

VISITOR VIEWS
ON
AMERICAN DREAMS

A STUDY FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

OFFICE OF POLICY AND ANALYSIS
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Introduction

This document provides the results of a study conducted among visitors to the National Museum of American History. The purpose of the study was to gather visitor opinions regarding a prospective exhibition that would provide an overview or introduction to American History, employing the concept “American Dreams.”

A study team from the Office of Policy and Analysis conducted 22 in-depth interviews with 27 visitors in April and May, 2006. The interviews ranged in length from one minute to one hour and averaged 12 minutes. The themes of the interviews included:

- The perceived need for an introductory exhibition
- How the visitor might envision such an exhibition
- Responses to the idea of “The American Dream” and “American Dreams”
- Responses to a statement about the exhibition written by the curator
- Responses to a list of American Dreams provided by the curator
- Suggestions regarding the exhibition

The study was designed to:

- provide a sampling of the diversity of views that visitors hold on these topics,
- allow a closer look at the reasoning or beliefs that support or underlie those views,
- introduce areas of potential difficulty
- identify areas of potential opportunity

Because the number of interviewees was relatively small and not representative of a larger population, this study does not represent all viewpoints that exist among visitors, nor can it be used to estimate the frequency of any particular viewpoint among all visitors.

Interviewers intercepted visitors at three locations in the museum: the Mall exit, the Constitution Avenue exit, and the first floor. Interviewees form a convenience sample -- no attempt was made either to construct a representative sample or to favor particular sub-groups within the population of visitors. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are:

Gender: 17 female, 10 male

Estimated Age: Range 13 years to 70s, Median age 40s

Ethnicity: 21 White, 3 Hispanic, 2 African American, 1 Asian American

Residence: 2 Washington Metro Area, 23 Other US locations, 2 Canada

Visit history: 7 first-time visitors, 9 repeat visitors, 11 unknown

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and divided into parts according to content. The excerpts were then organized by content and commonalities or patterns noted. Although overlap has been minimized, some excerpts are repeated in several content categories. Each excerpt is followed by an identifier that indicates the interview. Characteristics of that particular respondent can be located in Appendix A. Other appendices include the curatorial statement on the exhibition and the list of Dreams. Interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed by Ioana Munteanu and Andrew Pekarik, who also prepared this report.

Summary of Findings Organized by Topic

An Introductory Exhibition of American History is Needed/Not Needed

Visitors were asked how they felt about having one exhibition that would be an overview of the history of America. Some felt it was needed and some felt that it was not. Reasons for having such an exhibition included:

- a need for “context,” “an umbrella look”
- “a more cohesive introduction,” less “isolated” presentations
- value for others, especially children
- background for those who don’t know much about American history
- updating one’s knowledge
- no other history museum in the country does this

Reasons for NOT having such an exhibition included:

- no need for it
- it would be too hard to do – too big a subject; too many different viewpoints

Need for an Orientation Overview

A number of visitors understood “overview of American History” to mean an orientation exhibition that would provide an overview of the museum more than an overview of the subject. Even when this was clarified, some visitors still expressed the opinion that an introductory exhibition should be used to orient visitors to the rest of the museum. Others suggested that the theme of American Dreams could be used to organize the museum as a whole. These respondents appeared to be visitors who missed a sense of order in the arrangement of the museum. There were also respondents who expressly did not want to see the museum organized in any orderly way. (See also the section on NMAH orientation and organization problems).

Ideas for an Introductory Exhibition

Before the theme of American Dreams was raised, visitors were asked how they would envision an overview exhibition of American History. Some content suggestions reflected individual perspectives based on where they live. Organization suggestions included a mix of topics, key events, chronologies, and timelines. Some would start with Columbus; others with the period just before the arrival of the English. Some respondents also brought up display features, including drawings, multi-media, and music.

American Dream – Initial Response

This section includes first responses to “The American Dream” or “American Dreams” as the organizing theme for an introductory exhibition. These first reactions brought up some ideas that were immediately associated with the concept, including:

- Ellis Island, immigration
- Martin Luther King
- The American Dream has changed over the years
- Freedom
- Founding Fathers

American Dreams (Plural)

In some cases, interviewees were asked first about “The American Dream” as a theme, and then asked about “American Dreams,” to see whether or not this had an impact on the discussion. In some cases the respondent independently raised the point that dreams differ, depending on the individual. When discussing differences these respondents used categories based on:

- Age – child, teen, adult, senior
- National origin – Mexico, Asia, Cuba
- Celebrities – Arnold Schwarzenegger
- Religion – Jewish, Muslim, Christian
- Ethnicity – European, non-European; Black, Chinese, Hispanic, Irish

Top-of-mind Dreams

At the beginning of the discussion of American Dreams, some respondents spoke of what they considered to be American Dreams. These dreams included:

- Success
- Safety/Security
- Happiness
- Money
- Freedom
- Struggle and progress
- Achievement
- Building a nation
- Going to the moon
- Opportunity

Response to the Curator’s Statement

To aid in the discussions the curator prepared a statement about the exhibition (see Appendix B). This section includes initial responses to that statement. A few of those who responded directly to the content saw it as:

- Interesting and creative
- Emphasizing individual achievement
- Emphasizing success and achieving goals
- Too broad
- Not different from what’s already in the museum
- A central idea

Difficulties for the Exhibition

Some respondents raised issues that they thought might be particular challenges for an American Dreams exhibition. These included:

- It could cover hundreds, even thousands, of years
- The scope is very broad
- An overview of American history is not possible
- There needs to be different voices
- The concept needs to be more specific

Responses to the List of Dreams

A CITY ON A HILL: RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Religion and the American Dream drew a fair amount of excited comment, and the phrase “A City on a Hill” was unclear to some. Reactions included:

- This is the original dream
- Religion is an individual preference and shouldn’t be here
- Early settlers wanted religious freedom only for themselves, not others
- In America religion is “in your face”
- Religion today is “killing a lot of American dreams”

THE LADDER: UPWARD MOBILITY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Some noted that they did not know what was meant by “Upward Mobility.” For others it was understood in different ways, including:

- The progression of America – how the economy has grown
- “financial ladder”
- “achieving our dreams”

THE GARDEN: AGRICULTURE AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

The topic of agriculture was confusing for some and for others it recalled comments about the past, including:

- Native Americans
- “Agriculture moving into industry”

THE FRONTIER: WESTERN EXPANSION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

“Frontier” and “Western Expansion” seemed to be familiar concepts.

THE GRAND EMPORIUM: CONSUMERISM AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

This topic was unclear to some. Comments included:

- Does this mean capitalism? Free trade?
- Immigrants worked for “a better lifestyle for their families” not “material goods”

- It is something that “no other country has gotten into” because we’re “so rich.”
- “Part of everyday life”

THE GOLDEN DOOR: IMMIGRATION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Immigration was widely recognized as an important American dream. Comments included:

- “That’s huge.”
- “Very apropos right now for what we’re going through” “a hot topic now”
- “Immigration added to the culture”
- “this is THE American Dream”

THE DREAM FACTORY: HOLLYWOOD AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Some interviewees favored this topic (especially young people who understood it as a dream for fame), while others actively disliked it (especially those who regarded Hollywood’s role negatively). Comments included:

- “A lot of our culture is built around Hollywood”
- “That is not the American Dream. That is Hollywood’s dream.”
- “Hollywood is too fake.”
- “I really am into entertainment and popular culture.”
- “People would very much be drawn to [Hollywood], but I don’t think it’s important”
- “All the people who want to become famous...”
- “Everybody had a dream to be famous and be in Hollywood.”
- “These are the sort of things that even the teenagers are interested in...”

THE WHITE PICKET FENCE: HOME OWNERSHIP AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

This topic seemed to resonate more strongly with younger visitors than with older ones.

Comments included:

- “I’ve already had all my homes...”
- “...home ownership is big for a lot of people my age who are struggling...”
- ““White Picket Fence” - that is reality. That is NOT reality!”
- “...people want to own their own houses...”
- “...everybody wants to have a place to live and have family...”
- “Every person wants to have a home.”

A PLACE AT THE TABLE: SOCIAL EQUALITY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Social equality inspired both positive and negative responses. Comments included:

- “The last one is best. Social equality.”
- “...there needs to be more social equality in America....It’s not there.”
- “It’s a theme that’s been overdrawn.”
- “...nobody wants to be at the bottom of the social pyramid...”
- “...the social equality one (not only for women, but for African Americans) is really critical.”

Missing Dreams

Interviewees were asked which dreams were missing from the list. Missing dreams included:

- “Pursuit of happiness.”
- Careers
- Education
- “The frontier”
- Our government
- Women’s rights
- Personal peace
- Science and technology
- “the space race”
- “the future”

Problems with Dreams

In discussing American dreams, some interviewees noted some problems with dreams. These included:

- “...how difficult it is to pursue the dream. The struggle is what it’s all about.”
- “It [the list of Dreams] is kind of an economic viewpoint.” “They [the Dreams on the list] are all very worldly dreams...”
- “...people have had an American dream that’s been squashed from the very beginning...” “...that was the dream for the white man and for the people who were in charge...”
- “I’ve seen my dreams that were not realized...[but] I like my life the way it is.”
- “...Founding Fathers had a specific set of goals in mind and how we have faltered through the years and the reason for that...”
- “You can’t talk about opportunities for all without talking about failures...”

Personal Dreams

Some interviewees discussed their personal dreams. These included:

- Traveling
- Helping family
- Helping others (as an educator)
- Escaping poverty
- To live and work in DC
- To be a published writer
- To vacation
- Personal peace
- To have one’s own company, i.e., not work for an employer
- Freedom to question government policy and get answers
- Work hard, earn a good living, have a family

Dreams and History

Most interviewees, when discussing American dreams, tended to discuss the dreams of the present, whether their own or other people’s. Some respondents, however, made direct reference to dreams and the past, such as the idea of how dreams change over time. These references included:

- American dreams predate Columbus
- People of the past had different dreams
- “Early American had more of a political and freedom-type goal. As we progressed, it became more economic or personal freedom.”
- “...to learn where it’s been, so that we can make it happen, to where we want it to go.”
- “They dreamed of one country, we had it. They dreamed of industrializing the country...we had it.”
- “...every person has his own dream...Then the next generation will add on to that and strive to continue it and to add more to it.”
- “You can’t give freedom to somebody. They have to want it....It has to be their dream.”
- “It’s a little difficult to connect dreams from pre-Colonial, to a Colonial, to a Republic.”
- “Historically, it’s really one group being disadvantaged at the dreams of another...”

Suggestions for the Exhibition

A few interviewees offered suggestions.

- Personal stories
- Discuss all sides of the story
- Include reality and failures
- Include local/state perspectives
- Include an international perspective
- Consider the future as well as the past

NMAH Orientation and Organization Problems

In the course of the interviews some visitors described their difficulties in locating what they wanted to see or finding their way in general. Problems included:

- Finding an exhibition
- Misleading information in the map
- Understanding the overall organization of the museum
- Not finding “a natural progression” with a “start” or any sense of order
- Need for maps

Experiences in the Museum

Some visitors discussed other aspects of their visit to the museum that provide some insight into individual experiences. These excerpts include references to:

- Physical limitations in the museum (and the use of cell phones)
- “Real thing” and imagination experiences
- Gender differences

Discussion

An introductory exhibition is desirable for some

These interviews reinforce the belief presented in the report of the Blue Ribbon Commission that there are visitors who would appreciate and value an exhibition that provides an introduction to American history. The introductory exhibition these visitors envision would be arranged chronologically, use timelines and personal stories, and make use of themes/topics as complements to the temporal structure. Some of these visitors made it clear that they would like such an exhibition also to serve as a guide to what is in the museum.

American Dreams is an engaging subject

The interviews also demonstrate that “American Dreams” is an engaging subject for some visitors. Initial responses to this concept as an exhibition topic were favorable, although, when considering it more carefully, a number of these visitors raised problems regarding specific dreams, the question of whose viewpoints the dreams express, and the limitations and failures of some dreams.

Dreams are personal and present

Americans dreams were not immediately associated with history. Some visitors had difficulty, despite efforts by the interviewers, focusing on dreams and the past. Other visitors easily adopted an historical perspective. The topic of “American Dreams” tended to focus visitors on their own personal dreams, and the dreams of their contemporaries. It naturally implied a future perspective.

The poetic section titles could create confusion

The poetic titles that introduce each dream on the list caused problems for some visitors, either because the meaning of the phrase was unclear (e.g., “City on a Hill”) or because the poetic title and the descriptive title together seemed confusing (e.g., “The Ladder: Enterprise and the American Dream”).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems from this research that the theme of American Dreams could be an effective complement to an introductory, chronological exhibition on American history. At this preliminary stage a study of this kind serves to provide a sampling of the diversity of viewpoints vis-à-vis the subject, to raise questions, and to suggest opportunities. As the exhibition’s contents and organization are clarified, it will be possible to explore additional visitor responses to the exhibition plan.

Excerpts Organized by Topic

An Introductory Exhibition of American History is Needed/Not Needed

Visitors were asked how they felt about having one exhibition that would be an overview of the history of America. Some felt it was needed and some felt that it was not. Reasons for having such an exhibition included:

- a need for “context,” “an umbrella look”
- “a more cohesive introduction,” less “isolated” presentations
- value for others, especially children
- background for those who don’t know much about American history
- updating one’s knowledge
- “no other history museum in the country does this”

Reasons for NOT having such an exhibition included:

- no need for it
- it would be too hard to do – too big a subject; too many different viewpoints

I: Did you feel there was any need for a survey exhibition, an overview of American history?

R: I thought it was pretty much well-covered.

AP-01

I: We’re planning an overview exhibition that would tell a big story.

R: That would be good.

AP-02

I: Did you notice that we didn’t have an exhibition that was a general introduction to American History?

R: Yeah

I: Were you looking for something like that?

R: Yeah, definitely. I want to see some documents and I want to see some artifacts. When I saw the Star-Spangled Banner, I teared up a little bit. It was kind of moving. I definitely would have liked to have seen more of a cohesive introduction.

....

I: Did you see the Price of Freedom upstairs?

R: Yes. I wasn’t as impressed by that.

I: What was it missing?

R: More of a context. They have a table from the Grant and Lee surrender. That was cool. A lot of the show was replicas and stuff. You just walk past costumes, replica of a costume, replica of a costume. They didn’t tell you what the country was going through at the time.

I: You were missing the big picture.

R: Yes. That to me is something I think the museum should have. To give you an idea of what else was going on. What else was happening. A good exhibit on Lincoln how he had to work and work to find a General that he actually trusted. Those are good little footnotes. I'm sure it is a hard thing to do.

AP-03

I: Did you notice that we didn't have an exhibition introducing American History?

R: Yes, because I'd been here a long, long time ago, and I didn't see anything.

I: Were you looking for something like that?

R: We were kind of, a little bit, earlier.

I: What were you looking for?

R: Like what it used to be. Because at one point you did have more of an early American history. That is what I would imagine. Like the textiles, everything that was included, from the tools that they used to work with. All aspects. So you have a better idea. I have to go, I'm sorry.

AP-04

I: Did you notice an exhibition that was a general introduction to American History?

R: No

I: Were you looking for such a thing?

R: No.

....

I: We were thinking of an exhibition like that that would be for all of American history in one room. An introduction to the entire scope of American history. Do you think something like that is useful or necessary?

R: Yes. I see an awful lot of classes and stuff with kids. I think that would be more useful to them than me.

AP-06

I: We don't have an exhibition that is about all of American History.

R: True. That's right.

I: Does that feel like a problem to you?

R: I think the DC experience is an exhibition of entire American history. Having one like this might be something better, might be more efficient way for someone who didn't really know about it to come and focus on it.

I: It wasn't personally something that you missed.

R: Right. Right.
You know. It's interesting. Where did you grow up?

I: Philadelphia.

R: I grew up in North Carolina and I now live in California, and I've lived in the Midwest and now the West. People who live in these other areas of the country don't have the same appreciation for history that we do. Because you grew up in it. Perhaps if you had someplace where they could go to gain a greater appreciation.... So if you had one exhibit that fulfilled a lot of those requirements, that might be a good thing.

I: You feel that you're coming in with a lot of that already.

R: Yeah. We grew up in areas that were heavily indoctrinated with a lot of history, so the need is not as great for us, as compared to, say, Midwesterners, or people new to our country that are just coming here to be citizens.

....

I: We're thinking of an overview of American history, rather than of the museum.

