

# Connections With Character

A Study of Visitors to  
*The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*  
At the National Portrait Gallery

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## Foreword

*Black List* can be appreciated on several levels, for both its thoughtful subject matter and visually pleasing artwork. It educates, inspires, evokes memories, captures wins and losses, enlightens, and provides models of achievement. The Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) has conducted decades of visitor studies of exhibitions; with respect to *Black List*, OP&A staff are impressed with the insights visitors provided as well as the strong connections between the portraits and viewers. Surely, the exhibition enriched visitors' experiences and, like many of the Portrait Gallery's exhibitions, illustrated the vitality, relevance, and importance of portraiture.

The outcomes of this exhibition can be attributed to the remarkable undertakings of photographer and filmmaker Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and film critic Elvis Mitchell. *The Black List Project*, inspired by author Toni Morrison, is an exceptional narrative of achievement. Curator Ann Shumard and historian David Ward acquainted and pleased visitors with the extraordinary stories of African Americans. I gratefully acknowledge their exceptional work, time, and expertise.

I would like to express my appreciation to the leadership of the National Portrait Gallery, particularly its Commission, Associate Director Nik Apostolides, and Director of Education Rebecca Kasemeyer, for requesting this study. Their ongoing commitment to exploring the experiences that visitors have with the Gallery's exhibitions is commendable.

I also wish to thank the personnel responsible for this study. The project was led by OP&A staff members Lance Costello and Sarah Block. Together they designed the study, supervised the survey administration, analyzed the data, and wrote this report. Intern Hyemin Kim provided valuable assistance in preparing the data for analysis. Senior Analyst, Kathy Ernst, reviewed the report. Staff member Claire Eckert and interns Nadine Hanemann and Chungil Lee conducted qualitative interviews. Survey administration was carried out by staff members Claire Eckert, Maria Raviele, and Whitney Watriss and interns Hyemin Kim, Nadine Hanemann, Chungil Lee, Katie Behrens, Kim Stern, Mina Son, Minjung Kim, and Taeyoung Im.

# Background

## The Study

In early 2011, the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) was asked by leaders of the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) to undertake a series of visitor studies for the Gallery's temporary exhibitions. As part of that series, this report looks at visitors' interactions with and reactions to *The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*, which was on display on the second floor of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture from October 28, 2011 through April 22, 2012.

## The Exhibition

The exhibition was drawn from *The Black List Project*—an effort that grew from a casual lunch conversation between photographer/filmmaker Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and author Toni Morrison into a broad-based book, film, and portrait exhibition project. Greenfield-Sanders, in collaboration with NPR correspondent and former *New York Times* film critic Elvis Mitchell, developed the idea of documenting African Americans' achievements in disciplines as diverse as religion, performing arts, medicine, sports, art, literature, and politics.

For the project, Greenfield-Sanders created 50 large-format fine-art photographic portraits and directed the eponymously titled three-volume film, for which Mitchell interviewed the subjects, to document their experiences.

The National Portrait Gallery exhibition that displayed this visual “who’s who” of African Americans was put together by curator Ann Shumard and historian David Ward. It included all 50 portraits, featuring short biographic labels for each of the subjects, and a small theater with a continuous loop of the film. Information about *The Black List Project* was displayed on slanted plaques at each entrance. The labels next to the portraits included the name, date of birth, and profession of the individual as well as anecdotal information about their lives. Additional information was provided in the exhibition brochures.

The exhibition's brochure states that *The Black List Project* attempts “to create a new kind of black list- a visual “who’s who” of African American men and women.” The individuals on the list have “traveled different paths to success [yet] all share a deep-seated activism that has carried them over daunting obstacles and continues to be a driving force in their lives.” The exhibition touches upon issues of representation, racism and struggles.

# Methodology

## Quantitative Surveys

For the survey portion of the study, a random sample of adult visitors<sup>1</sup> entering and exiting Black List between February 22 and March 03, 2012 were intercepted and asked to complete a survey.<sup>2</sup> In total, 322 entering and 464 exiting visitors completed surveys, with response rates of 87% and 83%, respectively. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A and frequencies of responses are provided in Appendix B. Open-ended (write-in) comments from the survey are provided in Appendix C.

