

A Study of Visitors to *American Stories*  
at the National Museum of American History



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## Abstract

The Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) conducted a study of a new exhibition, *American Stories*, at the National Museum of American History. The report is based on the analysis of 27 qualitative interviews with visitors at the exit, entrance and within the exhibition and Entrance and Exit Surveys with visitors. A total of 353 visitors completed the Entrance Survey (83% of eligible respondents) and 467 the Exit Survey (72% of eligible respondents). On the whole, visitors to *American Stories* enjoyed the exhibition as a well-organized (i.e., chronological with date and era markers) introduction to American history that was familiar to them. It brought back memories through the inclusion of iconic objects as well as familiar objects to which they could relate. It gave American visitors a sense of pride in America.

At the same time, visitors who had hoped to get a richer, more robust understanding of the American story were somewhat disappointed. In the qualitative interviews, a major theme delivered to visitors by the exhibition was one of progress and change over the span of American history, the “look how far we’ve come” idea. On balance, the exhibition came out with an average overall rating.

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**Cover. Left:** Celia Cruz, the Afro-Cuban vocalist known as the “Queen of Salsa” wore these shoes, from 1997. As the political landscape changed dramatically in Cuba, many fled the country, including singer Celia Cruz, who found her place in New York City’s thriving 1960s Latino music scene and never returned to her country of origin. Photo: Richard Strauss, Smithsonian Institution. **Right:** Ruby slippers worn by Judy Garland, playing Dorothy in the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Photo: Harold Dorwin, Smithsonian Institution.

## Preface

Providing useful information and analyses to Smithsonian offices and museums is a core mission of The Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A). Thus, we are pleased to participate in the National Museum of American History's (NMAH) enthusiasm for assessing the effectiveness of new exhibitions. This study of *American Stories* is part of our continued collaboration with NMAH.

At NMAH, Howard Morrison and Bill Yeingst met with the OP&A study team before *American Stories* opened and shared their plans for the exhibition. As the study got underway, they provided comments on the protocol for the qualitative study and the questions in the survey, and facilitated data collection.

In OP&A, Zahava D. Doering had primary responsibility for designing this study of visitors to the *American Stories* exhibition, coordinating the data collection, and overseeing the project as a whole, as well as writing the report. Staff members Andrew Pekarik and Zahava Doering, and a volunteer, Kelly Richmond, undertook the first phase of the study, the interviews. Kelly analyzed the interviews through repeated listening and documented salient visitor comments in order to create Appendix A. An extraordinary intern, Hyemin Kim, guided by Sarah Block, Researcher, assisted with all aspects of the study, undertook responsibility for recruiting interviewers, editing, and data preparation; Andrew Pekarik and Hyemin Kim analyzed the survey data.

This study could not have been completed in a timely fashion without the assistance of nearly every OP&A staff member and intern. They volunteered to interview during especially busy times and ensured that we had high visitor cooperation rates. I thank them all for their work.

Carole M. P. Neves,  
Director,  
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## Introduction and Methodology

### Background

*American Stories* is an exhibition that opened on April 5, 2012 at the National Museum of American History (NMAH). It is located in the East Wing, on the second floor of the museum. This 5,300 square foot exhibition is considered temporary (3 to 5 years).

*"It was a pretty good representation of the last 150 years. It makes me feel good. I'm proud to be an American, and it's kind of a history of who we are, so it's kind of fun to look at and see." (M, Int. 25)\**

*American Stories* contains a broad representation of collection objects with revealing and informative details. It is organized by chronological era and focuses on objects and their connections to history. The exhibition uses over 100 historic and cultural objects from the

Museum's collections, supplemented by a few loans, as entryways to stories of people, inventions, issues and events that have shaped the American experience. *American Stories* is designed as an introductory experience to American history and as a dedicated space to feature new acquisitions that illustrate the breadth of the American experience. It acknowledges the limits of the museum's collections—and highlights new collecting that seeks to better represent the history of all Americans. At a "posting place" in the exhibition, visitors are asked to suggest objects the museum should add to its collections in order to represent their history, their America.<sup>1</sup>

Highlights include:

- a fragment of Plymouth rock
- Benjamin Franklin's walking stick
- Abraham Lincoln's gold pocket watch
- a sunstone capital from the Mormon temple at Nauvoo, Illinois
- Dorothy's ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*
- Bob Dylan's jacket
- Muhammad Ali's boxing gloves
- Archie Bunker's chair
- Kermit the Frog

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\* The number at the end of each quote is an assigned identification code. Table 1, Appendix B describes the qualitative interview respondents.

<sup>1</sup> See the online exhibition at <http://66.147.244.104/~amerif5/americanstories/>

OP&A Research. The research was focused on the extent to which visitors see objects as items associated with meanings and memories that connect the past to the present, as well as the extent to which visitors recognize the personal relevance of objects and their own connections to history. More broadly, it tackles personal identity, meaning making, expectations, and experiences. What were visitors looking forward to? What happened to visitors as they engaged with the exhibition? How did the expectations reported by entering visitors compare to the experiences of exiting visitors?

In addition, the research asked visitors to rate the exhibition. Is there a connection between rating and any characteristics of viewers or their responses? By using the same scale that OP&A has applied elsewhere at the Smithsonian (Overall Experience Rating), it is possible to compare the rating for this exhibition with ratings of other exhibitions at NMAH and elsewhere. Did the approach used in this exhibition have a measurable impact on visitor satisfaction?

### Methodology

OP&A conducted 27 in-depth interviews with visitors entering and leaving the exhibition. Visitors included both those who stopped at the “posting place” and those who did not. The interviews were recorded and analyzed. The open-ended interviewing format allowed visitors to speak freely and interviewers probed further whenever unexpected specific issues arose.

The Entrance-Exit Survey data were collected a month or so after the in-depth interviewing was completed to allow for development of a questionnaire, pre-testing and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process.

The surveys, using self-administered questionnaires, were conducted between June 4 and 12, 2012, between 9:30AM and 5:00PM. During each day, three interviewing sessions were conducted; days alternated between the Entrance Survey and the Exit Survey. The hours were coordinated so as not to interfere with the “Join the Student Sit-Ins at the Greensboro Lunch Counter” theatrical performances that take place near the entrance to the exhibition. Visitors were very cooperative in their participation in the surveys; a total of 353 completed surveys in the Entrance Survey (83% of eligible respondents) and 467 in the Exit Survey (72% of eligible respondents). We purposely collected more Exit Survey questionnaires, as two forms were needed to accommodate all the questions.

The specific study goals were to:

- identify what visitors anticipated when they arrived at *American Stories* and the extent to which those expectations were met; and
- determine the effectiveness of various communication and exhibition techniques used in the exhibition (e.g., organization by date/era, opportunity of leave a note/opinion, etc.).

Report organization. The next section contains the survey results and a summary of the qualitative interviews. This is followed by a discussion. Appendix A contains a detailed report of the in-depth interviews. A chart showing characteristics of the people who were interviewed is in Appendix B. Quotes from Appendix A are used throughout this report as examples; the number at the end of each quote is an assigned identification code (see Table 1, Appendix B). Appendix C has copies of the three questionnaires that were used in the survey. OP&A used one questionnaire for the Entrance Survey and two for the Exit Survey; some questions were asked only on one version and others on another, to minimize respondent burden. Appendix D provides tables of the frequency distributions of survey responses.

## Findings

### Visit Characteristics

#### First Time, Group Composition<sup>2</sup>.

- Nearly two-thirds of the visitors (62%) were making a first visit to the Smithsonian.
- About three-fourths of the visitors (73%) were visiting with other people (adults or children). One in ten (12%) was alone, and the rest (15%) were either adults accompanying a school group or members of other organized tours.

#### Sex and Age

- Women constituted nearly two-thirds of visitors (61%).
- Both the average and median age was 43. (Visitors under age 18 were not interviewed).
  - Respondents were nearly equally distributed among the following three age groups, 18 through 38 (36%), 39 through 49 (29%), 50 and older (35%).

#### Residence

- Washington DC Metropolitan Area residents and visitors who lived outside the United States were a minority (6% and 8%, respectively), while the majority was from other parts of the United States.

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<sup>2</sup> When the same visitor characteristic was asked on both the Entrance Survey and the Exit Survey, the text reports the Exit information.



## Overall Exhibition Rating

As seen in Figure 1, next page, The Overall Experience Rating is similar to *The First Ladies* exhibition, and the SI overall Smithsonian Institution (SI) exhibition average.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1**  
**Overall Exhibition Ratings:**  
*The First Ladies* (2010), *American Stories* (2012) and the Smithsonian (SI) Exhibition Average  
 In percent

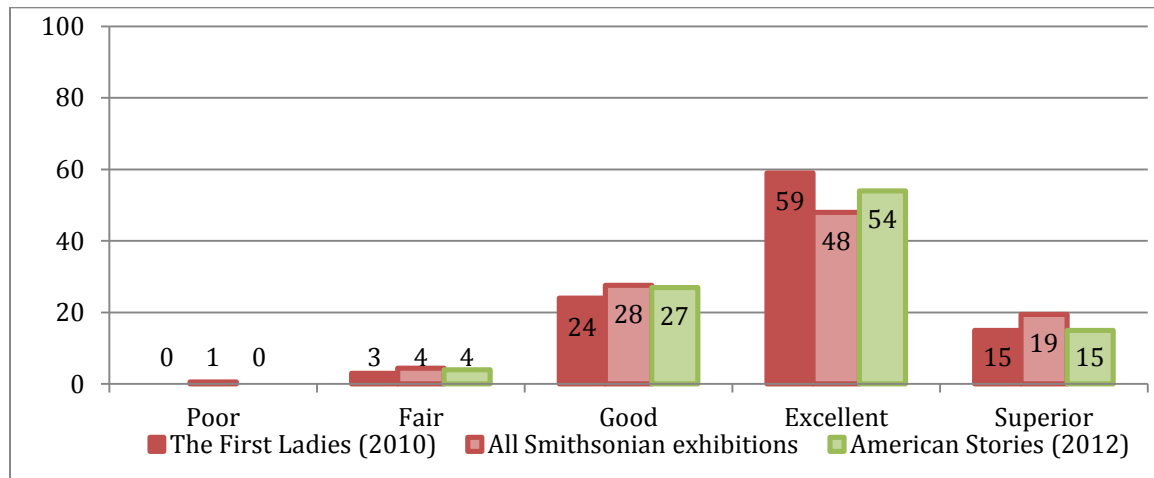


Figure 2 shows a comparison between the expected rating (Entrance Survey) and the rating after viewing the exhibition (Exit Survey). As can be see, the actual rating was somewhat higher than the expected rating. Specifically, the percentage that rated the exhibition as Good decreased (35% to 27%) and the Superior rating increased (10% to 15%).