R2: Oh, well I can tell you that generally American history in the schools right now is really a brush-over in a big way. And I can tell you, having been raised in the Midwest, and having raised our children on the East Coast, the Midwest, and now the West Coast very different approach. When we lived in Massachusetts, we lived in Boston, our kids got a very thorough understanding of American history because they could tie some of the events right in with field trips, being able to see it, feel it, know it. You can actually live it to a certain degree. The further west you go, the less likely that happens. You read about it in a book, and maybe one of those years you'll take a trip to Washington, DC, rarely do they make a trip to Boston. Most schools across the country will make a trip to DC before they do to Boston. But you can still get a good feel of it if you are actually out where it is. I really honestly believe that people up and down the whole East Coast he was raised in North Carolina when I first met him, he had a much better grasp of American history than I did, having been raised in the Midwest. And I've seen that with our kids, as they've gone through school at different ages.

AP-07

I: Did you notice that there is no single exhibition that is about American history as a whole?

R: Yes, sir.

I: How did you feel about that? Did you feel ok about that?

R: Somewhat.

I: Can you tell me more about the two sides of "somewhat"?

R: I don't know. It was alright. I don't know. I don't feel bad about it. I don't feel good about it. I enjoyed what I saw. I honestly, truly enjoyed what I did see.

I: If we did have an exhibition that was a survey of all of American history, would you have gone to that?

R: Of all American history in one exhibit? Yes, sir. I'm a history buff. I like history.

AP-08

I: One of the things the museum doesn't have is an exhibition that is just about American history, by itself, the whole story of American history. How do you feel about that?

R: It seems like something you should have.

I: But you don't really need it for your visit today?

R: Not really, but then again, I haven't really had my impression yet, so I don't know.

AP-09

I: Oh, you're a tour guide! How do you feel about the fact that there is no general introduction to American history, meaning one exhibition that tells the whole story of American history?

Do you think the museum needs something like that?

R: Yes, that would be nice...

I: For you personally or for other people?

R: For me personally and for other people.

AP10

I: Did you notice that there was no exhibition that just tells the story of American history just in one exhibition? How did you feel about that? Did you miss that? Or you think it was OK?

R: I wouldn't have thought of it until you brought it to my attention. However, I think that is a really valid point, because you get sections as you go along when you visit the states. For example yesterday we had a little lesson on Gettysburg and then here we had one with President's Ladies. So yes, it is very isolated. You're right.

I: So it would be a good thing for you if you would have one little exhibition that tells the whole sweep of American History.

R: Yes. You know, usually when you're teaching you would do that at the end as a review but I think it would be greatest as an introduction.

I: Are you a teacher?

R: Not anymore.

AP11

I: Did you feel the need to have an overview exhibition about American history?

R: No. I think it was pretty well organized as it was.

IM01

I: If you would have an exhibition presenting an overview of American history as opposed to what is in the museum.

R2: I don't think there is a need for it but it would allow for one committee's point of view about an overview given that so many different aspects of the American history...I'm sure somebody will be slighted. You have to do an incredible job to encompass everything.

I: What do you mean by an "incredible job"? How would see that?

R2: When you say “overview” what’s important to you and me may be different. Therefore your view will be reflected and not necessarily mine.

R1: Good point.

IM02

I: Did you felt the need of having an overview exhibition on American history?

R1: Yes...

I: What would you have in such and exhibition?

R2: I don’t know...Oh! I would like to see the Jazz age...the women with the skirts and everything...I would like to see that. I would like to see what happened to the Holocaust...

I: Would you divide it in themes...like history of music?

R2: Yes...

IM03A

I: Did you felt the need of having an exhibition focused on American history overall?

R2: Yes, probably.

....

I: What if I say a general exhibition about American history?

R2: A list of things and important things about them.

I: A list of things...

R2: Who we are and where we come from, religion, nationality...

IM03B

I: Would you like to have an exhibition in the museum of an overview of American history?

R3: Yes.

IM03C

I: Did you felt the need to have an exhibition on an overview of American history?

R: Yes, that would be very beneficial.

IM04

I: Did you feel there was something that was missing in this museum?

R: No I don’t. I thought it was very well done. I liked the audio portions that explain things to you. Sometimes there were videos that explain things to you and then, of course, there was the printed material that was very well done. Periodically there were people that were giving talks to groups and I listened to them a little bit as well. I didn’t think of anything as being missing.

I: I asked you this questions because the curators or American History Museum plan to have an exhibition on an overview of American History and I was wondering if you felt the need to

have an exhibition on an overview of American History?

R: It would probably bring everything together and I would think that if you would have an overview you would want to have it before people start going around to the individual things so they had this umbrella look at what the American history was or is.

IM06

I: Did you feel the need to have an exhibition focused on an overview of American history?

R: I never really thought about it actually...

I: But now that I told you about it...what is your reaction?

R: Actually it would be kind of nice to have an exhibition that relates to something like that.

IM07

I: You said that you've been here before today and spent a little bit of time in here. Did you feel that there was anything missing in the museum?

R: I couldn't really tell you...

I: If the NMAH museum would have an exhibition focused on an overview of American history, would you find it usefully?

R: Yes, definitely...

IM08

I: Were you missing anything in this museum?

R: I thought it was beautiful. I had difficulties reading...I lost my ability to read so the fact that they had pictorials and they had little areas where it was almost like a continuous tape, I found it was very, very enlightening for me.

I: Were you missing an exhibition focused on an overview of American history?

R: I didn't see the whole thing. I was only on two floors and I didn't spend that much time at each one but I thought it was very, very good. Being the museum for the history of the US, they obviously didn't say anything negative....

I: We were wondering if you were missing an exhibition that would talk about the American history overall...

R: Since I couldn't read I was only able to get what was shown on the [inaudible] where it gave you a very brief area of each individual one, whether it was the presidents' wives or the wars...but it was very, very good and precise...But, of course, they couldn't spend that much time and still have it on a continuum [inaudible].

I: But that is what I'm saying...if you would have one exhibition that would do that...

R: You can't do that. It's too big. You can't do that!

IM09

I: Do you think it would be beneficial for you if the museum would have an exhibition focused on an overview of American history?

R: Yes...

....

I: Now that you say that do you still think it would be beneficial to have an overview of American history where everything would be brought together?

R: I still think it would be beneficial and the main reason for me...is that there has been 20 years since I have been in American history and so it would still be good to see how some of these things have changed and moved.

IM10

I: The NMAH wants to have an exhibition presenting an overview of American History. Just to give you a little bit of background, since you have not seen the museum -- The museum is divided by themes.

R: I already noticed that...

I: But now they want to have one exhibition that would give visitors an overview of American history. What do you think of that?

R: Actually that is what I thought the museum would be like and it turns out that is [based on] themes. I think it's a good idea [to have an exhibition focused on an overview of American history] because I don't think there is a museum that does that in the country. I've seen a lot of museums in US and I don't think there is one that is dedicated to an overview. That being said however, you shouldn't lose some of the themes. Some of them can be reduced and compacted but I think generally incorporated within an overview would be better for context because that is the one thing that's missing in the museum -- context.

I: Just to make sure that you understand what I mean...the museum would not be dedicated entirely to an "overview"... just one exhibition...

R: Definitely there should be one.

IM11

Need for an Orientation Overview

A number of visitors understood “overview of American History” to mean an orientation exhibition that would provide an overview of the museum more than an overview of the subject. Even when this was clarified, some visitors still expressed the opinion that an introductory exhibition should be used to orient visitors to the rest of the museum. Others suggested that the theme of American Dreams could be used to organize the museum as a whole. These respondents appeared to be visitors who missed a sense of order in the arrangement of the museum. There were also respondents who expressly did not want to see the museum organized in any orderly way. (See also the section on NMAH orientation and organization problems).

I: If we have this overview exhibition, would you have gone there?

R: Yes.

I: What would you expect it to do for you?

R: I would get an idea of what is in the museum, and I would select what I want to see more of. I'm a retired teacher, so the kinds of things I'd like to see are things I used to teach. And I love to cook. That's why I was looking for Julia Child's kitchen. It said it was on the second floor, but I couldn't find it. Then someone told me it was on the third floor, and then I found out it was on the first floor. So it took me a while to find her kitchen.

....

I: So you would like an overview exhibition that is a guide to what's in the museum.

R: Yes. Something from each exhibition and a little excerpt where they would talk to you and say what else you would see for that exhibit. That would give you an idea of what you would want to go see.

I: So if you were doing that for Julia Child, what would you want to see?

R: You could just have Julia Child speak. You could take excerpts from the video and say that all here utensils, etc. are in the exhibition.

AP-02

I: We're thinking of organizing this exhibition under the theme of the American dream. Do you think that would work for this job?

R: Yes. Because the American dream changed over the years and you could relate that even to sections of the museum. And if you had one exhibit, like you're talking about, about American dreams, you could find in that exhibit areas you might like to see in the rest of the museum.

AP-06

R2: One thing I find with museums in general is that they are so big and overwhelming that you don't know where to start, and so you can actually have only one day to spend there and never get to see what you wanted to see because you didn't know where to start. You didn't plan at the beginning. To have a map is really helpful, but having an overview might be really helpful.

....

I: Which strikes you as the best topic?

R: I don't see any as the best. I see a variety of opportunities here.

I: Are any of them weaker than the others?

R: You could almost have a building that approaches this from different perspectives.

R2: Are you looking to set up the museum in this fashion?

AP-07

I: What do you think about having an overview exhibition of American history?

R1: I think it would be great!

R2: On the central floor here?

I: Wherever? Did you feel the need to have an overview exhibition?

R1: If you are interested in one thing over the other, so you can get directed to one thing or the other?

I: Is that how would see the exhibition?

R1: that is how I would see it, yes, like an overview.

I: But tell me what "overview" means to you?

R1: To me it means that you would be able to go directly... you would be able to see right away rather than going through the paper [she showed me the brochure] and looking for what you want. You have like a model of it [of the brochure]?

I: I'm talking about an exhibition...

R2: I don't know if I ...I don't feel that would be necessary. It's kind of nice walking around and discovering things and I think that I would miss that a little bit. A little sense of discovery, I enjoy that aspect of it.

R1: You might not go to something...

R2: And just miss it...whereas now you're forced to explore all the nooks and crannies.

IM02

I: Do you think that this exhibition focused on American history would work if it would deal with American dreams? If the "American dreams" would be the framework/the main topic for such an exhibition?

R: I think for this museum it would be good. My personal opinion is just to have an overview that is sort of a summary of what the persons can see in this museum. Although what you're describing might be a nice section of the museum, to talk about what are the American dreams of each individual, what are the differences. Let's say a person who was born somewhere else and has come to this country, what are their dreams? [Or you could have] the dreams of someone who was born here.

IM04

Ideas for an Introductory Exhibition

Before the theme of American Dreams was raised, visitors were asked how they would envision an overview exhibition of American History. Some content suggestions reflected individual perspectives based on where they live. Organization suggestions included a mix of topics, key events, chronologies, and timelines. Some would start with Columbus; others with the period just before the arrival of the English. Some respondents also brought up display features, including drawings, multi-media, and music.

I: How do you conceive of something like that? What would you imagine would work well for you?

R: For me, I would start off with history itself as an opening, and give people a 360 view of the country from its inception to the present. And then work off that with your wings, and each area would be, "this is the 1800s," and it would encompass the wars -- the way you had the Price of Freedom upstairs. But up there there is no real context in a historical sense. It was more that you went from the Civil War to the war in Korea to the war of 1812. It was just a single -- not confusing, but the technology age is over here, science is upstairs, and if people could see that Edison was building that stuff around the same time as the Civil War -- I'm not even sure the dates are correct -- but something general like that where you could tie it in, where you could see what was happening in 1801.

I: So you're envisioning a central room that has the big overview, and then these wings, like centuries? You mentioned a wing for the 1800s.

R: Yes. 1800s, 1900s.

I: How would they be arranged within those?

R: I guess you could do that, depending on what your wings are. You could do cultural, you could do military. You might even want to tie it in more to the geographic. Like, this is what the area looked like; this is how many people were there; this is the industry. Then you can show settlers. Then you can show industry, Edison, wars. That would be more beneficial to people, learning more about the country, rather than these kids who are not paying attention to anything. I think that's because everything is just throwing it out. If they actually say, "Wow, this is what a house looked like in the 1800s. This is what the guy was fighting in. This is what clothes they wore. And there's the Star-Spangled Banner."

....

I: I see. And in that central room, how would it be organized?

R: I would think just to give people an idea of where it was, just a simple timeline. Just simple posters, or something of that sort. Big, so that you don't have to walk around and look over here on this wall, or look over here on this wall. You can look up and see, "that's the 1800s."

I: When you say timeline, do you mean literally a line on the wall?

R: Yeah.

AP-03

I: If we were going to do an exhibition that is the story of American history in one exhibit, what would imagine it being? How would you like to see it organized?

R: As far as it being organized? Or what it would contain?

I: Whatever you'd like to tell me about it.

R: I am from Charleston, West Virginia. So I'm from the coal-mining areas. And you know we've had so many disasters in that area. I did a lot of expeditions and historical sites with girl scouting. For years. So I'm thinking more about things on our past history in the last two centuries, on how people came into certain areas, like into the colonial areas, and how they got started, their struggles. Their up-and-coming struggles. How they came in with nothing and built their areas from nothing, from scratch. How they learned. What they brought with them. How they learned to do from nothing -- from cutting down trees to building their own homes from nothing. They learned from Indians. They learned from one another. They drew from everyone else, and they gathered information from everyone. And, as they say, we became a melting pot from that. And I believe we all drew our strength from that, and just gathered so much information. And we picked little pieces of everything from everybody, and that's what I like. I love the small things. From the small things is where the biggest information comes.

I: What's an example of a small thing?

R: Small things? I was always taught from my grandparents listening and learning. When we listen, we learn to do better. If we listen to people's needs, as I said, cutting down the trees and doing the small things... I can't really do it off the top of my head. I'm not good right off the top of my head. Just listening to people, and learning from maybe their mistakes, or listening to what they have done in the past and picking up and putting your ideas with theirs and expand your ideas. That's how I've always done.

AP-08

I: But what would that [point of view] be?

R2: If I'm the king of the world? I like that. It would have to start with the Colonial era and perhaps before and the general discovery of Americas and then slowly it would focus on U.S. in particular. Then the highlights there [in US history], but also some aspects that aren't fully developed would also have to be in there...I guess chronologically would be the best way to do it.

I: When you say "highlights" what do you have in mind?

R2: Well typical things like the wars, the rights development, the whole concept of the uniqueness of America -- being a place where your rights are given by God and everyone else deserves it as well. That is probably the key aspect of our country.

IM02

I: What would you have in such an exhibition?

R2: I would want to have natural people doing natural things. I would like to have African-Americans achieving great things and all that stuff. You really don't see that in any of these museums. I think they should put more of that there.

IM03B

I: What would you have in there?

R3: It would have first our Founding Fathers, the first couple of presidents, then you would have different time periods when the new stuff was created like space ships and stuff like that that enable us to go in different places, then you would come up to now and you'll have the different wars that we fought in.

I: Let's say that you could have it two ways: by topic or chronologically. How would you prefer it?

R3: By topic.

IM03C

I: What would you have in such an exhibition?

R: I guess as many aspects of American history as possible. As you said, an overview, a summary of what we might be seeing. When you give a speech you tell people what you're going to talk about and then at the end of the speech you tell them what you have talked about and so it will be very beneficial at the entrance of the museum to have an overview of what they can expect to see there, an overview of American history. Also, where they can go to various parts of the museum to find it, like a map.

I: Right now the museum is divided by themes. We talk about technology, war, etc. Would it be beneficial if this exhibition would be displayed like a timeline or just a map of what's in here?

R: Chronologically with what's in there.

I: How would you make it?

R: I think it would probably be beneficial, because there are so many aspects of life that are going on through the years, to be organized by themes, still, similar to what it is, because there are different interests. I have different interests than someone else as opposed to going through history by everything that is going on. That might be a little bit disorganized so it makes sense to have it organized by themes, somewhat as you have it organized, as you said just provide an overview of what's in there.

IM04

I: What specific things would you have in such an exhibition? What would be useful for you?

R: I guess probably the beginning, right from Christopher Columbus, and just sort of little snippets all the way along and maybe a video with audio or even (I haven't been there for a while) headphones where you do a private [inaudible] that might be worthwhile. I don't know.

I: You said you would have some "snippets". What do you mean by it?

R: Of the history. Almost like a timeline...that is what I think about. A timeline would be this is what happened with Christopher Columbus and then the next important event, etc, etc. I don't think you would have to have every president or anything like that, but you could have the different wars, the important parts of the history of America and the flag. I was impressed with the flag. I'm not from the US, I am from Canada, and I was really impressed at the way the flag was displayed. The original. We don't do that or we don't do that well in Canada so I felt

that was well done.

I: Well I'm sure you do other things very well.

....

I: Well you mentioned the wars, then you said events.