Survey respondents, with some caveats, may be treated as a representative sample of the larger population of exhibition visitors.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the findings of the survey are, subject to the limits of statistical inference imposed by the sample size, generalizable to the overall population of exhibition visitors.<sup>4</sup>

## Qualitative Interviews

The study team conducted 34 semi-structured interviews with 42 visitors in the Black List gallery. This methodology is effective in probing visitor responses in depth, as it allows visitors to raise issues that are particularly salient to them and to discuss them in their own words at whatever length they wish. However, this methodology does not yield a representative sample of exhibition visitors. Interviewees were not chosen in a systematic fashion and no effort was made to encourage reticent visitors to participate. Findings presented in the qualitative section should be read as suggestive rather than representative of how visitors approached, interpreted, and responded to the exhibition.

Interviewers used a general question guide, reproduced in Appendix D. This guide, however, was only a basic framework and interviewers were given latitude to depart from the guide and follow up on points raised by interviewees. OP&A staff and interns transcribed all interviews, coded passages judged to be particularly original, articulate, or insightful, and organized the qualitative findings around thematic sections.

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<sup>1</sup> Every second visitor was selected, excluding those under 18 and organized groups. At busy moments, some visitors were missed. Missed visitors were counted and weighted in the data analysis.

<sup>2</sup> The exhibition had two entry/exit points; both were covered during nine entrance and six exit sessions. The survey administration sessions lasted 90 minutes and were comprised of three 30-minute segments.

<sup>3</sup> The chief caveat is the assumption that the visitor population at the times of the survey's administration did not systematically differ from the visitor population over the course of the exhibition's run.

<sup>4</sup> For the sample sizes of 322 and 464, the 95 percent confidence interval for survey figures is  $\pm 5.46\%$  and  $\pm 4.55\%$ , respectively, depending on the survey response in question. (The interval applies to a response figure of 50%; the confidence interval grows smaller as the figure in question approaches 0% or 100%.)

## Quantitative Findings

### Demographics

*Black List* drew a higher proportion of African American visitors than is typical for the Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture (Reynolds Center). Otherwise, demographical characteristics of visitors to the exhibition were similar to other exhibitions at the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) and the Reynolds Center.

**Race & Ethnicity:** Three in four visitors self identified their race as White (75%) and one in five as African American/Black (20%). Fewer identified themselves as Asian (7%), American Indian/Native Alaskan (2%), or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1%). By comparison, six percent of visitors self identified as African American in the most recent winter survey conducted at the Reynolds Center.<sup>5</sup> Six percent of visitors indicated that they were of Hispanic or Latino ethnic origin.

**Sex:** About three in five visitors to the exhibition were women (59%) and two in five were men (41%); this is consistent with both past results for the Reynolds Center and art museums in general.

**Age:** The mean age of visitors was 40 and the median age was 38. By generation, visitation consisted of 34% Generations Y and Z (born 1982 and later); 31% Generation X (born 1965-1981); 13% Trailing Baby Boom (born 1956-1964); 18% Leading Baby Boom (born 1946-1955); and 4% World War II Generation (born before 1946).

To get a sense of how different age groups reacted to various aspects of *Black List*, the study team broke down the age distribution into three roughly equal age cohorts—the youngest third of visitors included visitors 30 and younger, the middle third ranged in age from 31 to 48, and the oldest third were 49 or older.

**Group:** About seven-tenths of respondents came with other adults (71%), one quarter came alone (23%) and 7% came with youth age eighteen and younger.

**Residence:** The vast majority of respondents were from the United States (93%). About 7% were residents of other countries. Roughly two in five were from the local Washington, D.C. metropolitan region (41%).

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<sup>5</sup> OP&A; Donald W. Reynolds Center Visitor Survey, Study Highlights and Frequency Distributions, Spring 2010, <http://www.si.edu/content/opanda/docs/Rpts2010/10.05.DWRCVisitor.Final.pdf>.

## Visitor Characteristics

**Visit History:** Over half of survey respondents were visiting the Reynolds Center for the first time (57%, first time visitors); the rest had visited previously (43%, repeat visitors).