**Figure 2**  
**Overall Exhibition Rating of *American Stories*, Anticipated and Actual**  
 In percent

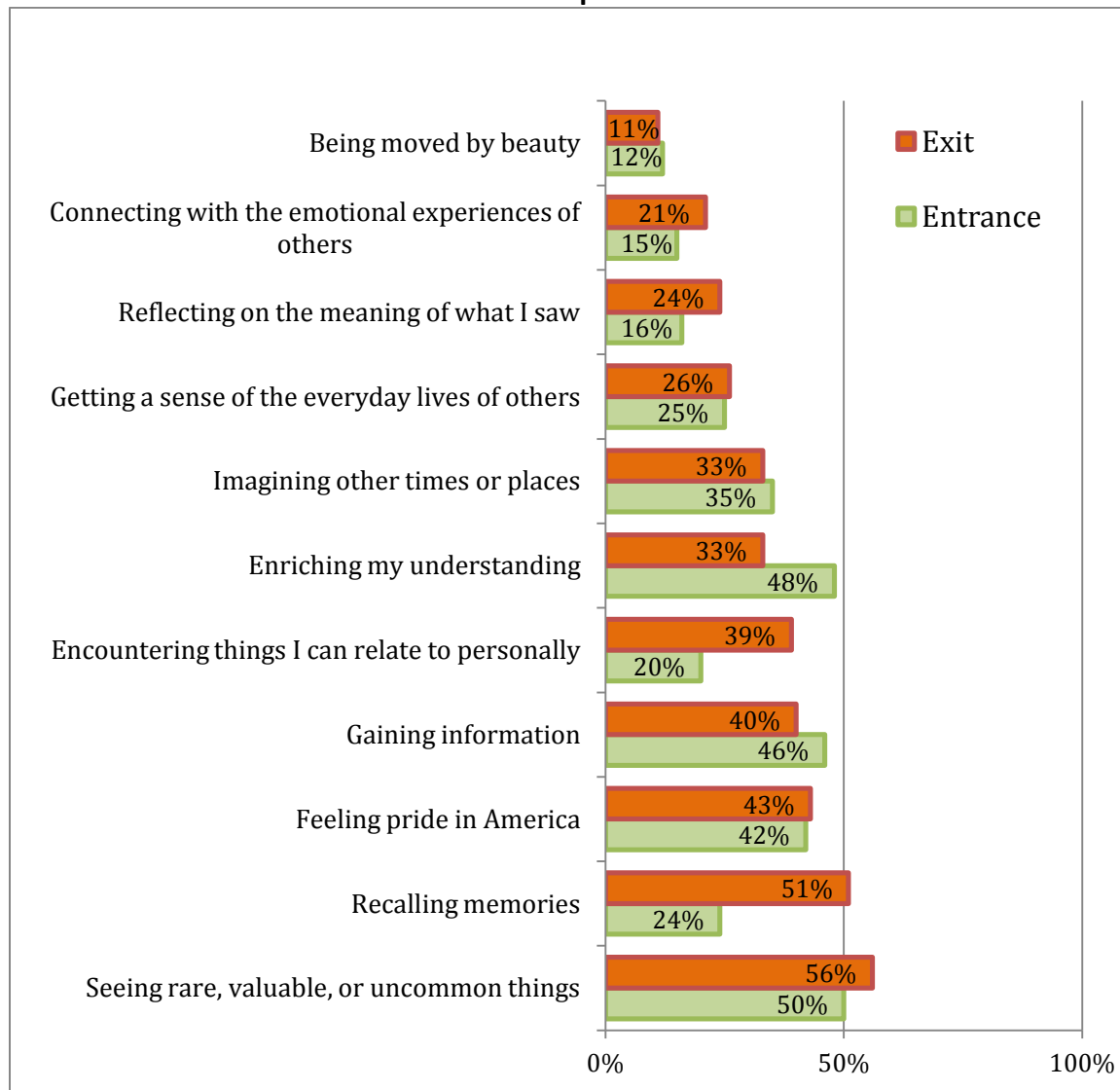


<sup>3</sup> Recent data for other NMAH exhibitions are not available.

## Experiences in the Exhibition

For nearly 15 years, OP&A staff has been exploring the experiences people have in exhibitions, measured through a comparison of what they expect when they come to what they report when they leave. Visitors to *American Stories* were shown a list of eleven experiences. These were selected both from lists used at NMAH before and those used in other Smithsonian museums. In selecting the list, the OP&A team consulted with NMAH staff to ensure that the experiences on the list included those they considered important for *American Stories*. Figure 3 shows the results from the Exit Survey compared to those in the Entrance Survey.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 3**  
**Satisfying Experiences, Entrance and Exit Surveys**  
**In percent**



<sup>4</sup> To minimize selection bias, e.g. selection of items near the top of the list, the lists were sorted in alphabetical order on one version of the questionnaires and revers alphabetical order on the second version.

Two experiences increased significantly from what people looked forward to (Entrance Survey) to what they reported as having experienced (Exit Survey): Recalling memories (24% to 51%) and Encountering things I can relate to personally (20% to 39%). In both instances the percentages nearly doubled. Both of these experiences clearly resonated with respondents.

One experience, Enriching my understanding, decreased significantly between the Entrance Survey and the Exit Survey (48% to 33%). In other words, visitors who had hoped to get a richer, more robust understanding of the American story were somewhat disappointed.

*"I don't get a patriotic thing, I get more the history of it. Just progress and change from industrial type things. Things to be proud of that we were able to develop those things. Pride. Patriotism to me is more the government and things like that. There's definitely pride out of seeing things in here, but not to me a patriotism, a flag-waving type thing...but the accomplishments are not so much the government to me and this shows that they were industrialists and things like that that did them." (M, Int. 1)*

Two experiences are significantly associated with higher overall experience ratings. Visitors who were Moved by beauty in the exhibition gave the exhibition a very high rating on exit (36% of them rated American Stories as Superior vs. 12% of those who did not mark that they were Moved by beauty), and Feeling pride in America also had a positive association with rating (19% of those who felt pride in the exhibition rated their overall

experience as Superior vs. 11% of other visitors). Of course, foreign residents rarely felt Pride in America (98% of those who marked Pride in America live in the US).

## Exhibition Features

*"Well, I mean, should the stuff in here be in a time capsule, could it be in a time capsule, is that what they're trying to do in this exhibit, to show everyday things from everyday people. I mean, you'd need bazillions more stuff. I mean, more room to show everyday things. But all these things seem to be things done by famous people, not just your everyday person from what I've seen. Well, we've got that urn over there. Well, jeepers, I don't have anything like that, now he's from a slave, as I recall. ... Well, that's true a slave probably wasn't [famous], but he did pretty good quality work." (F, Int. 27)*

Use. Visitors were asked about their use or awareness of thirteen exhibition features and asked to rate them. Almost all visitors expressed an opinion on exhibition design, lighting, cleanliness, organization of the exhibition by date/era, photos of people, amount of text, circulation pattern, and introduction (100% - 93%). Approximately one-third didn't see/hear or use music, museum staff, or the interactives (table or wall) (35%-40%). Only one in five (20%) noticed or used the Spanish language

text/pamphlet. See Figure 4 for all the items, ranked from the item that was seen/used by the most people and rated to the one that was seen/used by the smallest percent of visitors.