R: Military or going to the moon. Really things that change the direction of America. Maybe that is another way to look at it. I guess you'll have to really sit down and think about that, whether that would be [appropriate]. I wouldn't want it all to be military because there are other important events, as I said, going to the moon or Kennedy's assassination, would be another example because that changed many, many things...

I: What about economically? Would you have the Great Depression for example?

R: O, I would think so. That had a powerful effect on every country's history.

IM06

I: What would you like to have in it?

R: Maybe something that relates to all of the states. Maybe like each state's flag, the quarters...or maybe like things from each state.

I: How do you envision this...should it be an historical perspective or like a snapshot of each state...

R: I'm going to go historical...

I: How would you present it?

R: Photographs of some of the states and probably prints and drawings...or maybe music...

I: It seems to me that you're inclining towards life or culture in the different states...but when you said history, what did you have in mind?

R: Not movements...just something fun, like music and media.

IM07

I: How do you envision such an exhibition?

R: Everything...the highlights of what happening over the decades. Just the big, important things...

I: Which would those be?

R: I would certainly like to see more on what happened on 9/11...that was a personal thing for me.

I: You also said everything that happened for...starting when?

R: Since the US was being formed.

I: You mentioned 9/11...but what other events would you put in such an exhibition...what would you have in it?

R: I can't really tell you right now...you have round rooms, like you did the ladies, the gowns

and staff...I don't know...just start showing the progression, the main things, big things that happened in the history, whatever you can fit into the room. You kind of want to have the progress around...

I: Do you see it military, socio-economic...what kind of issues/events would you see in such an exhibition?

R: Probably all of it...but I guess you'll do cultural in one area, historical in another....

I: So you would see it divided in themes?

R: Yes...that would make sense.

IM08

I: What would you have in it?

R: I would start from the time Columbus came and then move forward to the Constitution and the Civil War and just bullet point things -- especially for the children.

I: What other bullet points would you make? What other things do you think would be important to be in there?

R: Then, I would go through how we acquire the other states and how we grew and things of that nature...where we began as Americans from the time Columbus landed through today.

IM10

I: What would you have in such an exhibition?

R: You definitely have to start prior to, just a little bit prior to, before the English arrived.

Definitely you would have to talk about the situation with California and Texas before it was purchased. I would be talking even about Canada in the sense that even though they were all colonies, they were all colonies together, and that would be an interesting, short introduction and then I would go into the political and religious reasons why the people came over, the specifics of why they build the specific places, who are the people they met there -- so you'll have to talk about the Natives, and then get into, not just the political but also the social aspects of daily life. How specific grounds were laid out and then get into the political division of each colony and give them their economic strengths or what each did, or their [motto] or incorporation date and so one and so forth; Of course, then, get into the revolution, then the founding of the country and all of that should be incorporated as one concept. Then I would go into the XIX century, the American Civil War, slavery has to be addressed, 1812 has to be addressed, the industrial revolution and then WWI, so one and so forth, up to recent events. But a good overview [would be] mixing social and economic and political...

I: and military since you mentioned the wars...?

R: And military would also have to be incorporated.

I: You mentioned a lot of stuff, but would you be able to do all that in one exhibit?

R: You'll have to be very specific about what it is that you want to achieve, you have to definitely give it a theme, but there are different ways of doing it. You can incorporate multimedia in the exhibit....

I: Let's say that you are the Director of this museum, you'll have a space as large as this hallway and you'll have all the money in the world and your theme will be this overview of American History. What would you do with it?

R: I would divide it into a number of rooms, a number of spaces. The first space would be pre-Colonial, Colonial, Founding Fathers, and American revolution, essentially the 18th century; then another 19th century and then another 20th century. Within each of those I guess in order to make sense, to have something similar with each, you would develop...one wall would be social, one wall political, and one wall economic and then you'll do the same thing with the other one and then the same thing with the last one and then for each you'll end up with an essential concept for that specific time. You would choose something that is unusual for that specific century, that doesn't apply to the others [centuries] just so you can have this comparison as a triangular theme...

I: Like...

R: I don't know...natives in the first one, slavery in the second one, and then you can have modern politics in the third one.

IM11

American Dream – Initial Response

This section includes first responses to “The American Dream” or “American Dreams” as the organizing theme for an introductory exhibition. These first reactions brought up some ideas that were immediately associated with the concept, including:

- **Ellis Island, immigration**
- **Martin Luther King**
- **The American dream has changed over the years**
- **Freedom**
- **Founding Fathers**

I: What would you think if we did an exhibition called “The American Dream”?

R: I think it would be good.

AP-01

I: One of the things they are talking about here is to do an exhibition called the American Dream. What do you think of that?

R: That’s good. You mean Ellis Island and that kind of stuff?

AP-03

I: We’re thinking of organizing this exhibition under the theme of the American dream. Do you think that would work for this job?

R: Yes. Because the American dream changed over the years.

AP-06

I: What if we called an exhibition like that “The American Dream.”

R: Yes. The American Dream. The American Future. That’s what Martin Luther King always went by. He always saw what people came from and what they could become and always looked ahead. I saw what I came from which was not a whole lot, but they were very strong-willed, very strong, hard-working people, and they believed in doing what was right, and doing it properly, by other people, and not taking advantage of everyone, and that’s the way I am. I’m blue-collar all the way. Always have been.

AP-08

I: How do you feel about that as the organizing principle for the whole story of American history?

R: This is so broad and is such a ...”American Dream”...I don’t know. I think it’s a good theme to deal with, but I think it’s too selective to think of.

AP10

I: The museum’s curators are thinking of having an overview exhibition of American history focused on the theme “American dream.”

R: ...it could work. It could help. It wouldn't hurt you to do it.

....

I: When I say "American Dream" what comes to your mind?

R: The "American dream" is about freedom. You have the freedom of choice to do what you want to.

IM01

I: If we would have this exhibition focused on "American Dream" would that work for you?

R2: That would be an aspect that would probably have broad appeal especially in the sense that those Founding Fathers had a specific set of goals in mind and how we have faltered through the years and the reason for that...and it would be a nice concept. But, than again, it would be a concept but it would probably be the most fundamental one to bring to light.

....

I: What do you think about the "American dreams" today?

R2: I'm confident. I think it's under a transition right now where there are aspects that are trying to find that differently than they have been to start with and I think that it would shake up from time to time. That always has been the case and I think one of those times is now.

I: Could you be more specific?

R2: I think there are two schools of thought. One is the original which was "the less government the better," and the other is people are generally unable to solve for themselves so institutions has to be created to take care of everything like universal healthcare, taxed, public schools, etc...

IM02

I: What do you think of when I say "American dream"?

R2: Probably like ..what Americans want to do for themselves.

I: What do you think that is?

R2: Probably keep their families safe and try to budget the money.

I: Security, both physical and financial?

R2: Yes

IM03

I: NMAH wants to have as a framework for this exhibition on an overview of American history, "American dreams". What do you think of it?

R: It would be one of those things...what would you have in it? [...]

IM08

I: Because they want to have one and the framework for such and exhibition would be

“American dreams..”

R: OK...that's doable. If they do it with a certain theme in mind, yes. But to try to get an overview of American history...you can't. That is too much.

IM09

I: The curators of NMAH are thinking of having as a framework for such an exhibition on an overview of American history, “American dreams.” What comes in your mind?

R: What comes in my mind would be people coming here from other countries and developing a lifestyle here, in America.

IM10

I: What about this as an idea -- “American Dreams?”

R: ...that would work...it would work because I think a lot of American history... the concept of American destiny, the concept of the American Dream, and the concept of all these principles that are driving...the principle of being a nation...would be driving...that would definitely be an interesting way of doing it.

IM11

American Dreams (Plural)

In some cases, interviewees were asked first about “The American Dream” as a theme, and then asked about “American Dreams,” to see whether or not this had an impact on the discussion. In some cases the respondent independently raised the point that dreams differ, depending on the individual. When discussing differences these respondents used categories based on:

- **Age – child, teen, adult, senior**
- **National origin – Mexico, Asia, Cuba**
- **Celebrities – Arnold Schwarzenegger**
- **Religion – Jewish, Muslim, Christian**
- **Ethnicity – European, non-European; Black, Chinese, Hispanic, Irish**

I: What if we called it American dreams, in the plural?

R: That would be better. It would give you a range of everybody’s dream and what they hoped to accomplish in their lives.

I: Do you mean different people have different dreams?

R: Oh, yes.

I: So not everybody would agree that it’s being happy, successful and safe?

R: Yes. Exactly.

AP-01

I: The curators are planning an exhibition called “The American Dream.” Do you think that’s a good topic?

R: “The American Dream”? What would that entail?

I: I don’t know. What do you think?

R: I think that for every age it would be different, you know. I would think that would be really difficult.

I: Do you mean for every age in history?

R: No. Every person. Because my dream would be absolutely different from a child’s dream. A teenager. Because I’ve gone through a lot already, my dream wouldn’t be like homes or something like that.

AP-02

I: What if they called it “American Dreams,” in the plural?

R: Yeah. I mean everyone’s got different dreams. The Mexicans want to come here just to work, just to make four dollars an hour. That’s a dream to them. They have to sit in boxcars -- horrible, horrible scenarios just crossing the border. Asian people coming over in boats. Even the Cubans. It’s crazy. “The American Dream,” that’s a good idea, because that is definitely part of history.

....

I: What do you think their dream is?

R: To start a new life. Kind of like mine. Everyone's life is different. Some people have certain dreams. Arnold Schwarzenegger's dream, you know, was different from [inaudible]. Their dream was to work in the subway.

AP-03

I: So do you think there is one American dream?

R: No, there is not just one American dream. We all have so many different... so much.... We are so much. America is so full of dreams. That's who we are. We are so idealistic. We have a lot of dreams. That's what I believe.

AP-08

I: If I say "American dreams" would that change what you just said?

R2: It wouldn't change what I said but it would change what other people fit into that broad spectrum of our rights.

I: Can you give me an example?

R2: Religiously speaking, if you are a Jew or a Muslim or Christian, we can all agree that the general principle being freedom of religion, we are saying that for all of us. How we specifically go about that, the dreams individually it's up to our own.

IM02

I: Anything else? If I say "American dreams" does it change anything?

R2: No.

IM03B

I: If I say "American dreams," does that change anything?

R3: Yes...I think it would be dreams of different...because America is really diverse. I think it would be the dreams of each denomination. Like how the Martin Luther King had a dream like that. It would be more than one dream. Before everybody had the same dream like coming so they don't want to be persecuted and now it's like everybody else has a different dream.

....

I: When you think of American dream, is something that applies to all Americans and goes thorough time or a do you see it as a personal and momentary issue? How do you see the American dream in terms of time, space and people?

R3: I think everybody has their own opinion on what "the American Dream" is. I guess some people think is freedom and some people think it's...I don't know exactly but something that continuous is going on and changes. As time goes on people have different dreams. You don't have the same dream as you did when you were four years old and it's like personal.

Everybody has their own dream. Not everybody wants to be a star. Some want to be doctors

and lawyers.

....

Everybody should have their own dream...

IM03C

I: Which one is correct in your opinion “American Dream” or “American Dreams”?

R: Definitely “American Dreams.” Each person has a different dream I think. What is my dream may not be your dream. I was born here and someone who is an immigrant would, I think, have different aspirations and different dreams.

....

I: So you don’t think there is a common “something” called “the American Dream”?

R: Not per se. I think that’s what makes America so wonderful is that there are so many opportunities and so each person can pursue his or hers own dreams.

....

I: Do you think that this exhibition focused on American history would work if it would deal with American dreams? If the “American Dreams” would be the framework or the main topic for such an exhibition?

R: I think for this museum it would be good. My personal opinion is just to have an overview that is sort of a summary of what the persons can see in this museum. Although what you’re describing might be a nice section of the museum, to talk about what are the American dreams of each individual, what are the differences. Let’s say a person who was born somewhere else and has come to this country, what are their dreams? [Or you could have] the dreams of someone who was born here.

....

I: Would you just present the dream or have a philosophical debate? How would you see these issues presented?

R: I think just to describe what you’ve heard in these interviews, some of what the dreams are of different people and be able to convey that in a museum setting that would be wonderful to be able to see what it is in each person’s mind, what they are thinking, what their dream is...to be able to convey that in a museum would be nice.

I: How would you see that? Objects, personal stories?

I think they’ve done a nice job using different techniques, different media in there...with photographs, with audio, video, hands-on...just a combination of different things...

IM04

I: The curators of NMAH want to have as a framework for this American history overview exhibition, “the American Dreams.” What do you think of that?

R: That’s great as long as each incorporates not just European dreams...but also dreams from

other cultures.
IM07

Everybody, every person has his own dream. Whether it is depending on his own way of life or religion or the profession that he's at -- and what they do is work for their part of it. When you get enough people doing that it becomes a huge thing...like our dream of space. We hadn't ever thought that we are going to go to the moon. And a better question is, why?

....

I: Let's tie this back to the topic...

R: It's such a vast country! It has such a polyglot of people that regardless of where they came from, what their origin was...collectively. You can get one point of view or two points of view or 200 point of view...there always going to be all the other splinter groups. You could do it on civil rights but when they talk about civil rights they talk about Black civil rights. They are not talking about Chinese civil rights or Hispanic civil rights. When they talk about civil rights they talk about strictly for Blacks. Now why should it be only for Blacks? They should have the same rights as the Hispanics, Americans or the Asian-minorities...and I would rather call them Black-Americans than African-Americans, because they are not in Africa...you don't talk about the Irish as the Irish Americans...they are Americans. Why should the Blacks be African-Americans.

I: If you would put the exhibition together, how would you do it?

R: The fact that everybody has a different dream and they have a chance to get them fulfilled.
IM09

Top-of-mind Dreams

At the beginning of the discussion of “American Dreams,” some respondents spoke of what they considered to be American dreams. These dreams included:

- **Success**
- **Safety/Security**
- **Happiness**
- **Money**
- **Freedom**
- **Struggle and progress**
- **Achievement**
- **Building a nation**
- **Going to the moon**
- **Opportunity**

I: What do you think the American dream is?

R: To be happy. To be successful. And to be safe in America.

I: How would you approach that from a historical viewpoint?

R: Well, you’d have to get through war to get to safety.

I: What gets you to happiness?

R: Life, just in general.

....

I: What are some of the other dreams that you’d expect to find then.

R: Some people want to be rich. Some want monetary values. Things like that.

AP-01

I: When I say “American dream” what comes to your mind?

R: The “American dream” is about freedom. You have the freedom of choice to do what you want to.

I: What would you have in such an exhibition?

R: Woow...help me with this one Christy...

I: If you would have an exhibition on “American dream” what would you have in it?

R2: Money!

I: You think money and you think freedom! But what exactly would you have in it?

R: If she is talking about money, maybe a sample of money from different time periods. Freedom, maybe to show how life was in [inaudible] century of coming along...but that’s about all I can come up with right now.

I: Can I ask you what you would have in it? You said money, but how would you picture the exhibition?

R2: Just how industry and jobs have grown and have helped the American people gain in wealth. Now you have more middle class citizens [inaudible]

I: So mean a progression? What would be the starting point?

R2: The time when we first landed here. Start from there and show how life was difficult from the start and how gradually, hopefully it became easier.

I: So you think it became easier?

R2: Yes.

I: What else comes to your mind when I say “American dream”?

R2: Everything. Everything a person could possibly want.

I: What if I say American dreams?

R: Nowadays is to be popular. To be established...

IM01

I: But in your opinion, what does the “American dream” mean?

R2: The right to live free. Those particular aspects of American society and institutions that foster that...[the freedom] to practice, to work, to live, but also the concept that freedom doesn't mean that you can do everything. They come with responsibilities and so forth and so we all have a collective common agreement on basic ways to live and as long as we are within those guidelines and we all agree on them then you are a free person.

IM02

I: When I say “American dream,” what does it mean to you?

R1: [inaudible] Americans. The things that they went through to survive and everything...

I: Elaborate a little bit or give me an example...

R1: I like to see what happened with the Holocaust and the Jazz age and everything and how it's started...

....

I: If I change it to “American dreams” does it change anything?

R1: I don't know...like the future...What Americans have achieved during that period and what they went through.

IM03A

I: What do you think of when I say “American dream”?

R2: Probably like ..what Americans want to do for themselves.

I: What do you think that is?

R2: Probably keep their families safe and try to budget the money.

I: Security, both physical and financial?

R2: Yes

IM03B

I: If we would call this exhibition “American dream” what comes to your mind when I say that?

R3: I think where we want America to go and the near future. When we first came in here we had this dream of building a new country. Some of the people were being persecuted and than some did it for land so they can get a lot more money.

I: What would be different in this country?

R3: It would be a lot more freedom, like freedom of religion, and it’s like in the Constitution...

IM03C

I: What would be your American dream?