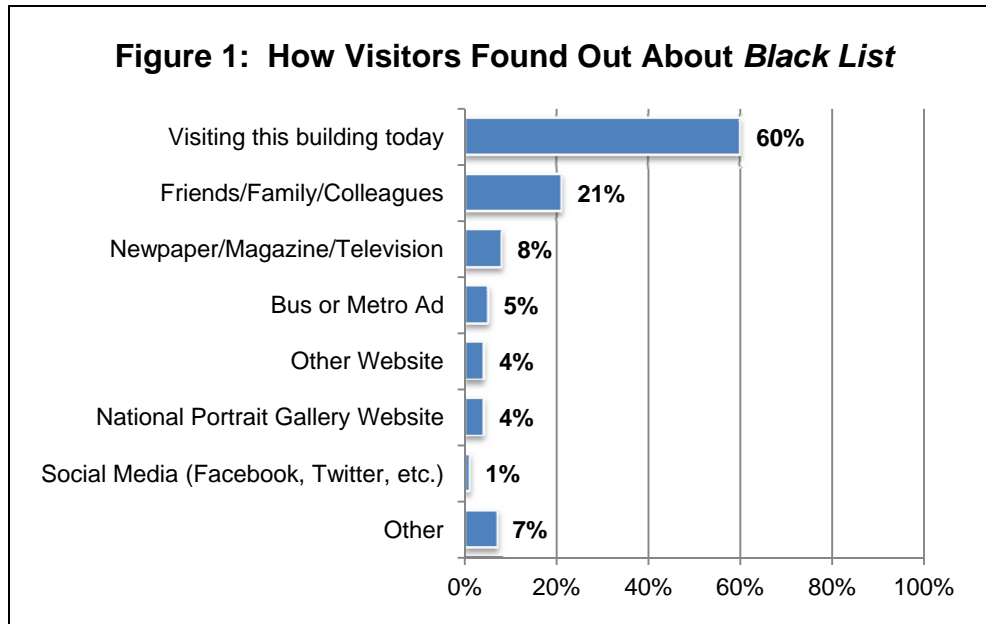
**Purpose of Visit:** One in five exhibition visitors came to the museum specifically to see *Black List* (20%). (We will refer to these visitors as “exhibition specific” and others will be called “general.”)

Three groups were more likely to be visiting specifically for *Black List*: African Americans, repeat visitors, and locals.

- 57% of African American visitors were exhibition-specific visitors (in contrast to 12% of visitors who were not African American).
- 38% of locals (vs. 16% of non locals)
- 25% of repeat visitors (vs. 17% of first time visitors)

**How Visitors Found Out About the Exhibition:** The majority of visitors found out about *Black List* when they arrived at the museum (60%) and about one in five through recommendations of friends, family or colleagues (21%). Other means of finding out about the exhibition were less popular: Newspaper/Magazine/Television (8%), Bus or Metro Ad (5%), National Portrait Gallery Website (4%), Other website (4%), Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc., 1%) and Other (7%).

Considering the higher percentage of African American visitors who were exhibition specific, it is not surprising that they were also less likely to find out from visiting the museum (30% vs. 65%). In contrast, African American visitors were more likely to find out about the exhibition through friends, family or colleagues (37 vs. 18%), or via Newspaper/Magazine/Television (18% vs. 6%).