**Figure 4**  
**Features Rated in *American Stories*, in Order of Percentage Seen/Used**

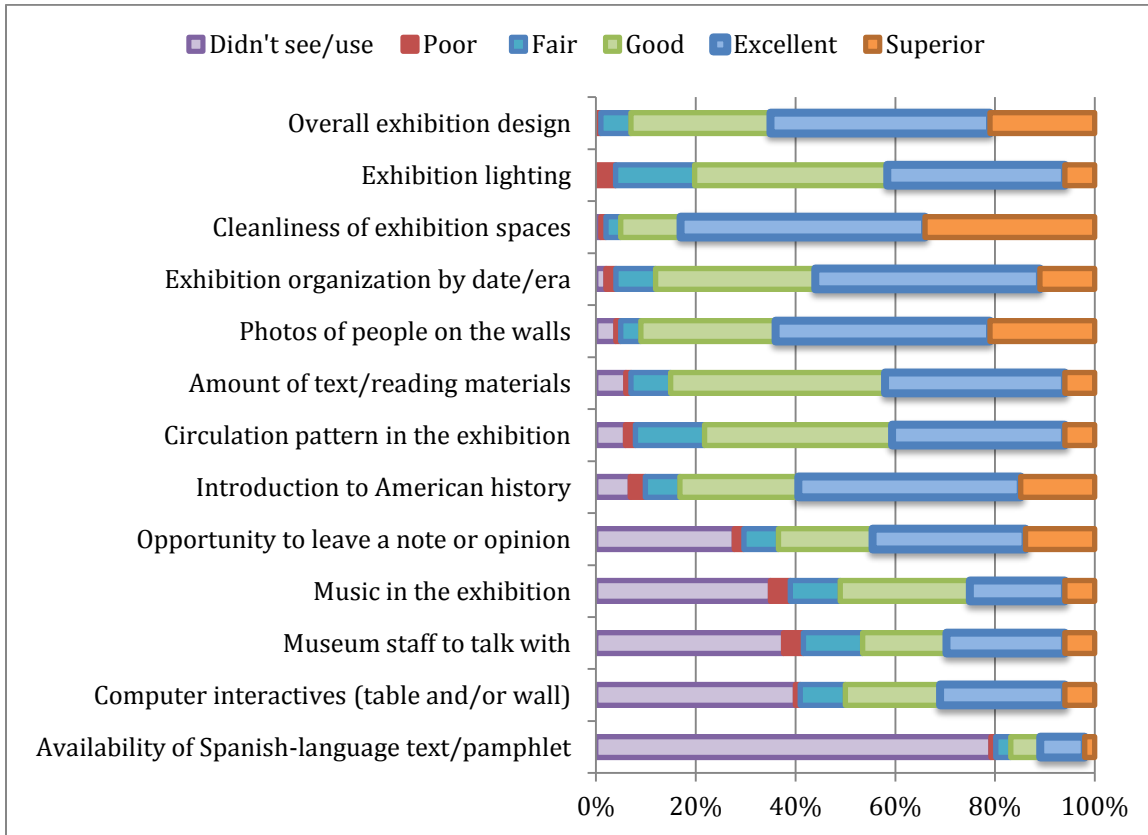
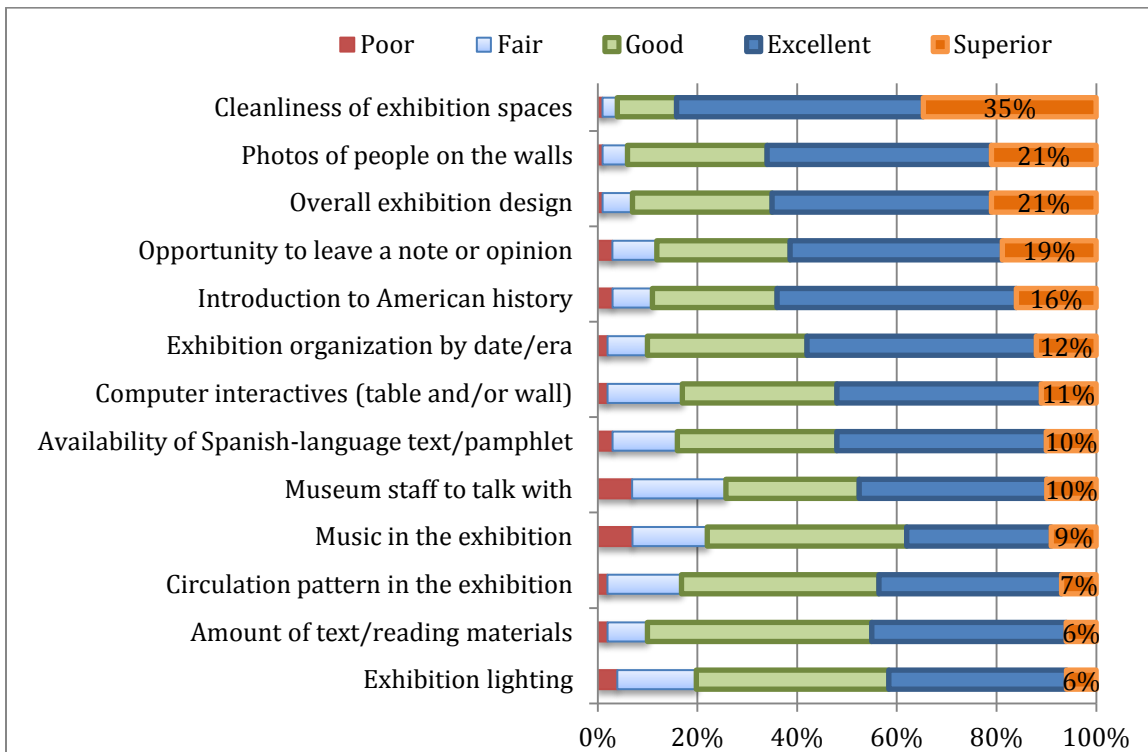


Figure 5 shows the same rated functions, excluding the visitors who indicated that they did not use or see it.

**Figure 5**  
**Features Rated in *American Stories*, in Order of Percentage Who Rated it Superior**



As Figure 5 shows, Cleanliness of the exhibition was rated well above average (35% Superior), and the next three items - Photos of people on the walls, Overall exhibition design and the

*"It's just kind of like a timeline, just stuff of each, certain era of history. I'd tell them that's what it is. The famous stuff, mainly, through each part of history."* (M, Int. 24)

Opportunity to leave a note or opinion at the "posting places" - are slightly above average). The exhibition as an introduction to American history is about average, while the Organization of the

exhibition by date/era is slightly below average (12% Superior). The remaining items, computer interactives, Spanish text, staff, music, circulation pattern, text and lighting are below average (11% to 6% Superior, respectively).

The analysis shows that new visitors to NMAH were more likely to see/use Spanish language text/pamphlet, compared to repeat visitors (24% vs. 13%).<sup>5</sup> The data also show some differences by gender; women were more likely to use or see the opportunity to leave a note or opinion at the "posting place" compared to men (80% vs. 63% for males).

Two of the feature ratings in Figure 5 are significantly associated with overall experience ratings: Introduction to American History and Exhibition organization by date/era. Almost half (44%) of those who marked Introduction to American History or Organization by date/era as Superior rated their overall experience Superior; and more than half (56%) of those who marked Exhibition organization by date/era as Superior also marked their overall experience as Superior.

There is one significant association between the visitor characteristics discussed earlier and feature ratings: The data show that first-time visitors were more likely to rate the Cleanliness of the exhibition spaces higher than repeat visitors (90% Excellent or Superior cleanliness for first timers vs. 75% Excellent or Superior cleanliness for repeat visitors).

There are some significant associations between experiences shown in Figure 5 and the ratings of features just discussed. These are listed below:

- Exhibition lighting and Being moved by beauty (19% of those who marked Beauty gave Lighting a Superior rating vs. 5% of others)
- Exhibition organization by date/era and Being moved by beauty (33% of those who marked Beauty gave Organization a superior rating vs. 9% of others)
- Introduction to American History and Feeling pride in America (20% of Pride marked Introduction superior vs. 11% of others)
- Music in the exhibition and Gaining information (20% of Information marked Music superior vs. 4% of others)
- Music in the exhibition and Imagining other times or places (20% of Imagining marked Music superior vs. 5% of others)
- Music in the exhibition and Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw (22% of Reflecting marked Music superior vs. 5% of others)

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<sup>5</sup> Visitors were not asked for their cultural identification; thus, we cannot tell if this difference reflects a difference in this characteristic between new and repeat visitors.

*I find the clothes to be fascinating, the things that people wore, and the tools in their homes and things. I find that all fascinating. ... Well, for two reasons, one, how much things have changed, but how much they've stayed the same. The things that we still use in our homes, they used then, the pitchers and the dishes. And how different we dress now, and how the quality of their garments, the thickness and the craftsmanship that goes into everything that we just take for granted now. It's so easy now for us with all our machinery. All the effort that went into things.” (F, Int. 8)*

### **Behavior in the Exhibition**

Based on their self report, visitors did a lot of looking, with two-thirds marking Very Much (67%), half did a lot of reading (47% reporting Very Much), and connecting with others was normally distributed across the range of categories (See Appendix D).

## Qualitative Interviews

The observations made by visitors in the qualitative interviews provide a more nuanced picture of the visitors' experience in American stories. Here we provided a summary of the interviews with a few examples; the complete report is in Appendix A.

On the whole, visitors found the exhibition a fun, digestible summary of their existing American history knowledge, coupled with memorable pop cultural elements that they could easily connect to personally. Some also singled out older objects as favorites. The selection reasons for these objects usually centered on the craftsmanship of the object or the its association with a historical figure.

"This was a quick overview which was fun, and I think you have to have a little bit of the fun thing in with the serious. ... Memories of things we've learned in school, ourselves. It was history. It was a refresher. It was a refresher for a lot of the things we've seen, or we knew about, but kind of put away in your memory box. ... It was a good reminder of some of the things from the past, and I thoroughly enjoyed it." (F, Int. 20)

"...for the most part what really interests me are items that I was alive to have witnessed. Like Kermit the Frog was interesting to me because I was six or seven years old when Sesame Street started and around that era." (M, Int. 16)

"That's the only thing that I stood, I stopped, and looked at, that and the clock. ... Just appreciation for the craftsmanship." (M, Int. 17)

"I really liked the jug with the poem on it. I just thought it was a really interesting act of like protest and craftsmanship. And I really liked that." (F2, Int. 22)

One of the major themes delivered to visitors by the exhibition was one of progress and change over the span of American history, the "look how far we've come" idea:

"Just the growth and industrialization and the effort, the work, the hard work that came in, and all the different trades that people brought together to make the country what it is." (F, Int. 8)

"Big story of America? We're always changing. Evolution. We're just a growing nation. We're progressing. Innovators too. Rapidly, technology-wise. ...We've come a long way, a long, long way." (All, Int. 7)

A subordinate observation, for some thoughtful visitors to the exhibit, was one of social inclusion and building awareness for diverse voices in the historical narrative:

"We were just saying, 'I wonder how much they [visitors' grandchildren] have learned about slavery. I don't think they're taught all that, their history in school, so much anymore. It's learning how to take tests, and I'm hoping that they have enough patience to absorb some of this stuff because it's important. (F, Int 20)

When questioned about the organization and layout of the exhibition most visitors enjoyed the more open-ended format, without an overtly directed pathway, but they typically agreed that starting with the earlier objects made the most sense to properly grasp the chronology of the exhibition. Visitors generally found the design and lighting attractive and inviting. Some visitors did make comments about the dimness of the lighting in some parts of the exhibit, however they understood the conservation concerns that were tied to these lighting choices. Similarly, questions about the cleanliness and upkeep of the exhibit elicited only positive responses from visitors, who found things well maintained and properly cared for.