R: The opportunity to live in a country that is free because you look around the world and all the different countries that do not have or do not share the same freedoms that we have. I grew up over 50 years ago and at that time there was the Iron Curtain. In my life time the Iron Curtain has fallen and so that I saw the enthusiasm of all those who had come to our country since then and who lived behind that Iron Curtain and who were oppressed. So to see that enthusiasm...I think it’s easy for us, growing up in the U.S., to take those freedoms for granted. When you look around the world and see how hard people want to come from those countries where they were living under oppression to U.S., then you could see what dreams are all about.

IM04

I: ...The museum’s curators came up with the idea of having an overview of American history based or framed on American dreams.

R: Yes! That would be interesting...so going to the Moon was one of the dreams? I would think it would be. Coming out of the depression I would think it would be one, and everybody speaks certainly, especially after the WWII that if the Americans hadn’t come in it would have gone one forever and the ending may have been considerably different. Those are dreams.

....

I: You already mentioned some things already but I want you to elaborate on this issue. What do you think makes the American dream American?

F: I think it’s that sort of “can do” attitude. People think (and I’m talking about people outside the America) people think if you go to America you have a great chance of being very successful and I’m talking financially, your level of living will go up and I know there is poverty in America, I’m not naïve, but I think that is what we think of American dream. And my daughter, who happens to live in Alabama, she has been living there for over three years, her life style is very different than what it was when she was in Canada.

I: Why do you think is that?

F: Well, one of the things is that when she moved to Alabama she started being paid in US dollars so our dollar is only about 15% less than yours. When she came it was 40% less. So it was like a 40% raise when she came to the US. So I think it gives them hope. I think it gives them the ability to dream of becoming part of this country. I have some friends who really don't speak highly of America because they [inaudible]. I think it's a wonderful country. I like the "can do," I like the freedom to live life as you want.

I: When you say "can do" do you actually mean that they have the opportunity to do what they want.

F: Yes. Canadians are very understated in comparison. When you come to the US it seems that you talk to people. It's this sort of opportunity out there if you want to do it.

IM06

I: But in your opinion, what do you think is the American Dream?

R: Opportunity...

IM07

I: For you, which is the American Dream?

R: I guess just like for everybody else's...how do you get started. How do you take your idea...how do you build it and make it work...which, I guess, if you would do that with specific people you would be showing that.

I: Is there anything in particular that makes the American Dream American?

R: If it's somebody who came from some place else coming to America thinking that this is the place of their choice...

I: Why do they make it their choice....

R: That's a good question because they don't seem to like it when they are here and they have a lot of complaints about it...that is a very good question and I don't have the answer for that.

IM08

I: When I say "American Dream" what comes to your mind?

R: The dreams of space. The dreams of freedom from the very, very beginning of the revolution, the dreams of Lincoln that this is going to be one country. They aren't going to be two countries, just one country...Just looking into the future in a very positive way and having achieved so much of it.

IM09

I: When I say "American Dreams" what comes to your mind? You said a few of them... but could you elaborate a little?

R: I think what is done in that conception will have to be for some American to be the central theme of the exhibit because that's where the dreams come from and you'll have to take several players that represent their time, that represent major events -- Washington and

Jefferson and Franklin...in the first part you'll have Lincoln, then Douglas...

I: What would be their dream?

R: They would have to drive a theme for all together...their dream would be essentially creating a nation equal, creating a nation of democracy, creating a nation. You'll also have to have creating a bigger nation [dealing with] the expansion of the country. In the XIX century you are a little bit more "solemn" as a period but you get the scientific dreams, as there is a lot of that happening in that period, you would have, of course, slavery and a lot of philosophical discussion about it and how specific people in the North dreamed about it and how specific people in the South dreamt about it and eventually what happened. In the 20th century you have the civil rights [inaudible] and again more scientific advancement.

You would have to take specific iconic people because if people can't relate to what it is they are seeing that's ...you know...

I: I would like to stress a little bit this issue of "American Dreams" and what makes them American. How do you define them, especially that you're from Canada. Do you think there is an American Dream?

R: I think there is, but using the term "American Dreams" what everybody understands it to be might not be appropriate for an exhibit because it might be a little difficult to present. I think in order to achieve something that is broader you'll have to pick up things about very specific themes like freedom, democracy, rights, people...those would have to be the main [focus] I think...

....

I: You mentioned freedom at the very beginning...

R: From a Canadian perspective, there is freedom but it's basic. They're free to say and do whatever they want, but not always and not entirely. I think freedom has walls here. They are very far and you really have to walk up to them to know where they are. There are political freedoms in the sense that you can join the political process but once you're there you have to be very rich -- money is very good here...which is part of the American dream -- money -- but it's also a barrier for a lot of people and I think freedom, you have to have the means to enjoy it in order to enjoy it and I think it's hard for people to be free when they are making \$3 an hour for their work. You're not a slave, but you're essentially working to make a living, to live, and that is an impediment on freedom and I'm willing to bet anything -- and I'm sure there are statistics on this -- the poor people in this country don't vote, therefore they are not expressing the political freedom to express themselves. You can't even have a telephone conversation in this country without being listened to -- which is a little disconcerting.

IM11

Response to the Curator's Statement

To aid in the discussions the curator prepared a statement about the exhibition (see Appendix B). This section includes initial responses to that statement. A few of those who responded directly to the content saw it as:

- **Interesting and creative**
- **Emphasizing individual achievement**
- **Emphasizing success and achieving goals**
- **Too broad**
- **Not different from what's already in the museum**
- **A central idea**

I: Here's a statement that the curator wrote for this exhibition. I'd be curious what you thought about it.

R: It sounds reasonable. It is a good observation.

AP-06

I: We're thinking of doing an introductory exhibition like that and basing it on the idea of "The American Dream." Or "American Dreams," in the plural. Here is something the curator wrote. What do you think about that?

R: I've seen exhibits like this at Ellis Island.

....

I: What did you think about the statement?

R: I thought this was interesting. I thought the statement was interesting and the topics were quite interesting too. This is creative.

AP-07

I: Let me show you this statement the curator has written for an exhibition on "American Dreams." Why don't you read this and tell me what you think about it.

R: There you've got it in a nutshell.

I: So you're in total agreement. It sounded to me when you were talking that that was the exhibition you were talking about.

R: Mainly, yes. You're right. I'm not good at speaking off the top of my head, but reading this, it is together here in this. Now that I'm reading it, it is about individual achievement. That's correct. We all have so many dreams. We all have individual dreams and individual achievements, and when you bring everyone together, as I said earlier, we are a melting pot. All of us are individuals, but when we all come together, that's what we are. We are all independents coming together as one. And I like this. Yes. We've struggled hard to get to where we are and to have something better. And I believe that's what America is. We're trying to do something better. And we're trying to have an opportunity here for everyone who comes into this nation, who comes into this area. I like this.

AP-08

I: So that's why you would appreciate that. Well we are thinking of doing an exhibition like that and we are thinking of having a theme for it which is called "American Dreams."

R: Oh!

I: This is the idea of the exhibition. Do you want to read that and tell me what you think about it?

R: Too bad the American Dream isn't peace for all.

I: It must be for you then...

R: Ummhmm.

AP11

I: I have the concept description of this exhibition. Do you want to take a look at it?

R: I sort of feel like a novice since this is my first time here.

I: We want everybody's opinion.

R: I would think you have to think of freedom and then you have to think about slavery and it would be a dream particularly for the African-Americans.

I think dreams, although I haven't thought about it, is a really good concept because so many people think life is about dreams and hope. I think that would be great!

I: And do you think that as well?

R: Yes, if you don't have hope and you don't have dreams your life is pretty boring and flat I would think.

[after just a few seconds of looking over it] It looks like it has possibilities very much so.

IM06

I: Can you please read this concept statement and give me your feedback on it?

R: I guess it does some up the main ideas of what the people think for American dreams -- success or achieving goals...

I: Are any of them appealing to you?

R: No....

I: Why? Do you have anything else in mind for such an exhibition or why isn't it appealing to you?

R: I guess it's a good thesis to start off, but for an exhibition you'll definitely have to narrow the idea...

I: How would you narrow it down? What would you have?

R: Just like a focus of people or geography...

I: But in your opinion, what do you think is the American dream?

R: Opportunity...

I: It was on the list...

R: I just wanted to narrow it down.

IM07

I: this is the concept statement...could you read it and tell me what's interesting or not and what you like or don't...

R: So your idea is someone who came to this country and make things better for themselves. I think that would be interesting...how do they make it work. How do they come up with their ideas and how do they make it work.

IM08

I: This is concept of the exhibition can you read it and give your feedback... what you think of it.

R: So how is that different from what you already have...talking about homes and how they used to be, and how people used to be and then going from field to factory and how things have changed in that manner. You probably already have that.

IM10

I: I have two things for you. One is the exhibition concept and the other one is a list of "American Dreams" that was put together by the NMAH team. Could you please read the exhibition concept and give me your feedback on it?

R: I think the concept is great. Honestly, I think "the American Dream" is central and you have it as a strong overriding theme. They have touched several different important factors of that dream and it has also recognized, and talks about, success and failures of realizing that dream and I think that's really important. The only thing that doesn't seem to be addressed explicitly...well it is actually...the opportunity for all. While the dream is still there more and more and more people are becoming poor in this country and poverty would have to be a very important subject in the exhibit. You can talk about opportunities for all without talking about failures of it especially [inaudible] there should be someone saying what Americans need is not - - you know to be encouraged to follow your dream but to also have a backup plan in case you don't become millionaires. It's important to display the dream but it's also important to state the reality, the failures of it. Very important.

IM11

Difficulties for the Exhibition

Some respondents raised issues that they thought might be particular challenges for an “American Dreams” exhibition. These included:

- It could cover hundreds, even thousands, of years
- The scope is very broad
- An overview of American history is not possible
- There needs to be different voices
- The concept needs to be more specific

I: If we’re doing this historically, over time, how would you handle it?

R: You’d want to have a separate exhibit for it?

I: Yeah, we’re thinking of a separate exhibit.

R: I think you’d have that almost set aside. It would be hard to do, because if you want to keep in touch with the historical context, those American Dreams have been going on for hundreds of years, thousands even, if you look at Columbus and trade routes. Those guys had dreams too. And the Founding Fathers. I’d almost have to put that into the centuries. I don’t know how you’d tie that in throughout history. You could do a separate exhibit on that subject.

AP-03

I: How do you feel about that as the organizing principle for the whole story of American history?

R: This is so broad and is such a ...”American Dream”...I don’t know. I think it’s a good theme to deal with, but I think it’s too selective to think of.

....

R: You know...I don’t know. You know what, I can only look at this when it’s done and criticize it.

I: But as a concept...you seem skeptical of it.

R: Yes I think so. I’m just one person.

AP10

I: We went into details with some of these issues but let’s go back to our exhibition on using the “American Dreams” as a framework for an American history overview. What are your thoughts now?

R: I still think it’s a great idea and I think it needs to be addressed in a realistic fashion. We are very good these days to be black and white about issues but I think it’s important that they are not...some of these issues are really broad and there has to be different voices. It’s sure one dream but [inaudible]

....

I: How to see the role of the NMAH? Considering that this is the “National” American History Museum? Would you have them taking the risk and putting such an exhibition together or would you just return to what you envisioned this exhibition to be (with the three rooms) at the very beginning?

R: [long pause]

I: Would you have your exhibition or you would have your exhibition with the dreams in it? You are the director of the NMAH and responsible to the Congress and American people...what would you do?

R: I think I would add another floor to the building because I think it’s important to give an overview of the history of America, to give it context, but I like the idea of dreams...I don’t know....but I would have an overview! Absolutely! Even though it would be just a basic thing...an exhibit that would give it context.

I still do think that the idea of the dreams is a great idea...would I do it? If someone would sell me the idea I would ask them to be a little bit more precise -- to tell me how they would really undertake it within it because I understand their concept and where they are trying to reach with it, but I need more than a few succinct [inaudible]. I need specifics. I would need to know how they would address each of them. Would they all be addressed in the same way? Are they thinking of a model and then [apply it to all the dreams]? Is that possible? Is that reasonable? But at the same time what are the American people to understand from it?

IM11

Responses to the List of Dreams*

A CITY ON A HILL: RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Religion and the American Dream drew a fair amount of excited comment, and the phrase “A City on a Hill” was unclear to some. Reactions included:

- **This is the original dream**
- **Religion is an individual preference and shouldn’t be here**
- **Early settlers wanted religious freedom only for themselves, not others**
- **In America religion is “in your face”**
- **Religion today is “killing a lot of American dreams”**

I guess the one that means more -- I think you could do this in a historical context, too, because that was obviously the original dream. [Religion] Indivisible, you know.

AP-03

I: What’s next?

R: The other one was.... Let’s see. What was the other one? There was another one that struck me wrong. What was it? There were two that struck me as really wrong. I think it was “The City on the Hill: Religion and the American Dream.” There’s a lot of religion and I understand that we all step on each other’s toes with religion. Religion is our own individual preference, because there are so many types of religion. I believe, honestly, that it is just something that we all just need to leave everyone individually alone. That is inside our own minds and bodies and hearts. And I don’t want someone else telling me what I can and cannot do.

I: Could that be the dream? To be free to have that?

R: That IS a dream. Yes. You’re right. But to make a display, or to make something on it, you are going to draw a lot of attention and get into a lot of problems getting it together. Maybe a lot of input on that, and a lot of problems getting it together, I believe. That’s what I was thinking of?

AP-08

I: Here is a set of a list of dreams that the curator wrote up and that they are thinking of including.

R: What is this...I don’t know what this means “A City on the Hill”? I think that this is a very difficult project to begin with, I understand that.

....

I: No. What we are talking about here is just one exhibition. Within the total there would be the story of America.

R: “A City on the Hill”...I don’t know what that means. What are you talking about?

* See Appendix C for the list of American Dreams.

I: I think what they mean is the idea of coming for religious freedom.

R: Why is this “A City on the Hill?”

I: That’s a quote. I’m not exactly sure.

R: Religion and the “American Dream”...oh! Well I don’t know what it is going to deal with. Tell me more. I can’t give you my opinion of something when I don’t know in detail what is going on here. Religion and the American Dream...in what way? You know, the Pilgrims came here for religious freedom. William Penn came here for religious freedom. Did they get it? Well, in their group they got it but not in total. So its was select groups and select areas. Do you know what I’m saying? So I don’t know what they would do with it. More information would be needed...

AP10

I: What about the rest of them? Did you understand what they are all about or you do not?

R3: I don’t get “A City on the Hill.”

IM03C

I: I have one more thing that I would like you to look at. Here is the list of dreams that the museum put together. Tell me if you know them.....

R: Is the “City on the Hill” Washington?

....

“A City on the Hill and the religion”...we have freedom of religion but your religion is more in your face. In Canada people don’t talk about their religion. We have a new prime minister right now and he says “God bless Canada” and people are just looking like “what is this!?” Where in America you do that all the time and you have your hand over your heart. We are not that showy. So that is why I think this does not resonate with me but I think with American people, and certainly people, and there are a lot of people who think that is just fine and it should be that way, it’s just the way we’ve been brought up and we are just very different.

IM06

I: Here is a list of American Dreams that the museum put together. Do you agree with them? Do you understand them? Can you identify yourself with any of them?

R: “A City on the Hill”...I don’t understand this one. How does that relate to religion?

IM10

I’m not sure about religion. I keep looking at it and it bothers me a little bit because...

I: You just gave me an example that people were coming from England because they couldn’t practice their religion...

R: Yes. However, historically speaking the Puritans were like the Taliban of today. I know that you might go “UHHHH”...but it’s true.... They were going to a greater freedom despite

the fact that that is how it is taught, they were going to be more...I don't know. This is a matter of a controversy [inaudible]....

I: Well, religion is a controversial topic, so please do tell me...

R: Religion needs to be dealt with very carefully. Especially right now in this country because religion is killing a lot of the American dreams. A lot of the advancements that we could be making, we are not making. A lot of the social activities that now we have as religion...there are many unchristian people amongst the Christian peoples of America and I think...just fighting poverty is not being dealt with. This is supposed to be one of the most Christian people in the world and poverty is not that important. I mean it is important but not as sustainable program of government. You have local charities but nobody goes to local charities. Not everybody is benefiting from those charities. You need specific rules about receiving money from a charity...

I: But how does religion play into this?

R: I think there is a skewed vision of religion in this country and most people that would describe themselves as religious, would describe [themselves] as Christians, but I don't think many of them would know what that means. And I think most of them would go to church, read the Bible, but won't acquire it properly or won't ...I don't know...I just think religion is very ...

I: I know it is very controversial but do try to explain it because I don't understand your point. Mormons for example are they skewed as well...? What do you mean by skewed?