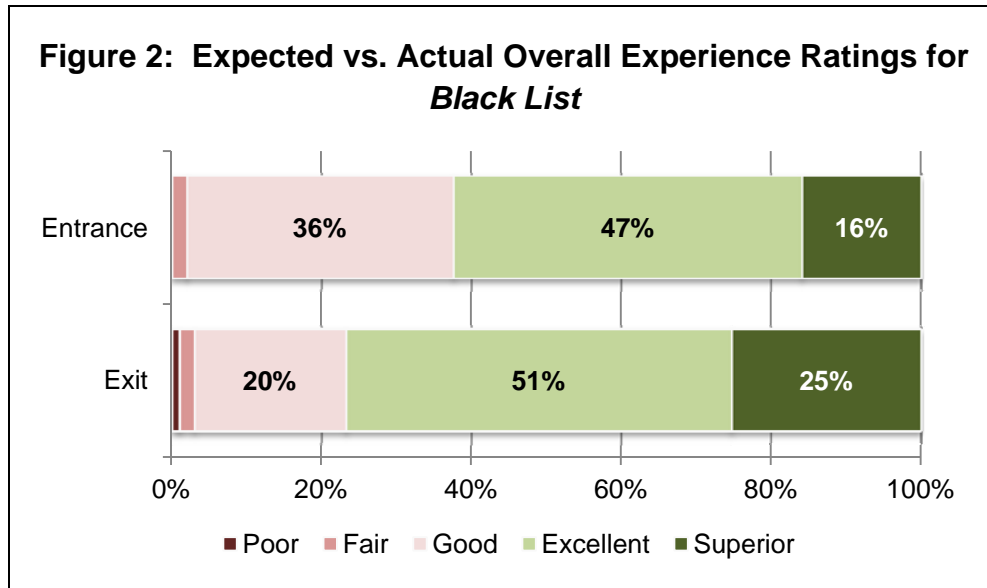
### Overall Experience Rating

Entering visitors were asked how they thought they would rate their overall experience with *Black List* when they left the exhibition. Exiting visitors were asked to rate their overall experience with the exhibition. Both used a five-point scale that has been applied by OP&A across Smithsonian exhibitions: *poor*, *fair*, *good*, *excellent*, and *superior*. In general, visitors who are critical of an exhibition, to one degree or another, select one of the lower three categories—*poor*, *fair*, or *good*. Those who are basically satisfied with their visit tend to mark *excellent*; for most Smithsonian exhibitions, the modal rating is *excellent*. Those who have very positive responses tend to mark *superior*.

**Entrance Ratings:** Approximately two in five entering visitors expected to rate their experience in the lower three categories, although only a fraction selected the lowest two categories: *good* (36%), *fair* (2%), *poor* (0%). Just less than half thought that they would rate their experience as *excellent* (47%) and one in six as *superior* (16%).

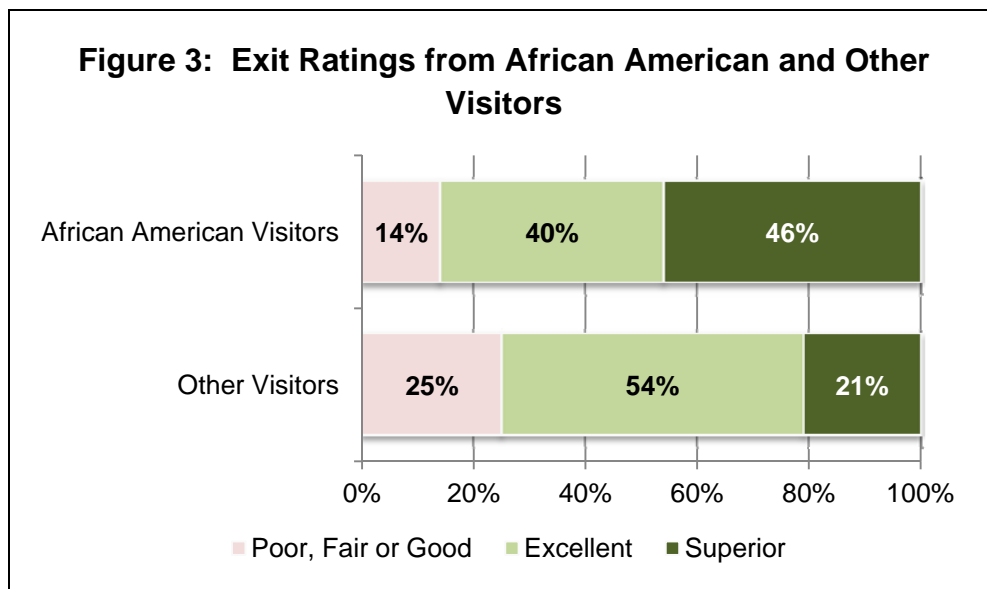
**Exit Ratings:** After visiting the exhibition, the total for the three lower categories dropped to fewer than one in four visitors: *good* (20%), *fair* (2%), *poor* (1%). The percentage of visitors selecting *excellent* was close to that expected on entrance (51%), while the proportion of visitors rating the exhibition *superior* increased to one in four (25%). These results show that visitors were more satisfied with their overall experiences in *Black List* than expected.





**Ratings and African American Visitors:** African American visitors entered *Black List* with higher expectations than other visitors (34% expected to rate the exhibition *superior* vs. 11% of other visitors; 26% expected to rate the exhibition lower than *excellent* vs. 40% of other visitors).