“I guess the thing was when I first came in, it was knowing to go to the right, and that’s where it started. I think, you know, if there’s some sort of direction to make you go that way would probably benefit people so they see the progression.” (F, Int. 11)

“It’s certainly darker than perhaps people want it to, but I understand that there’s reasons that the light, you know, don’t overexpose the objects. So, you have some limitations there for preservation’s sake. Perhaps, maybe, if it’s possible to find another way to find better lighting, that would be a suggestion.” (M, Int. 23)

Not all visitors noticed the “posting place” within the exhibit. Those who did see the area to contribute suggestions usually read the comments of others and frequently decided to post an idea. The majority of visitor contributions were tied to personal history and past experiences, often with popular culture aspects.

“Yes, I saw that. No (she didn’t contribute). I would have to think about that for a while. I was wondering if you actually ever take people’s suggestions and put them in?” (F, Int. 3)

When visitors were asked to provide a rating (1:Poor 2:Fair 3:Good 4:Excellent 5:Superior) for the *American Stories* exhibition they consistently scored the exhibit in the four/Excellent range. Comments seemed to indicate that in order to elicit a five/Superior rating visitors had an expectation that they would be “wowed” in some way, such as seeing something completely unexpected or impressively imposing.

“I’d say four (Excellent). Yeah. I think there’s a lot of interesting things, but I didn’t see anything that was like, ‘Oh, my gosh, that’s \_\_\_\_\_!’” (F, Int. 18)

“I’d give it a four (Excellent). Because I guess it didn’t ‘WOW’ me. Maybe something about, maybe the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum may ‘WOW’ me, maybe this one wasn’t a ‘WOW’, except the Apple IIE computer sitting over there.” (M, Int. 19)



## Discussion

On the whole, as quantified by the survey data and explicated by the qualitative interviews, visitors to *American Stories* enjoyed the exhibition as a well-organized (i.e., chronological with date and era markers) introduction to American history that was familiar to them. It brought back memories through the inclusion of iconic objects as well as familiar objects to which they could relate. Comments about progress and social inclusion quoted above are some of what translated in the survey into giving American visitors a sense of pride in America. Many had come to *American Stories* after seeing the *Star-Spangled Banner* exhibition, and this exhibition may have reinforced their feelings of pride and patriotism.

Visitors found the exhibition an enjoyable, digestible summation of their existing American history knowledge coupled with memorable pop cultural elements and familiar objects that they could easily connect to personally.

Some of the features incorporated in the exhibition supported sought-after experiences. Lighting and the organization of the exhibition itself, e.g., by historic era, supported the experience of being moved by beauty. The introduction as a whole supported pride in America, and music in the exhibition supported gaining information, imagining other times or places, and reflecting on meaning.

Most visitors acknowledged the clean, well-maintained look of the exhibition space, while photos of people on the walls, the overall exhibition design, and the opportunity to leave a note/opinion (“posting place”) were highly rated.

However the exhibition also left some visitors disappointed because it did not enrich their understanding to the degree that they would have liked. While many of the ‘ordinary’ objects in the exhibition appear to have had an emotional resonance with visitors, the apparent lack of spectacular objects was a disappointment. And, on balance, the exhibition came out with a typical rating for exhibitions.

## Appendix A.

### Interviews with Visitors to American Stories

On three separate days during May, 2012 OP&A staff conducted a series of entrance, exit, and within exhibit interviews with visitors to the *American Stories* exhibit. A total of twenty-seven interviews were recorded. The following is a qualitative overview of the interview content.

- ***Overall visitors found the exhibition a fun, digestible summation of their existing American history knowledge coupled with memorable pop cultural elements that they could easily connect to personally.***
  - “I loved the progression. I loved the progression. It gave you a quick overview. ... Other people coming from other countries, I think it’d be wonderful, just to get a quick overview of how we’ve progressed. Unbelievable.” (F, Int. 20)
  - “This was a quick overview which was fun, and I think you have to have a little bit of the fun thing in with the serious. ... Memories of things we’ve learned in school, ourselves. It was history. It was a refresher. It was a refresher for a lot of the things we’ve seen, or we knew about, but kind of put away in your memory box. ... It was a good reminder of some of the things from the past, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.” (F, Int. 20)
  - “It was a pretty good representation of the last 150 years. It makes me feel good. I’m proud to be an American, and it’s kind of a history of who we are, so it’s kind of fun to look at and see.” (M, Int. 25)
  - “Some of the things brought us back. Memories. Especially the computer. And the music. ...It was a good time.” (All, Int. 7)
  - “I feel like it sets the stage. Expectations are high now.” (M, Int. 21)
  - “The others, I recalled things about the history and learned things from it.” (M, Int. 1)
  - “Everything was pretty good. We enjoyed this. It brought us back to a lot of things. It did bring us back. It made me feel actually older and I’m only 35.” (All, Int. 7)
  - “I liked the progression that it made from the beginning all the way through current...I think it flows well. Of course it’s hard to pick one thing from a certain era. I liked it.” (F, Int. 11)
  - “I think it’s like a timeline of America.” (F, Int. 24)
  - “It’s just kind of like a timeline, just stuff of each, certain era of history. I’d tell them that’s what it is. The famous stuff, mainly, through each part of history.” (M, Int. 24)
  - “Not much, not since I’ve been out of school, not really. Like stuff I see and I’m like, “Oh, we learned about that in school.” And that’s really cool, but...” (F, Int. 24)

- “It was a pretty good representation of the last 150 years. It makes me feel good. I’m proud to be an American and it’s kind of a history of who we are, so it’s kind of fun to look at and see.” (M, Int. 25)
- “It’s about little, symbolic things from the different time periods.” (M, Int. 27)
- “Is this exhibit more a time capsule?” (F, Int. 27) “I don’t think they got the stuff out of a time capsule.” (M, Int. 27) “Well, I mean, should the stuff in here be in a time capsule, could it be in a time capsule, is that what they’re trying to do in this exhibit, to show everyday things from everyday people. I mean, you’d need bazillions more stuff. I mean, more room to show everyday things. But all these things seem to be things done by famous people, not just your everyday person from what I’ve seen. Well, we’ve got that urn over there. Well, jeepers, I don’t have anything like that, now he’s from a slave, as I recall. ... Well, that’s true a slave probably wasn’t [famous], but he did pretty good quality work.” (F, Int. 27)
- ***A major theme delivered to some visitors by the exhibition was one of progress and change over the span of American history, the “look how far we’ve come” idea.***
  - “That’s contemporary America. Here we are in 2012, you could almost expand it beyond that old Apple computer. We’ve come so far.” (F, Int. 20)
  - “Big story of America? We’re always changing. Evolution. We’re just a growing nation. We’re progressing. Innovators too. Rapidly, technology-wise. ...We’ve come a long way, a long, long way.” (All, Int. 7)
  - “I don’t get a patriotic thing, I get more the history of it. Just progress and change from industrial type things. Things to be proud of that we were able to develop those things. Pride. Patriotism to me is more the government and things like that. There’s definitely pride out of seeing things in here, but not to me a patriotism, a flag-waving type thing...but the accomplishments are not so much the government to me and this shows that they were industrialists and things like that that did them.” (M, Int. 1)
  - “I guess it tells their story is what we’re having, and how things have progressed.” (M, Int. 1)
  - “Just the growth and industrialization and the effort, the work, the hard work that came in, and all the different trades that people brought together to make the country what it is.” (F, Int. 8)
  - “I would say that it told a story. I like how there are different time transitions that carry us to pretty much modern day period. And I found it extremely nostalgic.” (M, Int. 21)
  - “The typewriter, I thought was really cool, actually. How different it is from what we use now. I mean overall everything was really, kind of told that story, but for me, that was kind the one piece that I...” (F, Int. 21)

- ***A subordinate observation for some thoughtful visitors to the exhibit was one of social inclusion and building awareness for diverse voices in the historical narrative.***
  - “Oh, I guess some of the black baseball displays that they had there, that was new stuff for me.” (M, Int. 1)
  - “I think I’m learning more about the different cultures. I kind of get the feeling I’m being force-fed some of it. But that’s also maybe my background as a person that didn’t experience a lot of the things and also didn’t want to learn about it. I didn’t seek it out on my own, unfortunately. I feel ok. I feel learning about it, but it does seem to be dominating the Smithsonian, in general nowadays. Maybe it appears dominating to me because I don’t spend the time with the other exhibits as much because I know those things already. That might be why. But the newer learning that I’m getting is from those types of exhibits...some of the industrial development, as workers’ rights were moving in, those type things were newer, and those were some of the ones.” (M, Int. 1)
  - “I really enjoyed...learning a little bit more about how Chinese immigrants, what had happened to them afterwards as well, of course we had a similar experience in Canada, to see how they were forced to move across the country and what not. I thought that was very interesting.” (F, Int. 3)
  - “Now I see that Natalie donated her dress. Can you just donate stuff? I didn’t know that. So, you can just donate?...Ok, that’s pretty cool. Ok. Interesting.” (F, Int. 7)
  - “I like stories. I liked the fact that it didn’t say, ‘This was made by an African-American slave.’ It brought it home to me that Dave was a real man and it personalized it, so. Yeah, I liked the question.” (F, Int. 10)
  - “We were just saying, ‘I wonder how much they’ve [visitors’ grandchildren] have learned about slavery. I don’t think they’re taught all that, their history in school, so much anymore. It’s learning how to take tests, and I’m hoping that they have enough patience to absorb some of this stuff because it’s important. ...We think in our lifetime some of this horrible stuff was still going, it still goes on, and it’s really important to be, and the awareness is extremely important.” (F, Int. 20)
  - “As [visitor name] said we both believe that we are the results of our history no matter what it is. You can pick some obvious ones like color, male/female, even in this society we think we’re all even and equal, and still there’s differences. [visitor name] grew up in a time where, for the most part, even after World War II, obviously, but woman were kind of looked at as the homemakers and the old man was the one who went out and worked in the factories.” (M, Int. 20)  
“Yeah, I had a career as a dental hygienist and I didn’t, I was the only one in my town and towns around because at, then, I graduated from high school in 1960, you were either a teacher, a librarian, or a nurse. There wasn’t much opportunity, so I was kind of the rebel, going to dental hygiene school.” (F, Int.