R: A very good example is that people don't live up to their religious standards. We know by looking at statistics that many, many people voted for the republicans in the last election because they oppose abortion, on the religious base...that's the religious base and that's how they sell it! These are the same people who are waging a war executing [inaudible]. Why are they fighting in our country because they think that they should, why are they executing people is because [inaudible]. And that to me is such a skewed, ridiculous [view of religion], is the most unchristian way of interpreting things. It's talking it and just adding anything you want to it and say "well, here you go! It's says so right here! So, let's do this!" and that is what I say is skewed. But at the same time, if one party is more religious than the other - but I'm not American so to me it doesn't matter. But one party is more religious than the other, that they are more "morally righteous" than the other, then why are they cutting social programs? Why are they cutting...How unchristian can that be? I think in this country with religion you have to be very careful because it's a political tool here that reaches into people's hearts and then to make the people to use the tool for whom they wanted them to vote. And that is ..."hmm"

I: I guess that what you're telling me is not that people cannot practice religion, whatever that would be, you're OK with that being the dream...just the way...

R: It manipulates...

I: How would you present this dream? Would you just exclude it because it's too controversial?

R: I wouldn't...but in American Dream...

I: But this is one of the most acclaimed American Dreams...the freedom of religion?

R: Sure, you can practice your religion but you can use that as a single example of dream as the dream of freedom because America has so many better freedoms than that...That is just one

[part] of the freedom of expression. And that is much more important and much more global than religion.

I: So would religion be part of it?

R: Religion would be part of the freedom of expression. I think is far more important than just religion. Religion is not enough. It's not enough and it's skewed. There are more important things than religion, especially in this country and we know that that would upset the Founding Fathers a great deal. They really have [the opinion] that we built this country so we can be free, don't bring in religion, and they said so themselves, it's just going to mess everything up.

But you see, I'm worried about the way they are going to introduce it. This is the way they are going to introduce it, right? [pointing at the card] In this order?

I: That's one of the reasons why we are talking to people to see their reactions to these dreams. I don't think they reached any decision.

R: Well it's at the top of the page. That would be an interesting way of starting the exhibit. This is how the Americas started. People were suffering religious persecution which...but again I don't like using that term for the Puritans because they weren't being persecuted; they weren't being allowed to do things that would take away the freedoms of others. That's why they were stopped and that's why they moved away. That would make the religion the introduction of the US, but it wasn't. If you were in the US at that time and you were a Jew! Forget it! They were not going to allow you to be [inaudible] a Puritan!

And again, religion, the slaves were not allowed to be baptized! Because as soon as they were baptized they weren't slaves anymore! You can't talk about religion in the "American Dream" exhibition! If you're not going to address it properly...

I: As in raising all these questions? What do you mean by "address it properly?"

R: Just like that...talking about the slaves not being able to be baptized Catholic, despite all of them being Catholic. The institution wasn't ready to [inaudible] ... that was about religious freedom. It's simply unacceptable!

IM11

THE LADDER: UPWARD MOBILITY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Some noted that they did not know what was meant by “Upward Mobility.” For others it was understood in different ways, including:

- The progression of America – how the economy has grown
- “financial ladder”
- “achieving our dreams”

I: Which is the best one? The one you’d highlight as the top dream.

R: Westward expansion, or the Ladder.

....

I: Let’s take the one you liked best, say upward mobility. What would you expect to see?

R: I’d see the progression of America and how the economy has grown.

AP-01

I: Which one would you be interested in, if it was about the past?

R: [Reads the list] Upward Mobility I don’t know what they mean by that. Do they mean a financial ladder?

AP-02

And upward mobility, that seems more like social equality. Because if you look at a lot of people who came here to start something, along with home ownership and Hollywood.

AP-03

I: I see what you mean...

R: The Ladder: Upward Mobility and the American Dream.” Again, what does it mean? Do **you** know? Am I supposed to interpret these any way I want to?

AP10

I: Are there any on this list that you think are not as good as the others for this purpose or maybe shouldn’t be on the list?

R: Probably the second [Upper Mobility] and the fourth [the Western Expansion].

AP11

I: Here is a list of “American Dreams”. Please go through it and tell me if you understand all of them, if you agree/disagree, give me your thoughts on it.

R2: I agree with most, all of them except for the “Upward Mobility and the American Dream” I don’t know what that means.

IM03B

“The Ladder...” I think I get that. I guess you’re getting higher and higher in achieving our

dreams.
IM03C

If I had to focus on one for me personally, it would be the “Ladder: Upward Mobility and the American Dream”. But on the other hand I can see someone coming from another country, as I mentioned, “The Golden Door: Immigration and American Dream” it would be that person’s dream. Maybe these are too many topics to cover but several of these would be good for a section of the museum called the “American Dreams”.
IM04

I see the “Ladder.”
IM10

THE GARDEN: AGRICULTURE AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

The topic of agriculture was confusing for some, while for others it recalled comments about the past, including:

- Native Americans
- “Agriculture moving into industry”

And agriculture, I’m not sure what kind of dream. I don’t know so much about the history of the agricultural revolution, if it was like that. I mean, would you go so far back as Meso-American cultures and some of the early ones, because that seems more of a global [issue]. Growing corn was a huge thing for Native Americans. That enabled them to change from a hunter-gatherer society to more sedentary. They were able to grow crops. Not that they were “Americans” per se, but, it depends on how you look at your museum. I haven’t noticed much about Native Americans, at least in this museum. This is the American history museum, so it seems that they should have a place.

....

I: But you mentioned that it is something now.

R: It is something now.

I: Is it the dream of our century? You seem to associate a lot of those other dreams with particular times in the past.

R: That’s what it seems like. Who really dreams of building a farm now? Not many people. But everyone dreams of having an Ipod.

AP-03

I: What do you think is meant by “Agriculture and the American dream”?

R: I think some people -- it would be the same as commercialism and the American dream. Some people are into agriculture more than commercialism, consumerism or whatever. It’s not everybody’s desire to be in business. Some people would rather grow or work with their hands or whatever.

AP-06

I: What about “Agriculture and the American dream”? Does that make sense to you?

R: Somewhat. At one time that was absolutely wonderful. Right now it should be up and coming again, because we are losing our land due to population growth, and we are needing food, due to population growth. And land is not being made anymore [laughs], and if we are needing to learn to take care of our land, that would make a wonderful, not only display, but it needs to be brought to the attention of America. And the American dream? Yes. That would be a really good one.

....

I: Does the agriculture one make sense to you?

R2: Absolutely. That's how the country was founded. And you also have a display with the agriculture moving in to industry. Originally we were just trying to scrape out a living and then we found out a way to make livings. So she was looking for a display on how they used to wash clothes, and I said, "That's an automatic washer." [laughter] "You want to go back to that?" And that's all because of the prosperity. Prosperity. It started in the garden, and went to the frontier, and then we got into consumerism.

AP-08

"The Garden..." I don't know how that really [is]. I know that in my history class we talked about settlements we knew that they didn't really know how to plant and it borrowed from Indians and I think that is what it means but I'm not sure.

IM03C

I'm not sure about the "Garden" and what that is.

IM06

"the Garden"...I can see that.

IM10

THE FRONTIER: WESTERN EXPANSION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

“Frontier” and “Western Expansion” seemed to be familiar concepts.

I: Which is the best one? The one you’d highlight as the top dream.

R: Westward expansion, or the Ladder.

....

I: And in the Westward expansion?

R: I’m from St. Louis, the gateway to the West, so... It expands our American country, economy, everything.

....

I: What kind of historical objects would you expect to see?

R: Oregon trail. Things like that. Moving to the West. Sod houses, things like that. Your standard American things that you’d see in the West. Buffaloes.

AP-01

People would be interested in the past, like the Westward expansion.

AP-02

Westward expansion, that was pretty awesome.

AP-03

I: Are there any on this list that you think are not as good as the others for this purpose or maybe shouldn’t be on the list?

R: Probably the second [Upper Mobility] and the fourth [the Western Expansion].

AP11

“The Frontier...” the reason we have the whole West in the US is because of the Western expansion.

IM03C

I: Which one resonates with you?

R: The frontier does, the golden door does (that is how I think of America); and the social equality one (not only for women, but for African Americans is really critical. [Among these] one doesn’t resonate more than the other.

IM06

“The Frontier”...that would be good.

IM10

THE GRAND EMPORIUM: CONSUMERISM AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

This topic was unclear to some. Comments included:

- **Does this mean capitalism? Free trade?**
- **Immigrants worked for “a better lifestyle for their families” not “material goods”**
- **It is something that “no other country has gotten into” because we’re “so rich.”**
- **“Part of everyday life”**

I: Any others that seem weaker to you?

R: I’m not sure about consumerism.

....

I: What about consumerism?

R: I’m not sure what you consider as consumerism and the American Dream. Capitalism? Free Trade?

I: I think it means the dream of having a lot of stuff.

R: Materialism? I guess that’s more of a current American dream. Early immigrants they were working at laundries and stuff. I don’t think they were working for -- even the Mexicans now -- they’re not working, I think, for material goods. They are working more for a better lifestyle for themselves and their families. To help out with families back home. I read a really good book that was all about the Asian immigration experience, and how even getting out of China was dangerous and difficult. And when they came here they had to be sequestered for eight months to two years and sometimes even sent back, and they came over here and lived in hovels and were the railroad builders. So I don’t know if consumerism is really that universal.

I: But you mentioned that it is something now.

R: It is something now.

I: Is it the dream of our century? You seem to associate a lot of those other dreams with particular times in the past.

R: That’s what it seems like. Who really dreams of building a farm now? Not many people. But everyone dreams of having an Ipod.

AP-03

I: What do you think is meant by “Agriculture and the American dream”?

R: I think some people -- it would be the same as commercialism and the American dream. Some people are into agriculture more than commercialism, consumerism or whatever. It’s not everybody’s desire to be in business. Some people would rather grow or work with their hands or whatever.

AP-06

I: How about “Consumerism and the American dream”?

R: “Consumerism and the American dream”? That was one that kind of bothered me.

I: What does that mean to you?

R: That a lot of people need their heads knocked off. [laughs] Pardon me.

I: Does that mean you are not sharing the dream of consumerism?

R: No. Buy what you need. Leave the rest in the store. I don't care if it has glitter on it. I don't care if it's pretty. If you don't need it, don't buy it. If it costs \$50 and you can go -- what's that song? "I can buy that same damn thing on the Walmart shelf half-price.." Darling. I do. I don't like Walmart. And I don't go in it very often, but I will. If it's good quality and it's decent and it doesn't cost overmuch, I will buy it. Because I take care of my clothing, I take care of my home, I take care of everything, and it will last me ten years. Because I take care of things. I don't wear something one or two times and throw it away, or trade it to somebody else. But things do need to be taken care of. Consumers do need to learn to take care of what they have. They don't need to be pitching things around.

....

R: So "Consumerism and the American dream." You could go big time on that one.

I: But some people have that dream.

R: Right, they do. And you could really go big time on that.

I: Meaning there's a lot we could talk about?

R: You could talk a lot on consumerism, yes. Yes.

I: So consumerism fits for you?

R2: Oh yes. It's something that no other country has actually gotten to. We have so much money and so much free time, because we have been so productive in this land, so rich, that we can have consumerism. There are people in India who can do our jobs, but they don't have consumerism because they're just holding on. They're just surviving, those types of things.
AP-08

I guess this [Consumerism] is a part of everyday life. This [Immigration] is very important. People would be very much be drawn to that [Hollywood] but I don't think it's important.
AP11

"The Grand Emporium..." I don't get that. I don't know what that means.
IM03C

I guess you'll have to have this [Consumerism] because for example we were driving to Alabama. My daughter lives in Alabama, so drove there and now we are driving back up to Canada and we cannot get over all these outlets all along. We were saying "who is buying all this material, but obviously people are, us too."
IM06

"Consumerism," "The Golden Door"... Yes... all of them.
IM10

THE GOLDEN DOOR: IMMIGRATION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Immigration was widely recognized as an important American dream. Comments included:

- “That’s huge.”
- “Very apropos right now for what we’re going through” “a hot topic now”
- “Immigration added to the culture”
- “this is THE American Dream”

Definitely immigration, that’s huge.

....

Early immigrants they were working at laundries and stuff. I don’t think they were working for...even the Mexicans now, they’re not working, I think, for material goods. They are working more for a better lifestyle for themselves and their families. To help out with families back home. I read a really good book that was all about the Asian immigration experience, and how even getting out of China was dangerous and difficult. And when they came here they had to be sequestered for 8 months to two years and sometimes even sent back, and they came over here and lived in hovels and were the railroad builders. So I don’t know if consumerism is really that universal.

AP-03

R: The Golden Door is very apropos right now for what we’re going through.

AP-07

Immigration added to the culture. The Golden Door.

AP-08

This [Immigration] is very important.

AP11

I: With which one do you agree mostly?

R2: “The Golden Door”

IM03B

“The Golden Door...” I can see that. When immigration...the periods [when] everybody was immigrating to America and they had their future paved with gold.

IM03C

If I had to focus on one for me personally, it would be the “Ladder: Upward Mobility and the American Dream”. But on the other hand I can see someone coming from another country, as I mentioned, “The Golden Door: Immigration and American Dream” it would be that person’s

dream. Maybe these are too many topics to cover but several of these would be good for a section of the museum called the “American dreams”.

IM04

I: That is exactly what we want to know if the list is clear to people

R: I’m assuming this is THE American Dream and when I say that I mean people coming to the US because they can have such a better life. That is what I mean by “The American Dream.”

....

I: Which one resonates with you?

R: The “Frontier” does, the “Golden Door” does (that is how I think of America); and the social equality one (not only for women, but for African Americans) is really critical. [Among these] one doesn’t resonate more than the other.

IM06

I: Many people do come here because they think they are going to be able to have a say...

R: They couldn’t do this in their own country. My parents came here from two different countries and they met here. If they could have dreamed or even a little bit of a dream that they thought could take place in the country that they were in, they would have stayed. But they didn’t. I feel that my grandmother, mother and her three sisters as soon as they came here the first thing they did was to enroll in night school.

I resent having phone messages in two languages...press one for English, two for Spanish. I realize these people are here and I want them to stay here but I want them to be a part of it. I don’t care what language they speak at home because home is a totally different thing. At home everybody learns everybody’s language but you should learn the language of the country that you’re in. You should be able to take a drivers test in English. You should be able to take a citizen’s test in English. If they are doing it in Spanish they are still not a part of it. [...]

IM09

“Consumerism,” “The Golden Door”...Yes...all of them.

IM10

I think also that there is something to be said about the immigrants, a very hot topic now.

I’m from a country where everybody is welcomed. In fact we make it a point. We want everybody we can get in our country. We believe that we benefit from it and we have two official languages. I speak perfect French. Our national anthem is in both languages. You sing in English and you sing it French together in the same song. It’s not that one is English and one is French, they are sung together in both languages. The fact that here there is so much resistance to that really is a signal of a failure of American Dream because it automatically takes away the right of opportunity to somebody, to not behave themselves in the way that they can.

....

I: Do you have a dream that speaks to you? Any surprises?

R: I'm actually surprised at immigration being there but, then again, I'm not. It's a very important part of the 20th century.

IM11

THE DREAM FACTORY: HOLLYWOOD AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Some interviewees favored this topic (especially young people who understood it as a dream for fame), while others actively disliked it (especially those who regarded Hollywood's role negatively). Comments included:

- “A lot of our culture is built around Hollywood”
- “That is not the American Dream. That is Hollywood's dream.”
- “Hollywood is too fake.”
- “I really am into entertainment and popular culture.”
- “People would very much be drawn to [Hollywood], but I don't think it's important”
- “All the people who want to become famous...”
- “Everybody had a dream to be famous and be in Hollywood.”
- “These are the sort of things that even the teenagers are interested in...”

I don't know if we need “Hollywood and the American Dream” so much. That seems more like a cultural dream than a meaningful, people-suffering-and-giving-up-their-lives to come here and fighting and wars and stuff.

I: So your idea of a dream is that it's a bigger thing.

R: In some ways it is. As far as Arnold Schwarzenegger, not to use him as an example too much, but his dream is part of the American Dream. He came here to make it in Hollywood, and so to body-build and lift weights. And so, I guess, a lot of our culture is built around Hollywood, so maybe I should retract that statement.

AP-03

R: One of these, “Hollywood and the American Dream.” I think a lot of times that that is not the American Dream. That is Hollywood's dream.

I: Can you tell me more about that distinction?

R: I think at times they seem to be trying to direct the American Dream and take us in one direction, that is their own, and not necessarily anyone's dream. The list is fine.

AP-06

I: Well, first, are there any of those that you think are really better than the others?

R: Oh, we've got some that we can throw out right now.

I: Ok. Let's take it that way. Which ones are you going to throw out?