African American visitors' high expectations were met (on exit, 46% rated it *superior* and 14% rated it lower than *excellent*<sup>6</sup>). For visitors other than African Americans, their ratings on exit were significantly higher than on entrance (21% *superior* vs. 11% on entrance; and 25% less that *excellent* vs. 40%).

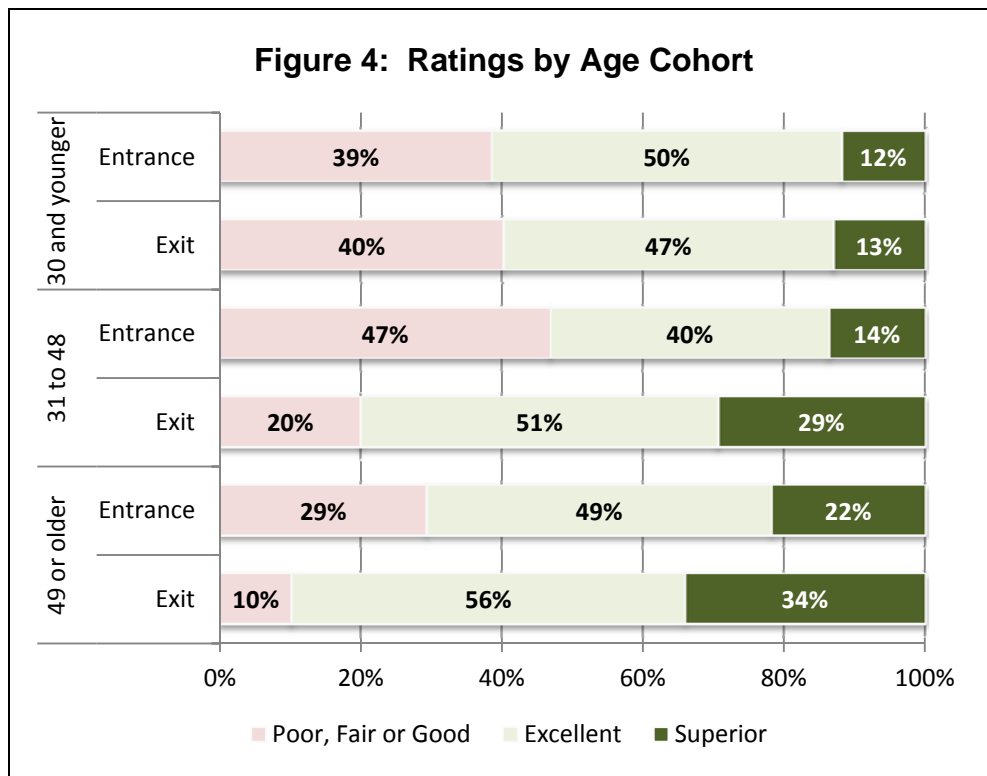


<sup>6</sup> For the sample size, the differences in entrance and exit ratings are not statistically significant.

**Ratings and Exhibition-Specific and General Visitors:** As is typically the case, visitors who came to the gallery specifically to see *Black List* had higher expectations for the exhibition (42% expected to rate *Black List* as superior vs. 9% of general visitors).

Notably, both groups rated the exhibition better on exit than they had expected. For general visitors, the number of superior ratings increased (9% to 20%); and the number of low ratings decreased (from 40% below excellent to 28% on exit). Significantly fewer exhibition specific visitors rated the exhibition lower than excellent (9% on exit compared to 26% on entrance).