20) “Today you can pretty much be anything you want and nobody’s going to look at you and say, ‘Well, that’s not really for you.’” (M, Int. 20)

- ***When visitors were asked what they liked the most in the exhibit they generally referenced specific items from popular culture because these gave rise to family memories and nostalgia.***
  - Popular Culture in general
  - “Oh, it’s just something from my childhood. I have much older siblings, so things that I was raised with, my life, in my lifetime, I find interesting and fun. ...My history, yep.” (F, Int. 8)
  - “Seeing things that they can relate to. When you talk to an eighth grader about a museum they don’t understand a lot of the things that are there, so you’ve got to hit some of the pop culture, some of the Babe Ruth stuff, Dorothy’s red slippers, that type of thing to get them in the door.” (M, Int. 1)
  - “To see things that I grew up with like Dorothy’s slippers, Kermit the Frog. I liked the Slinky one up here and the Rubik’s cube because those are things I remember. And the display with all the modern music as well as the old music because I still records, I still have 35s still too from a long time ago, from my grandparents.” (F, Int. 26)
  
  - Interactivity
  - “You want to make it interesting for the young people to have some of the “hands on” and see some of the fun things.” (F, Int. 20)
  - “Well, it’s the nature of my business, I took notice of the interactive, the plasma or the display that was touch sensitive. That’s what we do for a living, so I noticed the implementation of that. I noticed how the kids gravitated towards it.” (M, Int. 17)
  
  - Television (Archie Bunker’s chair, Kermit the Frog, etc.)
  - “Some of it I liked was the contemporary stuff like Archie Bunker’s seat. I got a kick of seeing that.” (M, Int. 4)
  - “It was alright. I liked Archie’s chair. And the Clemente jersey.” (M, Int. 24)
  - “Archie Bunker’s chair! Because we used to watch him.” (M, Int. 20)
  - “...for the most part what really interests me are items that I was alive to have witnessed. Like Kermit the Frog was interesting to me because I was six or seven years old when Sesame Street started and around that era.” (M, Int. 16)
  
  - Unique Household Items (Typewriter, Sewing Machine, etc.)
  - “Yeah, and Bob Dylan’s jacket, that little area was nice...I liked the bit about the early typewriter with the flower on it meaning that it was for women. That it was meant for the home and for women, and which, I learned to type at home, so I guess so.” (F, Int. 4)

- “I like the shoes and the teapot. And the Singer sewing machine. Aw, just because, that’s, you know, I grew up watching and I love tea and I sew. All personal, yes, definitely.” (F, Int. 19)
- Music (Sony Walkman, iPod, 45s, etc.)
- “And we grew up with music, so music was a part of the first date, music was part of when we got married, what was played when we got married, when my children were born, it was like what song was playing. When my father and grandmother died it was the first song that I heard after they died that pulls on my heart, and when people die I play music that they loved, so music speaks the universal language.” (F1, Int. 12)
- “Music ties into memory and history. And feelings and emotions. The Beatles and actually the Bee Gees also frame the work of the music that they’re talking about right now.” (F1, F2, Int. 12)
- “I’d say the different music, from the 45 record player to the Walkman to the iPod.” (F, Int. 18)
- “What I liked best? The things that I actually had in my lifetime. The Sony Walkman and the Apple IIE computer. I just thought it was kind of funny that here I was at my stage of my life and that’s already in a museum.” (M, Int. 19)
- Film (The Ruby Slippers)
- “Well, I came to see the Ruby Slippers, but I’m confused that if Fonzie’s jacket isn’t here again, I’m just not going to be happy. This is the second visit in two months.” (F2, Int. 12)
- “The shoes. Dorothy’s shoes. I mean, it’s just cool because I, like, I loved that movie when I grew up, so it’s just kind of a cool thing to see.” (F3, Int. 13)
- “And then Dorothy’s shoe? I can’t believe that. I was like, ‘Wow! That’s what it looked like?’ It’s even ripping on the bottom. I’m like, ‘It’s real shoes people wore.’” (F, Int. 7)
- Sports (Roberto Clemente’s jersey, Babe Ruth’s baseball, etc.)
- “So, that puts...Roberto Clemente was one of my favorite players growing up, and I remember when he died in the plane crash. So, to be able to see something and it just connected to me, so more so than here. I enjoy history, but that, but there is something that I really wanted to see and I just felt a need to see that.” (M, Int. 16)
- “I enjoyed the more modern stuff. Things that were more my parents’ era. I enjoyed the Roberto Clemente jersey. Just things that I could relate to. ... I spent most of my time on that end, so I enjoyed the more modern things.” (M, Int. 16)
- “My thing has still been the pop culture type things. For me personally, yes. That baseball, more so than anything else.” (M, Int. 1)

- “Old memorabilia. That’s, you know... Things like Babe Ruth’s baseball. Things like that.” (M, Int. 18)
- “Some of the sports memorabilia was kind of fun for me. I enjoyed that.” (M, Int. 25)
- ***However, some discussed objects from earlier points in history that were also singled out as favorites. The selection reasons for these objects usually centered on the craftsmanship of the object or the object’s association with a historical figure.***
  - Skill
  - “I liked the antique clock with the lunar calendar on the back of it.” (M, Int. 7)
  - “I find the clothes to be fascinating, the things that people wore, and the tools in their homes and things. I find that all fascinating. ... Well, for two reasons, one, how much things have changed, but how much they’ve stayed the same. The things that we still use in our homes, they used then, the pitchers and the dishes. And how different we dress now, and how the quality of their garments, the thickness and the craftsmanship that goes into everything that we just take for granted now. It’s so easy now for us to now with all our machinery. All the effort that went into things.” (F, Int. 8)
  - “That’s the only thing that I stood, I stopped, and looked at, that and the clock. ... Just appreciation for the craftsmanship.” (M, Int. 17)
  - “The clock was as interesting as anything. Just the fact that it was one of the first clockmakers in the U.S. because they’ve been making clocks in Europe for so long.” (M, Int. 15)
  - “Oh, that clock. Yes, if I had to say my favorite thing there, that clock was just amazing. It was big! I’ve never seen a clock that had the square like that. You know I just think of a regular grandfather clock that you see the front. It was huge. I loved it!” (F1, Int. 22)
  - “I really liked the jug with the poem on it. I just thought it was a really interesting act of like protest and craftsmanship. And I really liked that.” (F2, Int. 22)
  - Famous People
  - “I’ve read a lot about Benjamin Franklin, so I really enjoyed seeing some of the artifacts that were owned by him. That’s really interesting.” (M, Int. 23)
  - “Either the Benjamin Franklin outfit and whatnot, that information there, or the Nauvoo temple sunstone was kind of cool to see. Those are probably the things I liked best.” (M, Int. 25)
  - “I like personal objects. Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone is pretty incredible. You know, it’s his. He touched it. He made it. He made this thing there. And Ben Franklin’s walking stick, you know, it’s a personal item. Ali’s gloves. I mean it’s just personal, that they touched and used.” (M, Int. 9)

- Other People
- “I liked the African-American slave part just because our students are all African-American. That’s personal to me.” (F, Int. 9)
- “Honestly, what I loved was the jar, like the giant clay pot, and I loved it because it asked a question that engaged me, otherwise I would have just walked through...and it made me stop and pause for reflection and it made me want to read more. After it asked the question, ‘What do you notice about this jar?’ I learned that it was made by a slave who was defying the law by actually writing and engaging in literacy. So, it got me excited. I was like, ‘You go, Dave!’ So, it made me what to read even more.” (F, Int. 10)
- ***When questioned about the organization and layout of the exhibition most visitors enjoyed the more open-ended format, without an overtly directed pathway, but they typically agreed that starting with the earlier objects made the most sense to properly grasp the chronology of the exhibit.***
  - “It was very easy to flow through I thought with the dates up on the wall.” (M, Int. 20)
  - “If people go counter-clockwise in this I think it’s more fun because you end up with the fun stuff at the end. I think if you started with the fun stuff that gave us all a chuckle and came around it might seem a little bit “ho hum,” but I think if most people went this way, counter-clockwise, it would really be a little more interesting.” (F, Int. 20)
  - “I saw that date, and I could see later dates here, so we went in this way, but I would say to get the most out of it [the exhibit] starting at the earlier dates and working your way up because that’s how history progressed. It didn’t go from 1950 back to 1776.” (M, Int. 20)
  - “I love it. Easy. Easy to walk through. It’s a good visual. It’s very enticing. I don’t know. I wanted to walk in. I was coming here, but it wouldn’t have mattered. This was the exhibit we were coming to, but I looked and it was so welcoming. I think the color was vibrant, the layout was dynamic, and it was very 3-dimensional looking, so it wasn’t static. It was like, “Oh, it’s alive!” (F1,F2, Int. 12)
  - “And it’s easy to read the things that you have that you want to explain, that you want to read, itself it’s easy to read. It’s not like a book, so to speak. So, very nice. I can get educated in a quick time and space.” (F1, Int. 12)
  - “I love it [the exhibit]. I like the layout. I like its simplicity.” (F, Int. 10)
  - “I prefer to read the context. It’s very accessible. The text is very accessible and easy to understand. It gives a nice snapshot, I thought. It’s very well done.” (F, Int. 3)
  - “Oh, they are well-written and interesting.” (referring to label texts) (M, Int. 1)