R: Let's see. “The Dream Factory. Hollywood and the American Dream.” Skip it. Throw it out. “Hollywood and the American Dream.” That is so idealistic. Hollywood is too fake. It shows the kids how NOT to act. It is not realistic. It shows our children how NOT to be a human being. It doesn't. It doesn't show our children how to be a person. It shows our children today how NOT to treat another human being. I do not agree with that.

....

I: How about Hollywood?

R2: Hollywood, entertainment, popular culture. I really am into entertainment and popular culture, because three hundred years from now that will be the classic works. Whether it is *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* replacing a Rembrandt or Renoir. It's a medium. And entertainment....

I: So that fits into the overview.

R2: Yeah. And it kind of fits in with consumerism, because we have time to watch movies. And spend the money to make it.

R: All of this together, as a whole, makes sense, but individually they don't. As individual....

R2: No. The only thing individually that seems a little out is "The Dream Factory" and "A Place at the Table." And the only reason I think "A Place of the Table" is that it's overdone. It's overdone.

AP-08

I guess this [Consumerism] is a part of everyday life. This [Immigration] is very important. People would be very much be drawn to that [Hollywood] but I don't think it's important.
AP11

I: Here is card with what the American history curators think about the American dreams.

R2: Agree....[I saw he skipped the Hollywood dream]

I: The Hollywood dream is not...

R2: It's just a...that probably the worst aspect, but nevertheless one [of the dreams].

They tend to be a cynical and it is reflected in today's participation in the theaters and then the stunning success like people like *The Lord of the Rings*...Hollywood can't make those movies and everybody says they don't make them like they used to for a reason...there are some good ones hear and there, no doubt about it, but the trend line is a little harsh, a little nasty, greedy.

I think there is a predominant view in that industry and that is reflected in the movies they pick and choose and that view has changed.

IM02

I: This is a list of dreams developed by the NMAH and this is what they understand through "American dreams." Could you read it and give me your thoughts on it?

R1: I like the "The White Picket Fence" and "The Dream Factory."

I: Did you understand all of them?

R1: I pretty much understand all of them and I liked those two the most.

I: What do they tell you?

R1: "The Dream Factory and Hollywood and the American dream" that all the people who want to become famous and everything and it happened for them. "The White Picket Fence: Home Ownership" is that people want to own their own houses, but just like with that, it's just

having a dream come through, is having it by themselves for themselves.
IM03A

I: Here is a list of American Dreams that was put together by the museum. Tell me your thoughts on it.

R3: I think “The Dream Factory,” “White Picket Fence” and “A Place at the Table” because everybody had a dream to be famous and be in Hollywood, and everybody wants to have a place to live and have family, and then “A Place at the Table” is that nobody really wants to be at the bottom of the social pyramid, everybody wants to have friends and staff like that.
IM03C

I think this is sort of a fun thing to have in there [Hollywood] as it sort of reaches across. It’s interesting because I was listening to the children and these are those sort of things that even the teenagers are interested in...the Red Shoes and Seinfeld’s shirt.
IM06

THE WHITE PICKET FENCE: HOME OWNERSHIP AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

This topic seemed to resonate more strongly with younger visitors than with older ones. Comments included:

- **“I’ve already had all my homes...”**
- **“...home ownership is big for a lot of people my age who are struggling...”**
- **“White Picket Fence” - that is reality. That is NOT reality!”**
- **“...people want to own their own houses...”**
- **“...everybody wants to have a place to live and have family...”**
- **“Every person wants to have a home.”**

It says here home ownership. I wouldn't be interested, because I've already had all my homes and now we've sold and moved into that senior community. So that's a dream. To move into a senior community [laughs] where they have all the things available for us exercise machines, and getting to know people through membership in the organization, and they have games for us, bingo and whatever, and they have trips lined up for us. That was our dream. We were getting old, so... That would be something for seniors. What would their dream be? I suppose it would be traveling.

AP-02

And upward mobility, that seems more like social equality. Because if you look at a lot of people who came here to start something, along with home ownership and Hollywood.

....

I: Is there anything else on the list that you would pick as today's dream?

R: I think home ownership is big for a lot of people my age who are struggling and paying \$800 to share a four-bedroom house and no yard. That is a big dream and a lot of people, especially in this area, will never experience it. Most people in my economic status. That seems like the ultimate American Dream to me. And I would put family in here somewhere. A lot of people dream of having a family and owning a home, passing on a tradition.

AP-03

“White Picket Fence” that is not reality. That is NOT reality! That's a dream that is maybe...I don't know...It's fantasy! “The White Picket Fence” and the rambling house and the beautiful vines dripping over the cottage...that's an image. Is not reality! It doesn't exist.

AP10

I: This is a list of dreams developed by the NMAH and this is what they understand through “American Dreams.” Could you read it and give me your thoughts on it?

R1: I like the “The White Picket Fence” and “The Dream Factory.”

I: Did you understand all of them?

R1: I pretty much understand all of them and I liked those two the most.

I: What do they tell you?

R1: “The Dream Factory and Hollywood and the American Dream” that all the people who want to become famous and everything and it happened for them. “The White Picket Fence: Home Ownership” is that people want to own their own houses, but just like with that, it’s just having a dream come through, is having it by themselves for themselves.

IM03A

I: Here is a list of American dreams that was put together by the museum. Tell me your thoughts on it.

R3: I think “The Dream Factory,” “White Picket Fence” and “A Place at the Table” because everybody had a dream to be famous and be in Hollywood, and everybody wants to have a place to live and have family, and then “A Place a the Table” is that nobody really wants to be at the bottom of the social pyramid, everybody wants to have friends and stuff like that.

IM03C

The white picket fence would be every person’s [dream]. Every person wants to have a home.

IM06

I’m not surprised about home ownership, although I’m sure there are a lot of people that are surprised at seeing it...

IM11

A PLACE AT THE TABLE: SOCIAL EQUALITY AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

Social equality inspired both positive and negative responses. Comments included:

- **“The last one is best. Social equality.”**
- **“...there needs to be more social equality in America....It’s not there.”**
- **“It’s a theme that’s been overdrawn.”**
- **“...nobody wants to be at the bottom of the social pyramid...”**
- **“...the social equality one (not only for women, but for African Americans) is really critical.”**

And upward mobility, that seems more like social equality. Because if you look at a lot of people who came here to start something, along with “Home Ownership” and “Hollywood.”
AP-03

I: Here is a list of different dreams. What do you think of this?

R2: The last one is the best. “Social Equality.”

AP-06

I: How about social equality?

R: You could go on and on and on about social equality, because there needs to be more social equality in America. We need to even their odds. It’s not there.

R2: They ought to realize that everyone is equal, and stop it at that.

R: Yes, we need to realize that everyone is equal. Here is what I told my girl scouts and I am still saying it to this day. How old are my girl scouts? They started out at the age of about five or six and my girl scouts are about 24 years old now. They are still telling me to this day, the ones that are seeing me, the ones that have graduated college, they come up to me and say, “Mrs. H., do you remember...” And I’m going, “Ok. Which one are you telling me now?” And they’re saying, “Mrs. H. I remember when you told me. Do you remember when you said you don’t care if the person’s skin is purple, pink, orange, plaid, or green -- if you peel it off, we’re all the same underneath.” Yes. You’re right. That’s correct. Because I don’t care what you are, you’re still the same underneath. And this is exactly what that is all about. Social equality -- I don’t care what your skin is and I don’t care what you’ve got inside your head, or where you came from, or what you were taught. We’re all the same. We’re human. And we need to be taught we’re all equal. So I think this one will be wonderful.

....

I: Which ones would you take off the list?

R2: “Place at the table.”

I: Can you tell my why?

R2: It’s all over this place. I mean every culture, whether it’s color or religious, in this country has been striving to be something different. You’ve got a Native American museum. You have an Afro-American art museum. You’ve got the display on segregation, Separate but not Equal. I think it’s a theme that’s been overdrawn, and although I don’t see.... This country will never

be a homogeneous mixture of people. Cultural differences have to be accepted. And it is the culture differences that are part of what this made country what we are. And if you concentrate on “Social equality and the American dream,” if you concentrate on the women’s movement, if you concentrate on prohibition, if you concentrate on the Japanese internments -- that’s just for this century -- you’re wasting a lot of space and forgetting about the people who are out there working every day, because this is such a plentiful country, with resources, jobs, capital, and those types of things. And the people who work every day to build the homes, to create the society, to create social change, the ones who pay the taxes, those sorts of things to me that’s the core of the country; that’s what the American Dream is. This social change is kind of like on the tail end. You’ve got religion, you’ve got your upward mobility, gardening, frontier...

....

R: All of this together, as a whole, makes sense, but individually they don’t. As individual....

R2: No. The only thing individually that seems a little out is the “Dream Factory” and “A Place at the Table.” And the only reason I think “A Place of the Table” is that it’s overdone. It’s overdone.

AP-08

I: Here is a list of American Dreams that was put together by the museum. Tell me your thoughts on it.

R3: I think “The Dream Factory,” “White Picket Fence,” and “A Place at the Table” because everybody had a dream to be famous and be in Hollywood, and everybody wants to have a place to live and have family, and then “A Place a the Table” is that nobody really wants to be at the bottom of the social pyramid, everybody wants to have friends and staff like that.

IM03C

Oh, I was just about to say “where is the woman” but I can see that you have social equality.

....

I: Which one resonates with you?

R: The “Frontier” does, the “Golden Door” does (that is how I think of America); and the social equality one (not only for women, but for African Americans) is really critical. [Among these] one doesn’t resonate more than the other.

IM06

Missing Dreams

Interviewees were asked which dreams were missing from the list. Several respondents mentioned “education.” Missing dreams included:

- **“Pursuit of happiness.”**
- **Careers**
- **Education**
- **“The frontier”**
- **Our government**
- **Women’s rights**
- **Personal peace**
- **Science and technology**
- **“the space race”**
- **“the future”**

I: Anything else missing from the list besides family?

R: Maybe the pursuit of happiness. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That’s always rung true to me. The “pursuit” of happiness. It probably encompasses all of these. This is happiness for everybody in some way, whatever dream that is. That is why people come here. They want to pursue happiness in some way, whatever that may be, whether it is owning a home, planting a plot of land to grow corn, going to Hollywood and becoming a star.

I: You mentioned “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” What about life and liberty? What do they mean in dream terms?

R: The ability to live free, to live your life the way you’d like to. Liberty is more of a personal dignity kind of thing. Liberty to me is the ability to voice my opinion, to wear what I want and not be judged by it, to grow my hair as long as I like to, to put a nail through my nose if I want. That to me is the true idea of the American Dream -- life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.
AP-03

I: Could you add anything to that list?

R2: How about careers? You’ve got the way we live, what supports our living, consumerism. You’ve got home ownership, but I think a big part of what people choose to do in life, which determines any one of these aspects, is going to be what they choose to do with their life in terms of career choices. I think I can say that because we have kids graduated from high school and in college, all exploring what their futures might hold. And a lot of what they are thinking of is “how much money do I need to make to get what I want to get in life.” Not just from a materialistic standpoint, but to live the kind of life that they think they want to live, so that they can take advantage of home ownership, so they can take advantage of their dreams. And they want to be able to make a way to make money doing something that they love to do. And there is so much emphasis right now on kids going to college career offices helping them determine what do they want to focus on? What do they like to do? And at that young age it’s hard. Some kids they know what they love, but a lot mostly don’t know what they love, so they’re

searching careers. And these days you talk about people even our age who are making new careers for themselves at middle age or whatnot. That means you're looking at education, being re-educated. Look how many people left agriculture. When industries fail, they have to go searching for new things. And so education is becoming a huge part of that at every level, at the university, the colleges -- to train re-entry. So I could see how career development could be interesting.

I: Would this be a good framework for introducing American history? Would it cover everything? [Shows curatorial statement to R2]

R2: This includes what I was referring to. It's all tied in there -- education. Is there anything in there in terms of gender equalities or inequalities? Men and women approach this very differently, and there are still differences out there, but there is certainly a push towards equality and that certainly affects career choices. And if you think about it, just how many women... Right now there are more women entering colleges than men. There are more women entering fields of engineering and medicine, where they haven't been. So we're going to see a lot of change in that over the years. So I think that having historical perspectives on some of that might be interesting. And I'm not saying that just from a woman, feminist point of view, but for men and women to learn where it's been, so that we can make it happen, to where we want it to go.

AP-07

I: So let's go back to the idea that these themes are being used to tell the history of America. Do you think they're adequate to that? Are there things that are missing from this list that will drop out from the history because they don't fit the dream theme?

R: We're not going to have the frontier. The frontier is disappearing.

....

I: Do you think there is anything missing from this list? Some aspect of American Dreams that we're overlooking?

R: People that were here in the first place, that we took the land from.

R2: The other thing is education. Our generation, Baby Boomers, everything we've got was based on the space program in the 60s -- microcomputers, the plastics, the super-fabrics, those types of things. And if we hadn't done the research in the previous generation, the generation before that, the generation before that, and made education available to the masses, there is no way that we could have exploited the resources and things that we had. So education and accumulation of knowledge without education and the accumulation of knowledge, this building wouldn't be here. None of these buildings would be here. Maybe the rich people would keep the art hanging someplace. [laughter]

I: When you talked about education, science and technology -- are they separate or are they one thing?

R2: Technology and science are based in education. The other thing, with the public school system that we've developed, is that it has been a method for the government to use to make the population more homogeneous. And it has even gotten to the point now that regional accents are disappearing, because of cable TV. We all watch the same new. If we all watched CNN, we'd all have no accent. But education has served as a place for social change, for ideas,

for learning about other cultures, as well as exploiting other cultures. The science and the technology, they came from education, they came from trial and error and those sorts of things. Those are the things that built the country. They talk about our national health care. And I think it is a great and wonderful idea, but if drug companies don't have a profit motive, what's the reason for them to make drugs. And we go back to the consumerism thing, and the education. We've used consumerism to increase technology, and technology to increase consumerism. You show an Apple PC in nineteen-seventy-something. \$666. It did about as much as a pocket calculator that you can get for \$110 now.

AP-08

I: So what do you think about that as way to organize an exhibition on a story of America?

R: I think is very good. I do. But I hope along the way, somehow, it would be personal peace.

AP11

I: In your opinion, was there something that was not included in this list?

R: Well, I don't see anything in here about our government. To me what sets us apart from many countries in the world is the fact that this is a government of the people, about the people and for the people and that's what is important here in Washington DC. What we see is government in action so that would be definitely a part of it. I think that would be good for this.

....

One dream that I did not mention but I intended to but should have is the freedom of faith, to be able to worship as we please which many countries, especially my faith, wouldn't be able to worship as we please. So I think that is a wonderful freedom that we have here in the U.S. so that is one of the dreams...

IM04

I think at the moment one of the great successes of the American Dream, interestingly enough, I think is education in this country. Although there is a lot of complaints about it, it has been huge and one of the most important tenets to that dream. I would also like to bring up civil rights. We just need to look at it right now to know that there are still inequalities there and I'll like to bring up women's rights. Women are not completely...they still don't have all the choices that they should or could have.

Again, I would talk about technology. Still, in this country there is not that much forward-lookingness yet. It is more business oriented and not so much discovery oriented. There has been so much advancement and [inaudible] pinpoint specific things that are successes and failures. I think it's not black and white.

....

I think science and technology is missing from this list, which is super important in this country. My goodness...

I: How would you phrase it like a dream?

R: I think that science and technology in this country has been one of the most important

[dreams]. I wouldn't say building blocks...but you can't talk about American Dreams without talking about the space race. It's not possible...you can't ignore that as an advancement. My goodness! Man has always wanted to fly...where is that on this list!? It's one of the greatest achievements of mankind. Just to fly..and it's not here and that bothers me. You need to put that in here...you could go back to Renaissance to start that one off. I think that is very important...

I: Just out of curiosity, you used the term "space race"...what did you mean? Race against whom?

R: I used the term "space race" because that is the term that is being used for that period. I think when we talk about "space race" we do mean race against Russians.

I: So what was the dream there?

R: The dream was to make sure that they don't get into the sky before we do.

But it was presented -- and I don't want to be cynical about this because it's one of the greatest achievements of the mankind -- but it was really about sending people up there. It was sold as a race against the Russians and that is fine with me.

I: But was it the government's dream or was it the people's dream?

R: I think that in this case...you know, I think it's hard to tell. I think most people would answer the government's dream, but I have no problem with government inspiring people. The government needs to be a place of advancements and it needs to be a place for forward-thinkingness. But that being said, I don't think anybody thought to themselves "Oh, we're going to the moon...why would we do that." I think everybody was inspired by that thought and always assumed it as a part of our nature. So I think it's OK for the government to see stuff but I think that most of the people thought that was pretty cool anyways. They [government] had the research to do it. We can't afford to build these things...

