artifact ("real thing") or communication medium, such as a text panel, video loop, or interactive. In many cases, however, the design of the exhibition precluded isolating distinct elements. In those instances, a grouping of elements (generally a case) was considered an exhibition unit. A map showing the 64 exhibition units is in Appendix A.

All stops made by visitors at any of the 64 exhibition units were recorded. A "stop" was recorded if it was at least three seconds in duration. Certain stops contained elements which the visitor could operate or actively engage with. We recorded when a visitor watched someone using an interactive unit (e.g., making a 'speech' at the Presidential podium) or using an interactive himself or herself.

The visitor was observed for up to three minutes after they exited through the exhibit doors, to see if they entered the exhibition store. In addition, to behavior, limited demographic information (gender, group composition, approximate age, ethnicity/race) was recorded, from observation, by the tracker.

The tracker remained inconspicuous to the visitor throughout the observation period.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If at any point the visitor being observed, or another visitor, realized they were being followed the tracking was terminated. In practice, this occurred once in this study.

Observations were conducted from Wednesday, February 14 through Friday, February 16, Tuesday, February 20, and Friday, February 23 through Sunday, February 25, 2001. Within each day, there were three sessions. Observations were conducted every day between 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM, and 12:30 PM - 2:00 PM. The third session alternated between 2:30- 4:00 PM or 3:30 – 5:00 PM.

Sample selection procedures were established for this study. At the beginning of the session, the first tracker identified the third person handing in a ticket and selected that person to be followed, the second tracker started with the sixth person and, when scheduled, the third tracker began with the ninth. When a tracker completed an observation, they returned to the exhibition entrance and repeated the process.

Eighty-seven (87) systematically selected individuals were observed (unobtrusively tracked) from the time they entered the exhibition until the time at which they exited the exhibition and either entered the store or left the exhibition area (within 3 minutes). Observers (trackers) used specially designed maps and forms (see Appendix A) in conjunction with stopwatches to record the data.

## Definitions

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### Unit

A “unit” was a specific area or element defined for observation in the exhibition. A total of 64 units were included in the observation protocol for TAP. Units were classified into six types:

- Case(s)/Object(s) included cases(s) containing one or more objects or created element (e.g., the wall containing Lincoln’s Hat, cases with *Commander in Chief* and *Military Hero* artifacts, and the *Presidential Timeline*).
- Section Labels were the main text panels introducing the exhibition and other areas or rooms.
- Videos included solo video loop (e.g., *Life After the Presidency* and *Limits of Power*).
- Case(s) with Video(s) included an area with cases and video loops combined (e.g., *Recording the Spoken Word*).
- Interactives included “hands-on” elements such as the *Opinion Poll* and the *President’s Children*.
- Benches were also identified .

## Visit Time.

We have defined "visit time" as the total time in the ticketed exhibition; i.e., including time observing, time waiting to see an object, and time spent in other activities (e.g., tending to a child).

[The median visit time is 30.5 minutes; i.e., half of the visitors spend more than 30.5 minutes and half less than 30.5 minutes.]

## Time Stopped.

In this study, we defined a "stop" as having a minimum duration of 3 seconds in which the visitor is clearly observed looking at an object or engaged in an exhibition related activity (reading text, using an interactive, watching someone use an interactive, etc.) "Time Stopped" therefore excludes waiting in line, walking through a gallery, etc. [We find that the average time stopped = 31.4 minutes ( $SD = 20.7$  minutes).]

## Percent Engaged.

The relationship between "visit time" and "stop time" can be expressed as the percentage of time in the exhibition during which the visitor is directly engaged with the materials that are presented. [In this case, 85.1%.]

## Stops.

Our observation forms identified a total of 64 possible 'stop units' in the exhibition. Visitors can, however, return to a specific location (stop). In calculating the total stops made by individuals, we combined 'return stops,' e.g., a visitor who returns to an interactive is considered to have made one stop and the time stopped at both brief visits is combined. [Using this definition, we find that, on average, visitors made a total of 25.1 stops ( $SD = 11.4$ ). The median number of stops = 25.]

## Standard Deviation ( $SD$ )

The standard deviation is a statistic that tells you how 'tightly' all the various data points are clustered around the mean (average) in a set of data. When the examples are pretty tightly bunched together the standard deviation is small. When the data points are spread apart, you have a relatively large standard deviation. One standard deviation away from the mean (average) in either direction accounts for somewhere around 68% of the people in the sample. [Here, with the average 35.7 and the  $SD$  21.7,

we know that 68% of the visitors spent between 14.0 and 54.4 minutes in the exhibition.].

In looking at the tables, the standard deviation can be understood to show ‘agreement’ among visitors. Thus, for example, a small standard deviation means that most visitors spent almost the same amount of time at a location. A large standard deviation shows that different visitors spent very different times at a location.

## IV. Consolidated Recommendations

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### Access

- The Smithsonian should devise a better system of cross-referencing topics and objects across museums, and visitors to NMAH should be given more and better ways to find out what is on view in the museum.
- NMAH should post information about exhibitions planned for the future -- to encourage people interested in those topics to return, to spread the word about future projects, and to remind visitors that the museum is not static. The most effective locations would be near the exits and in the elevators.
- NMAH should make use of extensive publicity about the NMAH renovation, including design previews, to change its image as a staid, old-fashioned museum.
- Accessibility guidelines should be enforced more rigorously. Walkthroughs with representatives of populations with disabilities should be used to identify problems that are not apparent in plans (such as glare from lights). Alternative media, such as audio guides and large-print booklets of labels, should be made available for major exhibitions.

### Design

- Some aspects of the design are compromising the experience of visitors to TAP. For example, crowding is a problem that could be alleviated by more stringent control of the number of tickets issued during peak periods. More seating could be provided inside the exhibition. When NMAH is renovated, the exhibition could occupy more square feet. More generally, exhibits such as the Presidency should be installed in larger spaces, to facilitate access and improve the experience.
- In the future design of the renovated galleries, NMAH should provide some spaces that allow for quiet reflection as well as others that promote socialization.
- Since many visitors do not mind sorting visually through large numbers of objects, NMAH should consider installing some open storage areas in its renovated galleries, particularly in areas where there is strong public interest and unique depth in the collection.

## Planning

- The museum should investigate the experience of visitors in the First Ladies exhibition—which remains the most visited exhibition in the museum—in order to understand better its unique and enduring draw.
- The plan for redesigning the Transportation Hall should include an investigation of the experience of visitors to the current space, as well as studies focussed on the features that could draw new audiences. The re-design offers NMAH the opportunity to create an exhibition that will draw greater numbers of men, much as First Ladies does women; or, the exhibition may be re-designed to attract more women or other targeted audiences.