- “I guess the thing was when I first came in, it was knowing to go to the right, and that’s where it started. I think, you know, if there’s some sort of direction to make you go that way would probably benefit people so they see the progression.” (F, Int. 11)
- “A little confusing. A little confusing. Yes, because it’s, the open, I don’t know. Disjointed? Open format? I’m not sure.” (F1, Int. 13)
- “I just think there’s so much, you don’t know, ‘Should I go there?’ ‘Should I go there?’, there’s just so much...so...yeah.” (F3, Int. 13)
- “It’s too random for me. It’s open-ended and random, but some people might like that.” (F1, Int. 14)
- “I think it’s fine. This is the first part we’ve been into here. No, that’s fine. There’s no system to the actual age is there really? You go around and then there are all different things in the middle. It doesn’t go in chronological order, does it, really? Well, it starts here and it goes right, chronologically around the outside, but then, the pieces in the inside are not chronological, am I right? That was my impression.” (M, Int. 15)
- “If there’s a nice object, you read about it. You want to see the story behind it. (F) ... No, I think it’s very well done. No, no, your text is not too long. That’s fine. Anybody wants to learn more about it they buy a book.” (M, Int. 15)
- “I started, I went backwards actually. I didn’t realize there was a chronological order, so I went backwards.” (M, Int. 16)
- “For me it was con..., on the left-hand side it was confusing because I came in in the middle, and I can see now it goes around from right to left and it makes more sense to me, but when I walked in, I’m left-handed and I walked into the left and there were exhibits everywhere, so it was kind of confusing there, but I didn’t mind that. I’m not in a hurry, and I figured it out.” (M, Int. 16)
- “You’re asking me questions I didn’t really think about. I just wandered around. I mean, was there a timeline...I’m assuming there ...or is it just kind of scattered? I mean I couldn’t...I didn’t stop to try and figure out if there was some kind of progression. I just wandered, what caught my eye. But now that I’m looking at it, is there supposed to be an IN and an OUT? I kind of like the wander idea. Just like when I was in the Air & Space I mean they have these definite “Start Here,” “End Here.” This is more organic, you know? It’s O.K. to be that way. I used to be a teacher, so, students are much, you know, the attention span of young people is so short, following something they just don’t do that very well anymore. Us older folks expect it to follow a path, but just wandering...I liked it. I mean I love American history, so...” (M, Int. 17)
- “Very easy to follow. No problem at all. Well, it was just like the things you’ve got against the wall just kind of started us from the very beginning, and we just work our way around the room. (M, Int. 19)
- “Just bounce around. That’s kind of what I really liked about it. Yeah, you can just go from place to place.” (M, Int. 19)

- “I feel as if you enter from the right and as you transition to the left it gets more and more modern.” (M, Int. 21)
  - (When asked about the timeline) “I saw it as we were walking up, but I didn’t pay attention to it when we were in there. But that made me know to start over there actually, even more so than the stuff on the wall. When I saw the numbers across the top that was, made me know to start over there.” (F, Int. 21)
  - “I thought that it had a good flow. I just didn’t like to follow it. I just liked to bounce around.” (F2, Int. 22)
  - “It felt like there was a pattern to it, and it just wasn’t random chaos, but you were never really sure what you were looking at without looking at the signs. Yeah, it all went together.” (M1, Int. 22)
  - “I think the center was a little confusing because other than the center you kind of go around and that’s how you go through history, but then you want to jump over to the center and you’re not sure how that goes with the timeline.” (F2, Int. 22)
  - “That might be good. So, if you knew where to go to next. If you like a certain area and then you’d know where, ‘Oh, if I go to this floor or this building I can find out more. Yeah.” (F1, Int. 22)
  - “I guess if there was a criticism that would be my only one. It was somewhat disjointed making your way through the exhibit. I didn’t think it flowed as well as it possibly could, but you know it’s a long period of time to cover in one exhibit, so there are certainly some constraints with better ways to do it. Maybe perhaps the theme of the exhibit didn’t carry. I mean I understand that it’s just the last, you know, well the 200 years of our country’s history, but yeah, just from one to the next, I didn’t think the continuation is a good as maybe it could be. But it was still very well done.” (M, Int. 23)
- ***Visitors responding to an inquiry about the title of the exhibit, “American Stories”, replied in various ways. The name did not seem to direct people’s thoughts in any one specific direction.***
    - “We weren’t sure when we saw *American Stories* if it was chronological or if it was just a compilation of different stories.” (F, Int. 20) “A hodgepodge of things.” (M, Int. 20) “That’s what I thought it might be. ... We should go check it out, basically, and then I realized. I didn’t know what kind of stories. It’s kind of ambiguous *American Stories*. I mean about cars or going to the moon??” (F, Int. 20) “But, there’s so many here.” (M, Int. 20) “Maybe if it said something like, *A progression of life in America* or something because we didn’t know what it was, but we gravitated toward it because we just got done with the Jefferson exhibit.” (F, Int. 20)
    - “Yes, I noticed it. I wonder if you might put, start with your 1776 to whatever your latest date is just so when they see the stories they appreciate that it’s a time-oriented thing.” (M, Int. 20)

- “In reading the title the first thing that comes to mind, again it’s an encompassing title because every single piece of history in there, one thing led to another, essentially it’s the story of us.” (M, Int. 21)
- “I think it makes it really personal because we always learn about American history as something that happened to other people at a different time, but in this same area, and *American Stories* it’s more like stories of Americans just like us, so I really like that.” (F, Int. 22)
- “I think we were looking more for stuff on Appalachia.” (M, Int. 4) “Yeah, that’s what I was hoping would be here with it being *American Stories*.” (F, Int. 4)
- “I don’t know how to answer that because I’m just saying I’m interested just to see what it was that you thought was *American Stories*, so I didn’t know what I was getting into when I came to look.” (F1, Int. 12)
- “No, I never really looked at the title. I was looking for an area that we could start in basically.” (M, Int. 15)
- “Well, that’s what drew me here when I was looking at it on the map, I saw *American Stories* and that intrigued me. (Had the exhibit circled on his map of the museum.) So, I saw that, so the title is something that pulled me in. Actually I, when I, I didn’t realize until I started getting around to the right that it was stories of our entire American heritage. I was thinking it was just probably more, I think, I’m trying to think if I knew what was up here. I don’t know, I was just thinking just artifacts from historical places in time, I guess. And so that’s why I enjoyed coming here; I wanted to come here and see different things that... for the most part what really interests me are items that I was alive to have witnessed.” (M, Int. 16)
- “I was curious, just because, you know, you have this thing here (gestures to Lunch Counter program) that they’re setting up for their...so, I’m thinking, well, are these African-American stories? I mean the color scheme kind of has that feel. I wasn’t quite sure what, if it was nations of, I couldn’t quite tell what that meant exactly. Because of that I felt it might have been, not that it was a problem, but that was my initial feeling.” (M, Int. 17)
- “It really didn’t. I didn’t know what we were getting into when we... A lit bit, yeah. There’s not a heck of a lot of different eras. It’s a little bit for every era, but not, it’s not extensive, but it is the American story, isn’t it?” (M, Int. 18)
- “I’m not sure I even noticed it because we kind of walked in from the side, over there.” (F, Int. 18)
- “I actually didn’t notice it. I guess in reading the title, the first thing that comes to mind, again, is, I feel like it’s an encompassing title because every single piece of history in there, one thing led to another. And, essentially it’s the story of us.
- “I didn’t notice till you pointed that way. It makes sense though.” (M2, Int. 22)
- “No, I had a rough idea of what to expect. Just different snapshots of the country’s history, but I had seen a lot of these different pieces in other exhibits because I’ve been here before.” (M, Int. 23)

- ***When asked about the design and lighting of the exhibit visitors generally found it attractive and inviting. Some visitors did make comments about the dimness of the lighting in some parts of the exhibit, however they understood the conservation concerns that were tied to these lighting choices.***
  - “We both have a little trouble seeing in low light, so we might have liked a little more...but I appreciate you have a light damage issue to deal with.” (M, Int. 20)
  - “I don’t know about the new design of museums. It must be what they’re being taught, but the old idea, the old display areas where there were a lot more displays and not as much pizzazz. Too much open space. Too few items. Every museum in the country is going to this type of style. Oh, just the storyboards and that. They are telling the story more. I want to walk into a museum and see a line of 20 cars [or objects] and look at those.” (M, Int. 1)
  - “It’s pretty dull. It is pretty dull. The exhibits are lit up. (F) The exhibits are lit up, but it is pretty dull. There some bits that you’ve got to get right to read the thing. You could do a wee bit more lighting round about the reading items. You had to be right at them, and if there’s a few people around them you can’t get at them.” (M, Int. 15)
  - “I could read everything. I noticed, like Archie Bunker’s chair, I was here about 20 some years ago; it wasn’t in a case back then, was it? I kind of remember... and it’s interesting all these pieces that had been sitting out before now are preserved, so people can’t get at them. And it makes sense. But, no, they were fine. I could see everything.” (M, Int. 16)
  - “It seems, seems kind of, pretty modern actually.” (F, Int. 18)
  - “A little bit more lighting here, but I’m sure they do that for reasons so it doesn’t fade out the clothing, but I like to sew, so I’d like to see the stitching, the fine details.” (F, Int. 19)
  - “They were fine. Easy to see. Work around. If there were a lot of people there, you could always go look at another view of it.” (M, Int. 19)
  - “Easy to read.” (F, Int. 19)
  - “I looked more probably the objects that you had in the cases, than I did the titles. And the dates, I did look at that, but the titles, No.” (M, Int. 19)
  - “I feel like the lighting’s fine. You can read everything that’s inside. If anything I feel as if the subtle darkness sort of sets the mood. It puts me, puts your mind at ease. I think it’s a little less distracting. It allows you to actually reminisce.” (M, Int. 21)
  - “I mean it is dark, but I read the little sign that it needs to be dark to protect the pieces, but I didn’t think it was uncomfortably dark, difficult to see anything.” (F2, Int. 22)
  - “I don’t really like the color scheme because it looks like it doesn’t fit with the rest of it. It’s like, ‘Oh, that little block right there, *American Stories*, everything else purple.’” (F2, Int. 22)