I: Do you think that there are any other dreams that are missing?

R: I don't know how they intend on building it but [in this list] they are missing the future. But I expect that [the future] is going to be added to all of them [dreams] or I would hope so... Because I guess this is also meant to inspire. It is not just meant to [say] "here is what we used to think" but also "here is what we are thinking or what we might think."

IM11

Problems with Dreams

In discussing American Dreams, some interviewees noted some problems with dreams. These included:

- **“...how difficult it is to pursue the dream. The struggle is what it’s all about.”**
- **“It [the list of Dreams] is kind of an economic viewpoint.” “They [the Dreams on the list] are all very worldly dreams...”**
- **“...people have had an American dream that’s been squashed from the very beginning...” “...that was the dream for the white man and for the people who were in charge...”**
- **“I’ve seen my dreams that were not realized...[but] I like my life the way it is.”**
- **“...Founding Fathers had a specific set of goals in mind and how we have faltered through the years and the reason for that...”**
- **“You can’t talk about opportunities for all without talking about failures...”**

I: You mentioned that some dreams are difficult to realize, such as home ownership.

R: Very.

I: Should this exhibition talk about what keeps people from achieving their dreams?

R: I think even informing young people of what Asian immigrants went through and what Mexicans go through now would give them an understanding that not all dreams come true. It’s an arduous, brutal task. Brutal. I don’t think these kids realize how brutal it really was, and is, for a lot of people. That’s something that everyone should realize. It would help everyone to build more respect. The Founding Fathers what they went through. All the people who fought in all the wars. They died so that Mexicans could come here and work and that’s part of America. Ellis Island. I don’t think people realize what they had to go through to get into this country. I would stay away from how difficult it was per se to achieve dreams and go into more how difficult it is to pursue the dream.

The struggle is what it’s all about. It is not so much about the achievement, because once you achieve that, there is always another dream. No one is ever content. Even though you have this great job -- which I would cut off my left foot for -- you have the American Dream. I think for you, someone else probably has the American Dream. Maybe I do. So it is relative in some ways. Maybe Dick Cheney, or Bill Gates is content. Maybe they don’t need anything, so they might be the few people who don’t appreciate the exhibit, but I think the achievement is more personal.

AP-03

I think it [the list of Dreams] is actually interesting. It’s kind of an economic viewpoint.

AP-07

I: Aha. So the thing that we are thinking about at the moment is “American Dreams” and here is a statement that the curator has written about that. Why don’t you tell me what you think

about that?

R: This is just one area and one thing that is going on. You're talking about the American Dream. You know people have had an American dream that's been squashed from the very beginning -- the dream of freedom. Of course, they weren't free; they were slaves...so what happened was that they were in pursuit of happiness but they never got it, whatsoever, for as long as there were slaves and they were not happy. So they did have dreams, and I don't know where you're going with it, because the right of all to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness has remained the fundamental American Dream...well that's the white man's dream and not for the African-Americans. That was the dream for the white man and for the people who were in charge who believed in...you know they were in the majority, they were not the minority. What about the minorities who came here. You know they were talking about one nation under God and saying "I shouldn't use the word GOD at all" but they were very religious when they were here. They were the majority and so that's the way it was. If you were a minority, too bad. People came here searching for their own, you know, that's how the country was started with the Pilgrims and the religious persecution. So they were trying to get their dream. We are all trying to get our dream but do we realize our dream? No, but you have to have that dream to survive.

I: Interestingly you brought up the difference between dream and fantasy...is the American Dream an American Fantasy?

R: I don't know...you know the American dream today is to win the lottery! Is that fantasy? Yeah...How many people are going to win the lottery? So it is a fantasy! The American Dream. It really never existed...that is what we strive for. That is not fantasy. We strive for certain dreams that are attainable. So many people come to this country and work very, very hard and attain something that they may not have dreamt would have happened. A lot of them say "I never dreamed that I would be a billionaire!" "I never dreamed..." it's through circumstance that things happen. But enough with my lecture...

....

I: That's OK. We are talking with lots of people.

R: I don't know about "the American Dream." I'm too old, at this point in my life to think of an American Dream. I've seen my dreams that were not realized, and am I terribly disillusioned? No, I like my life the way it is. I'm very happy with the way it is. It could have taken another...you know like Robert Frost's "the path not taken." So I can't tell you what that was but I did have a dream...I don't know if it was fantasy. It could have been. People go on various paths towards their dream and are detoured, and in spite of the detour they come back again and are able to...A particular example is Oprah Winfrey. Do you think she thought she would ever be this popular, that she would ever be a billionaire? I don't think she did. All she was was a woman who was quite good at the time. There are a lot of people who are very good but are nowhere. But through circumstance they became something and it was circumstance that changed their existence. I don't know if they had that dream. I don't know if Oprah Winfrey had the dream that she has today. Did she dream this? I doubt it. A lot of people don't dream -- they do their work; they do their job; and many of them, in spite of their failures, in spite of the roadblocks in their way become successful.

AP10

I: Well, here is a list of the dreams that the curator highlighted so far...

R: They are all very worldly dreams, aren't they?

....

I: Can you say a little more? What do you mean by "worldly?"

R: Well, I guess there is nothing here about inner serenity. I said before "inner peace," because all of these, including religion, are all very active, they are all very worldly to me, and I don't think we can live our life so focused just on worldly things. Look at the state the world is in right now. I mean Canada has joined also over in Iraq and look at how people cannot get along, neighbors, etc. This is why I feel that way.

AP11

I: If we would have this exhibition focused on "American dream" would that work for you?

R2: That would be an aspect that would probably have broad appeal especially in the sense that those Founding Fathers had a specific set of goals in mind and how we have faltered through the years and the reason for that...and it would be a nice concept. But, than again, it would be a concept but it would probably be the most fundamental one to bring to light.

IM02

I: I have two things for you. One is the exhibition concept and the other one is a list of "American Dreams" that was put together by the museum team. Could you please read the exhibition concept and give me your feedback on it?

R: I think the concept is great. Honestly, I think "the American Dream" is central and you have it as a strong overriding theme. They have touched several different important factors of that dream and it has also recognized, and talks about, success and failures of realizing that dream and I think that's really important. The only thing that doesn't seem to be addressed explicitly...well it is actually...the opportunity for all. While the dream is still there more and more and more people are becoming poor in this country and poverty would have to be a very important subject in the exhibit. You can't talk about opportunities for all without talking about failures of it especially [inaudible] there should be someone saying what Americans need is not - - you know to be encouraged to follow your dream but to also have a backup plan in case you don't become millionaires. It's important to display the dream but it's also important to state the reality, the failures of it. Very important.

I: You gave me a very good example of a dream and the failure side. Can you give me another example?

R: I have in my head an image. In the 1930 there was a very famous photographer who went in [inaudible] and photographed all these very poor people who had nothing. When I think about the failure of the "American Dreams" I think about these people and I think about that there are still people who live like that, who live in the far end of farms. As much as it is idealized in this country is one of the poorest area in the country is where people live on farms or on area around farms.

IM11

Personal Dreams

Some interviewees discussed their personal dreams. These included:

- **Traveling**
- **Helping family**
- **Helping others (as an educator)**
- **Escaping poverty**
- **To live and work in DC**
- **To be a published writer**
- **To vacation**
- **Personal peace**
- **To have one's own company, i.e., not work for an employer**
- **Freedom to question government policy and get answers**
- **Work hard, earn a good living, have a family**

I: What would your dream be?

R: My dream would be just traveling, which is what we're doing now. So I guess I would want to see something about traveling.

....

I was brought up in a sugar plantation in Hawaii. My parents came from Japan and they worked for the plantation and they had six children, so we didn't have very much money. One thing I see missing here is education. I would like to see something about education. Because I think they still don't have an answer as to educating children and educating them equally and doing a good job of it. This "No Child Left Behind", I don't think is doing it. And I've had experience working with students, student-teachers, and substituting after I retired. And as I substitute I see what's happening to the teachers that are coming in, and they are not of high quality. So there is something that needs to be done about the education of the teachers. My husband had that concern. He taught for a while, and then he decided, "where would I be best used, or best be able to help out in education," and he went to teach in college, at the University of Laverne for four years. Then he decided, "No, I need to be on the campus, where I can see what the teachers are doing." So he became principal of two schools, and he ended his career as an administrator. But we both feel the same way. We see that there are so many problems.

....

I: How far back in your life did that start the belief in education as the American Dream?

R: When I was in elementary school. In third grade I really admired my teacher. I think my teacher was the one that inspired me to become a teacher, and from then on, my brother

became a teacher and I used to help him out with his teaching, correcting papers and so forth. When I used to go and substitute I saw that teachers had no background, even in discipline of children. And they had less children. They had only twenty children, and I had 32 to 40 children in a class.

I: What level did you teach?

R: Second and third mostly, but I've taught first, fourth, fifth and I was a math consultant in the school. I worked with all the children from kindergarten through sixth grade. If they were having a difficult time in math I brought them into my lab and I worked with them, and I could see what was happening. A lot of these children could learn if they had one-to-one experience. Right now my husband I started a tutoring program. We had seniors at our place volunteer to tutor in an elementary school. But we just had to go through fingerprints and tuberculin test. They're much more strict now, because of all the things that happen with little kids. So when we return to California, we will probably get started, because there were five of us that were already approved. There were others that hadn't been approved. It takes like 30 days for some of them to be approved. I don't know why. So we're going to be tutoring children one-to-one. The district just happened to have this tutoring program in progress so it was easy to just place each of us.

I: I notice as you're talking that a lot of your emphasis is on helping other people. Even back at the very beginning, and not so much on your own advancement. Am I right? Is your dream more helping others?

R: Yes. I think so. Education is what I know most about, so that is what I would want to be helping out.

I: When you were on the sugar plantation, did you see education as your way to a better life?

R: Well yes, because I sure didn't see being on the plantation for the rest of my life as a way of life. We used to go to be served soup because the plantation would be on strike and my father didn't have any work or get any pay. So we went to soup lines. There were so many things we didn't have. We didn't have toys. We made our own toys out of dirt or flowers, chopped them up and made something out of them. Or climbed a tree or rode the bicycle or made toys out of broomsticks and things like that. I never had a doll in my life. We never had a Christmas gift or anything like that. We were brought up as Buddhists, but still my mother put up a little tree. But we had no gifts under the tree. We couldn't afford it.

I: Did you feel that you were missing things?

R: No, at that time I don't.... Well, my very best girlfriend's parents had a better job. The father worked in the office. So she had a piano, piano lessons, and things like that. She had a car that she could drive. We didn't even have a car yet. So I looked up to her. I said, "Look she can do all these things. One day I'd like to be able to do that. Or if I had a family, I would like my daughter or son to be able to do some of the things she was doing." And we have. I think my husband and I, both being educators... We just have one child and my daughter became very much involved in helping other people. She is just like we are. She helps in other ways. What she wanted was to have children learn that their water environment had to be protected. She wrote a book about a whale. We got the books out to the school and she goes out and speaks to the class. But she is not an educator. She went to school. She had a business [degree], more in the financial side. But because of both of us being educators, she has really gotten into

the education part too.

I: When you were growing up as a child, did you feel that you had access to that dream of becoming like your friend and having a car and everything?

R: My first three [siblings] were not able to go to college, because my parents couldn't afford to send them. If anyone deserved to go to college, my oldest brother did. He was very smart. He became a self-educated man. He built himself financially through business. He opened different types of businesses. He built the first savings and loan on Maui. Then he took the plantation land along the beach. They weren't doing anything with it, so he built a hotel on it. And then later they sold the land to him and he sold the hotel, and now he has sold the savings and loan too. My sister left and went to Honolulu to get a job, because she couldn't get a good-paying job on Maui. And my sister in the middle was the one that really had to help my parents out. She helped my brother go to the University of Hawaii and he became a teacher. Then he helped my next brother go to college at Michigan State. He became an engineer. Then I had attended University of Hawaii for two years I had a scholarship there and I lived with my sister. And then my brother told me, "You need to go to the mainland to experience the weather, the seasons." So he sent me to Oregon and that's how I ended up there.

I: Wow. So your family really helped one another.

R: Yes, so I felt that I didn't have anyone to help, being the youngest, so I went back home from Oregon and helped my mom and dad, because everyone had to move out of the plantation homes and move into the city because they were going to raze cane fields. They didn't want to leave. They had lived in that home for over 50 years, and they really had a hard time parting with the home. So they had a choice of either taking the home with them, but we talked them into, "You know, you really deserve something new," although they were not very good homes, but they were still new. So they finally decided to get the house and my brother moved their home to use it for storage for his shoe store, and later fixed it up. They were happy because they could go to see the home once in a while. So we've had a difficult time in our younger days, but I think everyone became successful in their own fields.

AP-02

I: What would you focus on for that? What does it mean to you?

R: To me it means a lot. I'm here right here right now literally because of the American Dream. So that's deep.

I: In what sense?

R: I'm trying to move here, to this city, and get involved. I have a dream. I want to help.

AP-03

R2: Yeah. I dream of getting to be a writer and I don't know how to get my work out there. I write poetry and short stories. But if you're not a published author... You could put it on the internet, but I'm not good at the internet. You need more places where people can get help getting their dreams out there to share with the world. Thoughts and ideas. For people who don't have money.

....

I: You bring up an interest point with the cultural dimension. Do you think culture has been part of the American Dream?

R2: I don't think of it as culture. I think of it as people have thoughts, feelings, and ideas, and when you write them down you can share them with each other.

R: You have the right in this country to express yourself, so if that's your dream you can do it.

R2: They don't make it easy for everyday people. And we have just as many good ideas as people with wealth have. This is the first vacation we've had in 25 years without the kids.

R: He's trying to talk about the American Dream.

R2: I dreamed about a vacation for years.

AP-06

I: So what do you think about that as way to organize an exhibition on a story of America?

R: I think is very good. I do. But I hope along the way, somehow, it would be personal peace.

AP11

For me personally, even though I have those freedoms, still I appreciate them. Just coming through this wonderful city and then being able to do what I want to, set my own schedule, to work as I want to. I don't work for an employer. I have my own company so that to me is my American Dream to have all those freedoms that we enjoy.

IM04

I: This brings up an even more important issue. Do you think the NMAH should have such and exhibit?

R: The freedom to question and expect answers. This is my own very personal view to say that I am against the current administration is an understatement...when they were talking about going to visit the White House, I said "I would go provided that he is not there!" [...Cheney is Dr. Strangelove ,etc....she went on about this current administration]

We should have the freedom to disagree and to disagree very strongly without being called a "traitor," "un-American" or you don't know what you're talking about...[...]

IM09

I: What is your American Dream?

R: I'm basically living my American Dream. I'm traveling in America, seeing America, with my children, I work hard, I earn a good living and I have two children and a husband and that is my dream.

IM10

Dreams and History

Most interviewees, when discussing American Dreams, tended to discuss the dreams of the present, whether their own or other people's. Some respondents, however, made direct reference to dreams and the past, such as the idea of how dreams change over time.

These references included:

- American Dreams predate Columbus
- People of the past had different dreams
- “Early American had more of a political and freedom-type goal. As we progressed, it became more economic or personal freedom.”
- “...to learn where it's been, so that we can make it happen, to where we want it to go.”
- “They dreamed of one country, we had it. They dreamed of industrializing the country...we had it.”
- “...every person has his own dream...Then the next generation will add on to that and strive to continue it and to add more to it.”
- “You can't give freedom to somebody. They have to want it....It has to be their dream.”
- “It's a little difficult to connect dreams from pre-Colonial, to a Colonial, to a Republic.”
- “Historically, it's really one group being disadvantaged at the dreams of another...”

I: I notice as you're talking about this that you are thinking about dream as something that happens in the future.

R: Right. In the future.

I: I think the curators are thinking of it as something that happened in the past.

R: Oh, in the past.

I: Do you think that's interesting?

R: Yes. People would be interested in the past, like the Westward expansion.

AP-02

I: If we're doing this historically, over time, how would you handle it?

R: You'd want to have a separate exhibit for it?

I: Yeah, we're thinking of a separate exhibit.

R: I think you'd have that almost set aside. It would be hard to do, because if you want to keep in touch with the historical context, those American dreams have been going on for hundreds of years, thousands even, if you look at Columbus and trade routes. Those guys had dreams too. And the Founding Fathers. I'd almost have to put that into the centuries. I don't know how

you'd tie that in throughout history. You could do a separate exhibit on that subject.

....

I: But you saw an alternative of putting it into your overview exhibition.

R: Yes.

I: So each of the century rooms would have their own dreams?

R: I'm sure a lot of those people had totally different dreams than we have now. What were they working for?

AP-03

I: Can you see that as an introduction to American history as a whole?