- “It’s certainly darker than perhaps people want it to, but I understand that there’s reasons that the light, you know, don’t overexpose the objects. So, you have some limitations there for preservation’s sake. Perhaps, maybe, if it’s possible to find another way to find better lighting, that would be a suggestion.” (M, Int. 23)
- “Well, one thing because I didn’t look real closely at the exhibit, but the Benjamin Franklin outfit. I’m assuming that’s a representation of what, that wasn’t an actual, it wasn’t clear. At first it said it was his, at least that’s the way it appeared and as I dug deeper I thought, ‘Well, maybe not.’ I don’t know if that’s a critical thing, but I was looking to see if that was something he had actually worn.” (M, Int. 17)
- ***Questions about the cleanliness and upkeep of the exhibit elicited only positive responses from visitors, who found things well maintained and properly cared for.***
  - (When queried directly about cleanliness, fingerprints.) “I didn’t notice that at all. No.” (F, Int. 4)
  - “Oh yes. I think all your museums look as if they’re being taken care of.” (F, M, Int. 15)
  - (When queried directly about maintenance and upkeep.) “Very well. Yes.” (M, F, Int. 18)
- ***Not all visitors noticed the Posting places within the exhibit. Those who did see the area to contribute suggestions usually read the comments of others and frequently decided to post an idea. The majority of visitor contributions were tied to personal history and past experiences, often with popular culture aspects.***
  - “Yes, I saw that. No (she didn’t contribute). I would have to think about that for a while. I was wondering if you actually ever take people’s suggestions and put them in?” (F, Int. 3)
  - “I did (see the posting place), but I didn’t take a close look at it...I saw some drawings and such. It looked like people did it on computers, so I thought it was something you did from home. It looked like a computer print out. No, I didn’t see the invitation (to contribute).” (F, Int. 4)
  - (When asked if she added to the Posting Place.) “No, I did not.” (When asked what she’d give from her life to the museum to be part of American history.) “Wow, I don’t know. Probably my roller skates. I say that because I roller-skated as a child, and I kept my roller skates, and I kept them in pristine condition, and my 14-year old daughter now roller skates and she uses my skates. So, it was something that I passed on through the generations. ... I passed the love of doing that on to my own daughter.” (F, Int. 8)
  - (When asked about coming to the Posting Place.) “I came at the end... I read the back side as I was walking around...I put up ‘American Bandstand’ because it did so much for the growth of the United States, both socially, culturally, you know,

- segregation, integration, and all of that, and I think it, you know, and music. It kind of covers everything.” (F, Int. 11)
- (When asked about coming to the Posting Place.) “Halfway through the exhibit. Yes [read contributions of others]. It looked to me that a lot of them were written by kids because there were things that were very current, and when I’m looking at the overall of what we want to remember about America, to me, for me growing up, since I’m older, of course, to me it was the Beatles because they changed my life. And they also changed the course of music and the lives of people, so to me the Beatles made a very big impact on my life.” (F, Int. 12)
  - (When asked about coming to the Posting Place.) “Halfway. We already went all the way (gestures). We went right, instead of left. I don’t know why. (When asked if they read other comments.) Yes. Yes. (When asked if they contributed.) Yes. Uh-huh.” (F1, F2, F3, Int. 13)
  - “Instead of having the write, where you write out and put your opinion [Posting Place], I would suggest having that the last thing or at the end that way everyone will get to see everything and get a clue of what to do, instead of having it in the middle. So you start there, and then you go to the middle, and you don’t know what’s over there. So you have it at the end, if there’s an end to go to.” (F3, Int. 14)
  - “No, I didn’t take note of that.” (M, Int. 15)
  - “I probably didn’t even see it. It was probably right where I was supposed to come out, so I didn’t see it.” (M, Int. 16)
  - “I missed that.” (M, Int. 17)
  - “I did see that. Yeah. I read a couple, and they were from kids that said, some of them said kind of silly things. One of said he’d like to see ‘Girls’.” (F, Int. 18)
  - “I saw it, but I skipped right by it. I was more interested in what was already here as opposed to what was not here.” (M, Int. 19)
  - “We missed that. We missed that.” (M, F, Int. 20)
  - “I had not noticed that. I didn’t either.” (M, F, Int. 21)
  - “Write what you want? I participated. I actually wrote computers, and then I went over to the other side and saw that you have the Apple IIE because that’s obviously a huge part of American history.” (M2, Int. 22)
  - “I read some. I looked at them. Justin Bieber. I think you could leave him out for a while.” (M1, F2, Int. 22)
  - “I saw a couple that were about empowerment of women, one specifically roller derby. I don’t know that much about roller derby, but just any sort of Women’s Rights Movement thing. All I saw in here about women was a quinceanera dress and that to me isn’t what women’s culture...oh, and Ruby Slippers. Fancy shoes and a pretty dress doesn’t scream American, strong women to me.” (F2, Int. 22)
  - “I didn’t see that.” (M, Int. 23)

- “I noticed that. I just glanced at it to see what people, the suggestions they made, but I didn’t spend a lot of time looking at it. But I did notice that.” (F, Int. 23)
  - “Or the little message board. I didn’t stop and look at that. It says something like ‘What is missing?’ and that’s all I saw. I didn’t stop. High school kids surrounded it, so I didn’t stop and look at it. ... That is a really good question. Maybe more from 1776 and that area, maybe? You know ‘Forming a New Nation’ there’s some information there, but I think that’s what started it all, so that’s what I would like to see.” (M, Int. 25)
  - (Asked what the visitor would add.) “Pictures of them in use. Things being used. Like a toy they had here, somebody actually doing it because, like, the Walkman, you see it sitting, but kids that have not ever seeing it before might not know that you wear it on your thing and you jogged with it. Because I remember the big deal when I was a kid was getting a Walkman that you could do reserve on because at one time, you had to take the cassette out, flip it, and put it back in, and you usually ended up dropping it. But some the stuff they might look at and never have seen it in use, so maybe even having just a picture of a regular kid taken on, you know, the square pictures at the time next to the objects, so people could see that kids actually played with them and how they were played with. Because a Slinky would be great, but if it’s just there and not actually showing it, how it works, or a kid actually playing with it, some kids might now know. They might walk right by a display, but pictures of other kids I think interest kids too. I know my daughter stopped at all the ones with babies in them. So, anything with a baby in it made her stop and really look. Like there was a slave holding a baby upstairs, and that even drew her to get her girlfriend, ‘Look there’s a baby being held by a black slave.’” (F, Int. 26)
  - “I’ll tell you there is some weird stuff up here. Guns. Guns. Candy, free candy. Jell-o.” (M, Int. 27)
  - “I just wanted to see what other people were saying. I haven’t been all the way around, so I don’t know what’s not here.” (F, Int. 27)
- ***When visitors were asked to provide a rating (1:Poor 2:Fair 3:Good 4:Excellent 5:Superior) for the American Stories exhibit they consistently scored the exhibit in the four/Excellent range. Comments seemed to indicate that in order to elicit a five/Superior rating visitors had an expectation that they would be “wowed” in some way, such as seeing something completely unexpected or impressively imposing.***
    - “I’d give it a four (Excellent). I wouldn’t put it at the top because I like seeing articles more. Like, for instance, the Space Museum and the airplane thing I think you can see that all the kids are there today. ... There’s nothing specific. I like the way it’s laid out, especially around the outside. No, it’s just. I like more exhibits. I like the big, you know, if you’ve got exhibits it’s nice to see them and

if for something takes your eye, you can read about it. And the bigger the object, the better. It keeps everybody going round.” (M, Int. 15)

- “Probably about a four (Excellent). I...probably more interactive type things, and I’m not sure how you bring that in, with something a little more interactive at times. I was just at the Archives and I found the Document Room, which I didn’t even know; is the Vault, I think it’s called the Vault? I had never even known it was there. And I only had a few minutes, and I’m going to come back to that some day because there were so many different items that are, I mean, actually, in our modern history, that are there and things that I can see, maybe audio/visual, looking at it through TV or listening to the...I think if there were a few more things there that would probably intrigue me a little bit more. I know it’s hard to do with the right end, the older history. (He was asked if he had seen the touch table, and he had not noticed it.)” (M, Int. 16)
- “Four (Excellent). Because I’m hesitant. I don’t really know what a five would be, definitely not a one. I mean I didn’t really give it a good look over, I just kind of... I’m going to be, I’m going to assume it’s all real good. From what I saw it was nice.” (M, Int. 17)
- “Four (Excellent) to five (Superior). A four.” (M, Int. 18)
- “I’d say four (Excellent). Yeah. I think there’s a lot of interesting things, but I didn’t see anything that was like, ‘Oh, my gosh, that’s \_\_\_\_\_!’” (F, Int. 18)
- “I’d give it a four (Excellent). Because I guess it didn’t ‘WOW’ me. Maybe something about, maybe the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum may ‘WOW’ me, maybe this one wasn’t a ‘WOW’, except the Apple IIE computer sitting over there.” (M, Int. 19)
- “I would say the four (Excellent) also, simply because I don’t think anything is perfect, but you know, I thought everything was wonderful.” (F, Int. 19)
- “I’d say Excellent. And the other thing is, and it’s a little bit, maybe from our perspective, a little bit of the nature of this exhibit, um, we’re not seeing any Saturn 5 rockets or anything that really knock you off your feet.” (M, Int. 20)
- “Between Good and Excellent. Yes. Well, because we didn’t know, I didn’t know what I was going to be looking at, where over here you have Thomas Jefferson and Monticello.” (F, Int. 20)
- “I would rate it a five (Superior) actually. I’m not a person who smiles a lot, and there are a lot of things in there that actually made me smile. And I was amazed at the age of a lot of things, the shape that it’s in...it’s a testament to American workmanship. So, it made me feel good. My grandparents have a clock similar to that, but obviously nowhere near as old. It just brings back fond memories.” (M, Int. 21)
- “I’d give it a five (Superior). I liked it. To me this had a lot of interesting things that I enjoyed seeing.” (F1, Int. 22)
- “I’d give it at least a four (Excellent) plus. You know, five is, would be pretty extreme. Five is like you couldn’t do any better.” (M1, Int. 22)



- “Four (Excellent) sounds good.” (M2, Int. 22)
  - “Yeah, I’d say four (Excellent).” (F2, Int. 22)
  - “Relative to some of the other exhibits, perhaps it wasn’t as organized or maybe because it’s covering such a broad spectrum of things that is somewhat of a limitation. But I’d say good. So many of the exhibits here are so good, so relative to those...” (M, Int. 23)
- ***A few visitors used the interview as an opportunity to express more general opinions about messages communicated by the museum.***
    - “I think as American History (the museum) it does show, it should show, the path we’ve come down and all the things that we’ve had...the innovations, things that were innovations then and now they’ve come to be, so that’s... I think that telling the story of what we’ve come through in life is good. And also, will we continue? There’s no way we can have the speed of progress, I don’t think, in the future, but we still are progressing and changing things.” (M, Int. 1)
    - “I felt like it was worth coming back [to the museum]. As a Socialist and a Leftist it was hard for me to engage in a lot of patriotic things, and yet I don’t think that it’s so overdone that I couldn’t stomach it. American history for me has a lot of tragedy wrapped up into it, and the contradictions, and the hypocrisy is there, and so, I struggled whether or not to come back here. Yeah. Well, I have such a Howard Zinn perspective on history, so most history brings a burden to me, you know? Especially, when I live in my own, you know, my own bubble that is contradictory to mainstream experience. So, I came back, and I felt like it wasn’t too much for me to stomach. In fact, I felt like it didn’t really have a Left slant, but it had enough neutral interpretation of history that I felt good about coming back.” (F, Int. 10)
    - “This is what kind of brought me back. You’re going to laugh. So, there’s an exhibit downstairs that I saw with a lot of 50’s nostalgia, and the Hollywood, it wasn’t even necessarily 50’s but, it was like I saw Patsy Cline’s...um...Yes! It made me giggle. I really, I enjoyed that. And like Superman was there, you know. So it was a piece of American nostalgia that I connected with because I liked that era, so it was fun.” (F, Int. 10)
    - (Asked if the theme of change and progress was enough.) “I feel that I like that slant, about progress, and I think that is has to be presented very delicately. We’re living in a day and age where everybody has, everybody has a sponsor, everybody has a donor, you know, and we have to be very P.C., and I do think that this does OK job. Obviously, when you create a museum and you’re creating these exhibits, we don’t want to display the parts of history that are going to make people not come back, you know? I was really blessed by the spiritual singer. I felt like that created a connection to the Civil Rights movement is a very meaningful way. You know, but, all progress has its downside as well. You know? And it’s what we choose to present in our exhibits.” (F, Int. 10)

- (Asked what is it about history that turns the visitor on.) “You know, I think that, you know, we’ve got the most incredible country that’s ever been on the Earth, and I think that there were a lot of incredible people, men and women, that helped to that all together right in the beginning, and I admire their ideals and beliefs. And I think that we all are the benefactors of what they did way back then, so I think it’s neat to study those people, and I’m interested to know who they were, and why they thought the way they did, and why they did what they did, and why they endured what they did. So, that just interests me. I respect those people. ... Yeah, I think a lot of people take what we have for granted. They don’t realize, you know, what we have. I’ve traveled around the world a little bit, and what we have here, the freedom that we have here is different from anything else on the planet, so we’re pretty fortunate.” (M, Int. 25)
- (Asked if something from the visitor’s home belonged in the museum.) “No. It’s everyday. It’s too, it’s too mundane. I don’t have anything extraordinary. Well, I’ve only just started. ... That are signed by important people.” (F, Int. 27)
- (Asked if something from the visitor’s home belonged in the museum.) “Well, they are important to us. But they are not the general representation of, say, sports. ... From a spectator part, which seems to be the mindset, it’s baseball or football or those kinds of things.” (M, Int. 27)

**Appendix B.**

**Table I. Characteristics of Respondents Interviewed by OP&A Staff**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Approximate Age</b>	<b>Group Composition</b>	<b>Where from</b>
1	Male	60s	Alone (but typically leads school groups)	Unclear, not local (American)
2	Male, Female	50s	Couple	Unclear, not local (American)
3	Female	40s	Alone	Ottawa, Canada
4	Male, Female	50s	Couple	Unclear, not local (American)
5	Male	20s	Alone	Foreign Visitor, Indian
6	Female	50s	Alone (docent support in exhibit)	Local resident
7	2 Males, 3 Females	30s	Group of friends	Unclear, not local (American)
8	Female	40s	Mother with teenage daughter, part of school visit	California
9	Male, Female	late 30s	Couple	Memphis, Tennessee
10	Female	late 20s	Alone	Unclear, not local (American)
11	Female	50s	Alone	Unclear, not local (American)
12	2 Females	40s-early 50s	Friends	Florida, Georgia
13	4 Females	40s, late teens-early 20s	Mother with daughters and a daughter's friend	Unclear, not local (American)
14 (continuation of 13)	4 Females	40s, late teens-early 20s	Mother with daughters and a daughter's friend	Unclear, not local (American)
15	Male, Female	60s	Couple	Scotland
16	Male	40s	Alone, but chaperone for school group	Cleveland, Ohio
17	Male	40s	Alone	Unclear, not local
18	Male, Female	60s	Couple	Unclear, not local (American)
19	Male, Female	50s	Couple	Unclear, not local (American)
20	Male, Female	Late 60s-early 70s	Couple	Connecticut
21	Male, Female	Early 30s	Couple	Wisconsin
22	2 Males, 2 Females	Parents in 50s, Children in 20s	Family of four	Unclear, not local (American)
23	Male,	30s, 60s	Group of 3, Son bringing	Unclear, Son may

	Female		his parents	be local, parents visiting (American)
24	Male, Female	20s	Couple	Pennsylvania
25	Male	30s	Alone	Utah
26	Female	40s	Parent chaperone for 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade field trip	Delaware
27	Female, Male	40s, 50s	Friends, traveling to SI as part of a school group	Outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

**Appendix C.**  
**Questionnaires for American Stories**  
**Entrance Survey**

times or places  
ries  
e meaning of what I saw  
able, or uncommon things

isting this exhibition today? [Mark only ONE]  
ol group/organized group

### Exit Survey – Version 1

Metropolitan Area  
Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

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Male

**Thank You!**

0	0	0	0	ID	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<b>N1</b>
C	R	I	I						

### Exit Survey – Version 1



**Appendix D**  
**Frequency Distributions from *American Stories***

Is this your first visit to this museum, the National Museum of American History?	Entrance	Exit
Yes (First time visitor)	60%	62%
No (Repeat visitor)	40%	39%

**Entrance: How do you think you will rate your overall experience at this exhibition, *American Stories*, when you leave?**

**Exit: Based on your visit today, please rate your overall experience at this exhibition, *American Stories*.**

	Entrance	Exit
Poor	0%	0%
Fair	2%	4%
Good	35%	27%
Excellent	54%	54%
Superior	10%	15%

**Entrance: Which of these experiences are you especially looking forward to in this exhibition, *American Stories*, today?[Mark one or more]**

**Exit: Which of these experiences were especially satisfying to you in the *American Stories* exhibition?[Mark one or more]**

	Entrance	Exit
Seeing rare, valuable, or uncommon things	50%	56%
Enriching my understanding	48%	33%
Gaining information	46%	40%
Feeling pride in America	42%	43%
Imagining other times or places	35%	33%
Getting a sense of the everyday lives of others	25%	26%
Recalling memories	24%	51%
Encountering things I can relate to personally	20%	39%
Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw	16%	24%
Connecting with the emotional experiences of others	15%	21%
Being moved by beauty	12%	11%
<b>Average number of experiences marked</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>

**With whom are you visiting this exhibition today?[Mark only ONE]**

	Entrance	Exit
I am with a school group/ organized group	14%	16%
I am alone	13%	12%
I am with others	73%	73%

**Where do you live?**

	Entrance	Exit
Washington DC Metropolitan Area	7%	6%
Other US	85%	86%
Other country	8%	8%

**What is your age?**

	Entrance	Exit
Mean	43	44
Median	43	43
Silent (Born 1925-1945) – Ages 67-87	5%	6%
Leading Boomer (Born 1946-1955) – Ages 57-65	13%	16%
Trailing Boomer (Born 1956-1964) – Ages 48-56	23%	18%
Generation X (Born 1965-1981) – Ages 31-47	37%	38%
Generation Y (Born 1982-1995) – Ages 18-30	22%	23%

**Mean Age** **43.0** **43.5**



Are you...?		Entrance	Exit
	Female	59%	61%
	Male	41%	39%

### Exit Only (listed in order of use)

Please rate each of these exhibition features	Didn't see/use	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Superior
Overall exhibition design	0%	1%	6%	28%	44%	21%
Exhibition lighting	0%	4%	16%	39%	36%	6%
Cleanliness of exhibition spaces	1%	1%	3%	12%	49%	34%
Exhibition organization by date/era	2%	2%	8%	32%	45%	11%
Photos of people on the walls	4%	1%	4%	27%	43%	21%
Amount of text/reading materials	6%	1%	8%	43%	36%	6%
Circulation pattern in the exhibition	6%	2%	14%	38%	35%	6%
Introduction to American history	7%	3%	7%	24%	45%	15%
Opportunity to leave a note or opinion	28%	2%	7%	19%	31%	14%
Music in the exhibition	35%	4%	10%	26%	19%	6%
Museum staff to talk with	38%	4%	12%	17%	24%	6%
Computer interactives (table and/or wall)	40%	1%	9%	19%	25%	6%
Availability of Spanish-language text/pamphlet	80%	1%	3%	6%	9%	2%

### Exit Only (excluding those who didn't see/use; listed in order of rating)

Please rate each of these exhibition features	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Superior
Cleanliness of exhibition spaces	1%	3%	12%	50%	35%
Photos of people on the walls	1%	5%	28%	45%	21%
Overall exhibition design	1%	6%	28%	44%	21%
Opportunity to leave a note or opinion	3%	9%	27%	43%	19%
Introduction to American history	3%	8%	25%	48%	16%
Exhibition organization by date/era	2%	8%	32%	46%	12%
Computer interactives (table and/or wall)	2%	15%	31%	41%	11%
Availability of Spanish-language text/pamphlet	3%	13%	32%	42%	10%
Museum staff to talk with	7%	19%	27%	38%	10%
Music in the exhibition	7%	15%	40%	29%	9%
Circulation pattern in the exhibition	2%	15%	40%	37%	7%
Amount of text/reading materials	2%	8%	45%	39%	6%
Exhibition lighting	4%	16%	39%	36%	6%

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<b>In this exhibition, American Stories, to what extent did you engage in these activities?</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Very much</b>
Examining/looking	1%	7%	25%	67%
Reading/gaining information	2%	10%	42%	47%
Connecting with others/feeling	14%	30%	38%	17%

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