R: Sure, because it was the early Americans who had more of a political and freedom-type goal. As we progressed, it became more economic or personal freedom.

I: Can you think of anything in American history that doesn't fit into this theme, that would be missing?

R: Other than war, which takes us in the other direction of the American dream.

AP-06

I: Would this be a good framework for introducing American history? Would it cover everything? [Shows curatorial statement to R2]

R2: This includes what I was referring to. It's all tied in there -- education. Is there anything in there in terms of gender equalities or inequalities? Men and women approach this very differently, and there are still differences out there, but there is certainly a push towards equality and that certainly affects career choices. And if you think about it, just how many women... Right now there are more women entering colleges than men. There are more women entering fields of engineering and medicine, where they haven't been. So we're going to see a lot of change in that over the years. So I think that having historical perspectives on some of that might be interesting. And I'm not saying that just from a woman, feminist point of view, but for men and women to learn where it's been, so that we can make it happen, to where we want it to go.

I: So you're suggesting that it precede the history of dreams in the past.

R2: I mean there was a time when women dreamed of having the white picket fence and the husband who had the great job and they could have the great home life. And now there are tremendous opportunities. You can be dual working couples. You can have somebody stay home and the other one... You can have the husband stay home and the woman go to work. Many different ways of doing it. And we evolved to that over time. But the dreams have changed as a result of that. Certainly women's dreams have changed, but I think even men. Men can now look and say, "Well, maybe I'd like to raise a family." Which is a very different perspective than 20 or 50 years ago.

AP-07

I: And you would like to see a discussion of all this?

R2: It would helpful but again is contemporary now but 10 years from now after the exposition it's been up, maybe that debate has been settled. But if you kept it on a current level it will always be fresh.

IM02

I: When I say "American dream" what comes to your mind?

R: The dreams of space. The dreams of freedom from the very, very beginning of the revolution, the dreams of Lincoln that is going to be one country. They aren't going to be two countries, just one country...Just looking into the future in a very positive way and having achieved so much of it.

A dream is something in the future...so you can only take the dreams of those who came before us and what they foresaw and what they foresaw has come true. They dreamed of freedom...we had it. They dreamed of one country, we had it. They dreamed of industrializing the country...we had it. We've lost it but we had it.

I: Let's take the first one that you mentioned "freedom." In your opinion, what specific things do you think should be debated?

R: We were looking for freedom from the England. We were a colony of the English. We didn't want to be a colony of the English and so we fought them and we won. I guess every president, every person has his own dream and that what you strive for. Then the next generation will add on to that and strive to continue it and to add more to it. So when they came across something as simple as an antibiotic or penicillin, this was a dream that prevented so many deaths. People would die from pneumonia, or die from a bad cold, all of the sudden they weren't anymore. This was able to fulfill their dream.

....

I do have to tell you that I was at the Vietnam memorial yesterday and I looked at those names and I walked from the beginning to the end and all I could think of was what a waste...what a waste of life. And I know that is going to happen when they build some kind of monument or memorial to the Iraq war...again it would be what a waste...for the same reason...we had no business of being there. You can't give freedom to somebody. They have to want it. They have to be willing to fight for it. When you give them something, it's meaningless...when they fight for something or work for something than it will have some meaning. Unless they know what they're missing they have to want it! It's as simple as that. It has to be their dream. If it's not their dream they don't know what we are talking about nor do they care.

I: So would you have such a debate in this exhibition?

R: Not with our current administration...No! I'd probably go to jail.

IM09

I: What dreams would be more specific for each era? For the first era, for example?

R: It's a little difficult to connect dreams from pre-Colonial, to a Colonial, to a Republic. It's easier to go from Colonial to a Republic, but it's much harder to go from Natives further, because it is a little tough to do justice to the topic in a museum exhibit especially in a theme as

“dreams.”

I: Why do you think that?

R: Historically, it's really one group being disadvantaged at the dreams of another, and that actually is the same thing for the 20th century. There is a lot of that. In “Louisiana purchase” you can talk about that as a dream but that wasn't necessarily true for everybody, in fact it wasn't good for most people that were living on that land. So I think that's the hardest. Finding the...just because they are dreams it doesn't mean that people benefit from those dreams and that has to be a...you can't ignore that.

....

I: Do you think that was always the case or is more of a current issue?

R: I think the specifics of it today are specific to today...but they are not so much actually. At the eve of the 20th century you had the Irish and you had the Polish and all these people coming into the US who were at the time of an odd economic moment. Just because of the depression where there were very rich people and very poor people and these immigrants came in at the bottom or lower than everybody else and were facing the same things as the Mexicans are facing today “stealing the jobs, changing the culture, creating chaos into the society,” and we know that they are not. Since then and now there has been such a...the wars...the 60s with the civil rights when there was not question about everybody being a valued member of society. Now it seems that we are going back to the old early XIX century mentality of very rich, very poor, immigrants not so good, they are at the bottom, they are stealing jobs and not...and that would be an interesting issue [inaudible] to look at advancements for these groups and how [inaudible]

I: Can you give me an example of an American dream that was successful and then of all the dreams that you gave me up to this point, of one that is not really decided yet.

R: Before I answer that question I just want to say that I believe, although I have a BA in history, I don't believe history is circular but I do believe that things tend to happen...we tend to relive things. So just because something might be a failure or a success today it doesn't mean that it is the same as it is or as it was.

IM11

Suggestions for the Exhibition

A few interviewees offered suggestions.

- **Personal stories**
- **Discuss all sides of the story**
- **Include reality and failures**
- **Include local/state perspectives**
- **Include an international perspective**
- **Consider the future as well as the past**

I: If you were going to tell of the story of your family in the American dream exhibition, what would you use to tell that story?

R: I would want to see something, but there are 50 states, so I don't know how you'd do that I would want to see the history of Hawaii, the plantation people. What they did. I don't think many people know what a difficult time the people had. And I think it was mostly the Japanese that ended up on the plantation as laborers, because the Chinese went to Honolulu and opened up businesses, so they had better jobs. They were able to survive better than the Japanese. And then you have all the war, World War II, where we got involved, and yet some of them got sent to camps. I was just to start Japanese school and my Japanese-school teacher had to come up to camp. My minister had to come up to camp. And they were going to send all of us to Molokai. But then someone talked them out of it. They said, "Why do that? It's really unnecessary." So they didn't. There is so much history.

AP-02

R: You would have to take specific iconic people because if people can't relate to what it is they are seeing that's....you know...

....

I: You said that you would have at least two things in this exhibition 1) we'll have to bring in the story of people and 2) we'll have to discuss all sides of the story and that things are not black and white. But in terms of things, what would you have? How would you have a debate of pros and cons? How would you do that? Or what else would you put in it.

R: I don't know. There could be a third contrast. What happens elsewhere in the world at that time, at whatever they are looking at. To really bring into perspective how lucky the people are, the outside world, and then the American dreams. But the American dreams are built on the failures of other countries...In England for example the Puritans couldn't practice their religion as they wanted it, so they moved, living the American dream. Then [inaudible] we are going to be represented and that creates another dream and you can just look at freedom today, women's rights and realize that is just not that here there is so much ...Personally, as a foreigner, I would like to see the international concept, how things are elsewhere, that they are very lucky here....

I: What would you have from that perspective from another country? What specifically would you present?

R: Well, [an] historical [view]...you wouldn't have just the bad things; you would also have to have the good things. There are some things that worked better [in other countries] than here, and I think that would have to be highlighted. I'm not quite sure that would be a great idea as that would [allow] a lot of information to be covered in an exhibition like this, but then again I would not build an exhibit like this on a small [scale]. It would be very complex at least in its themes. [...]

....

I: How would you design it to sell it?

R: Considering that I take on the project, I would address religion, but I would have a lot of fights. You have to talk about Puritans. You have to be honest about it, you can't just say that they came to US because of their religious persecution, it was way more complicated than that and that would have to be addressed. Why did they leave England? How were they in America? And how would they live? How would they practice their religion?

I would put the Natives in here. I don't know how would you put them but they have to be mentioned. It's so important [inaudible]

In the Colonial era, Jefferson and Washington were not Christians. They had the philosophy that mankind is left with its own devices and God is abstract; you should live your life the best way that you can. It's wasn't Bible-based, it wasn't Ten-Commandments-based, it was really a practical approach to life. That would have to be addressed...were the Founding Fathers Christians? That is the debate....Is it a Judaeo-Christian country that they founded? Talk about their religious practices. Talk about the religions of the immigrants who were coming in the 19th Century. You have to talk about the Jews a little bit, like communities they built....

I was going to get to that for all the other ones...for example consumerism doesn't really begin until 1920. And I think you'll have to start with the beginning. And you can't start for each dream with the beginning of the country, it has to be relevant and for consumerism [that] would be WWI. I don't know how big this is going to be...Each has to have an experience of that dream. Then talk about how the dream is lived by some and how it is created by others, how it has changed, how it has moved and how it's going to move into the future, its success and failure.

IM11

NMAH Orientation and Organization Problems

In the course of the interviews some visitors described their difficulties in locating what they wanted to see or finding their way in general. Problems included:

- **Finding an exhibition**
- **Misleading information in the map**
- **Not understanding the overall organization of the museum**
- **Not finding “a natural progression” with a “start” or any sense of order**
- **Need for maps**

I was looking for Julia Child’s kitchen. It said it was on the second floor, but I couldn’t find it. Then someone told me it was on the third floor, and then I found out it was on the first floor. So it took me a while to find her kitchen.

I: So you didn’t know about it from the map?

R: No from the map it didn’t say. It said that it was on the second floor. The writing about Julia Child was on the second-floor page, so that’s where I headed. But it doesn’t point out anywhere on the map where it is. When you look at the writing, it is on the page with the second floor.

I: Oh, I see. That’s very misleading.

R: Yes, it is. With someone who has a foot problem, to have to go to all three floors....

I had to go to floor three to see the Presidents, so I wanted to see that. But I couldn’t find Julia Child. Then finally someone told me it was on the first floor. And when I came down here I noticed that food was on the first floor, so, yes, it would make sense that she would be on the first floor.

I: Oh, I see.

R: I saw food on the map on the first floor.

AP-02

I: That brings us back to the introductory exhibit where you see all these things linked together. Do you see that exhibition as being a guide to the museum in some way?

R: It could be. It could tell you what’s here. This is hard. Why is Edison downstairs? I want to check out the 1800s. I want to check out the documents and artifacts from that time. Lincoln is upstairs and the guy who was building the cotton gin at the same time is downstairs. The cotton gin is a huge thing.

AP-03

I was looking for the start. I thought there might be a natural progression. I saw that up on the top floor, in the war area. But I didn’t see it in most of the museum, where it followed a timeline.

I think a little more order in the entire museum would help me out. So that I know that I am

going from this area to that area. This is the first time that I've ever been here and I guess no matter what you did it would be a little confusing, because it's so big.

I: For you personally, it is more the order of things in the museum that's the issue.

R: Right.

AP-06

R2: Are you looking to set up the museum in this fashion?

I: No, not the whole museum. Just one exhibit.

AP-07

I: Do you mean a project of an overview exhibition?

R: No, just the whole overview and "this" [American Dream]. You know and people will criticize it saying "You know there is no rhyme or reason to it," yet we find now various things. I can find various places to go so I don't know what people are saying about that kind of idea and it is just scrambled. It doesn't have an order to it. I don't know if this is what their dream is here in the SI to have an order to it for people? Does that mean that you have to follow one path?

....

They didn't have too much time. So I took them there. I took them to the Flag, the one outside the Pentagon, on their way to the Ladies. They didn't have that much time. They had like an hour. I wanted them to do some of the looking around rather than getting lost trying to what's new. And you can't organize this. You can't have your group go from place to place, so you let them go and you just try to hope they find what they want. I can steer them in the direction. Some of these kids know about Ruby Slippers and things like that and it is difficult [to get there] if you don't know where to go here....

AP10

I: As you were going through the museum, or after, did you ever felt that there was something missing in the museum?

R: Maps...

IM07

Experiences in the Museum

Some visitors discussed other aspects of their visit to the museum that provide some insight into individual experiences. These excerpts include references to:

- Physical limitations in the museum (and the use of cell phones)
- “Real thing” and imagination experiences
- Gender differences

I: Did you have a list to plan your visit from? Did you know what was in the museum?

R: We got the booklet and we looked at it and I knew we had only so much time, so what we did there are four of us and we all have our cell phones and we all separated. Everybody wanted to see something different. There were three of us that kind of started together, looking at the First Lady exhibit, but then we separated. I had to move a little faster in order to get more in, and I couldn't stand there and read because of my feet. The other thing is that I only have so much time and I wanted to cover as much area as possible.

AP-02

I: When you mentioned the Star-Spangled Banner and the documents -- it seems that the objects are really important for you for an emotional connection.

R: Oh yeah. I don't want to see a replica of a gun used. I want to see the gun. To me it has life. I'm kind of weird that way, I guess, but I think those things embody the feelings. The actual objects. Meaning. Life. That's a personal thing. Like when I saw the Star Spangled Banner, or the flag from 9/11. That gives you a context. Something you can look at and it is actually is there. Those guys held it in their hands. They were probably talking, “We've got to get a flag. O.k. We got the flag. Tie it down! Don't let it fall!” So that to me is almost a story behind it, rather than when you see just a replica.

I: Do you do a lot of imagining like that in the museum?

R: I like to think about the guys in the picture. They're not as prominent as the Flag, but they have stories too.

I: What about with the Star-Spangled Banner?

R: People struggling to stay alive to keep this country going. And this guy checking it out to see if the flag's still flying. Every couple of hours. Because he knows that's it. If the flag's down, he's done. That to me was the fight against great odds, which is always inspiring to me.

AP-03

I: Do you find that there is something in this museum that really captures people's imaginations?

R: I hope so. I had a lot of girls. So I said “What do you want?” How can you...there is so much here! I've been coming here for 6 years and I haven't seen it all. So you can't see it all and I try to steer them. They are girls. So I told them to go to see the gowns.

AP10

Appendix A: Characteristics of Interviewees

Interview	Length (min)	Gender	Age	Group composition	Race/Ethnicity	Live	Visit History
IM01	3	M, F	15	2 adults	White	US	
IM02	10	F,M	50	2 adults	White	US	
IM03	20	F,F,F	13	school group	White, African-American	US	
IM04	10	M	50	alone	White	US	
IM06	12	F	50	alone	White	Canada	first time
IM07	6	F	20	alone	Latino	Arlington	repeat
IM08	5	F	40	Family (2 boys)	White	US	repeat
IM09	13	F	60	Group of adults	White	US	
IM10	8	F	20	With one kid	Latino	US	
IM11	60	F	20	alone	White	Canada	first time
AP01	4	M	20	alone	White	St. Louis	repeat
AP02	26	F	70	4 adults	Asian-American	California	first time
AP03	22	M	20	alone	White	DC	first time
AP04	1	F	40	Group of adults	Latino	US	repeat
AP06	8	M,F	50	couple	White	US	repeat
AP07	10	M,F	50	couple	White	US	repeat
AP08	27	F, M	50	2 adults	White	WV	first time
AP09	1	M	30	alone	White	US	first time
AP10	13	M	40	alone	White	US	repeat
AP11	5	F	40	alone	White	US	

Appendix B: Curatorial Statement

American Dreams
Concept statement
DRAFT 5/2/06

What is the American Dream? How has it shaped American history?

In reality, there have been many different American dreams.

Some American dreams have been about freedom, both political and personal—participating in an open, democratic society; being able to choose where to live and work; having the right to live according to one’s own values and beliefs.

Other American dreams have been about economic success—earning a living wage; attaining financial independence; owning a business; providing a good home for one’s family.

Still other American dreams have been about individual achievement—getting a good education; finding a satisfying career; fulfilling one’s creative and intellectual potential.

While they are as diverse as the people who have pursued them, these American dreams also share a common theme: the idea of opportunity.

For centuries, people have viewed America as a land of opportunity, a place where everyone has the chance to achieve a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities. While reality has often failed to live up to this ideal, a belief in equal opportunity—the right of all to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—has remained the fundamental American Dream.

One way to view American history, then, is as the story of *American Dreams*: how diverse people have struggled to achieve their own dreams of a better life, and how the nation has met with both success and failure in realizing the broader American Dream of opportunity for all.

Appendix C: List of American Dreams

- **A City on a Hill:** Religion and the American Dream
- **The Ladder:** Enterprise and the American Dream
- **The Garden:** Agriculture and the American Dream
- **The Frontier:** Western Expansion and the American Dream
- **The Grand Emporium:** Consumerism and the American Dream
- **The Golden Door:** Immigration and the American Dream
- **The Dream Factory:** Hollywood and the American Dream
- **The White Picket Fence:** Home Ownership and the American Dream
- **A Place at the Table:** Social Equality and the American Dream