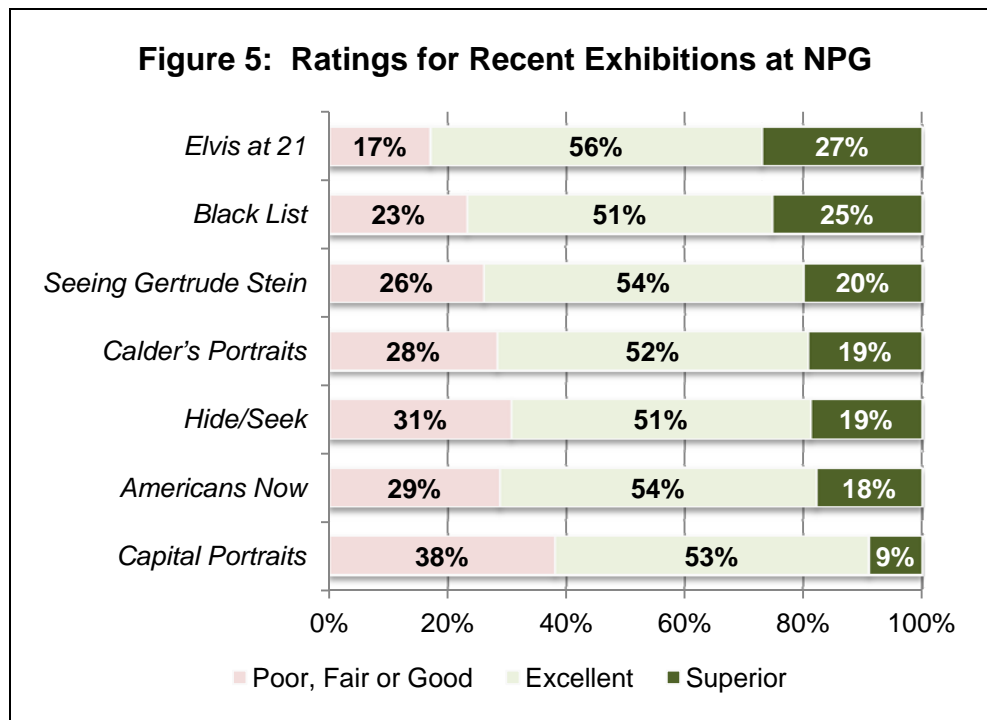
**Ratings and Age:** On entrance all three age cohorts registered similar expectations for *Black List*. Actual ratings for both the oldest and middle cohorts were higher on exit; while ratings from the youngest cohort were consistent with their expectations.



### Comparison with Other NPG Exhibitions

Overall satisfaction ratings for recent NPG exhibitions studied by OP&A have tended to cluster together near the overall average for Smithsonian exhibitions; *Black List* ratings were at the upper edge of this cluster.

In terms of *superior* ratings, *Black List*'s 25% was similar to the figure registered for *Elvis at 21* (27%) and higher than the figures for *Seeing Gertrude Stein* (20%), *Calder's Portraits* (20%), *Hide/Seek* (19%), *Americans Now* (18%) and *Capital Portraits* (9%). At the other end of the scale, *Black List*, with 23% in the lower ratings of *poor, fair, and good*, was similar to *Seeing Gertrude Stein* (26%), *Calder's Portraits* (28%), and *Americans Now* (29%); did less well than *Elvis at 21* (17%); and better than *Hide/Seek* (31%) and *Capital Portraits* (38%).



### Individual Exhibition Aspects

**Time Spent:** By visitors' estimates of the amount of time they spent in the exhibition, visits lasted an average of 26 minutes (median 20 minutes). One in four visitors stayed less than 15 minutes; and one in five visits lasted 30 minutes or longer.

As would be expected, length of visit correlated with ratings. Visitors rating the exhibition *poor, fair or good* stayed an average of 16 minutes, those rating it *excellent* averaged 27 minutes and visitors who thought the exhibition was *superior* spent an average of 33 minutes in *Black List*.

African American visitors averaged 37 minutes (compared to 23 minutes for non African American visitors) and exhibition specific visitors spent twice as long in the exhibition as general visitors (42 minutes vs. 21 minutes).

**Information:** Exiting visitors were asked “To what extent did you skim or read the wall text in this exhibition?” The three most common responses, each selected by about one in four visitors, were read most (27%), read some (23%), and a mix of skimming and reading (23%). Fewer respondents indicated that they skimmed some (16%), skimmed most (7%) or skimmed or read little to none (5%). None of the categories on exit showed a significant change to the responses entering visitors gave regarding the more general question—“To what extent do you usually skim or read wall texts when you visit exhibitions?” That is, visitors did not report reading (or skimming) more or less in *Black List* than they usually do when visiting exhibitions.

Visitors who read most of the wall text in *Black List* were more likely to rate the exhibition *superior* (41% vs. 20% of other visitors) and less likely to rate the exhibition low (*poor, fair or good*, 7% vs. 29%).

African American visitors and exhibition specific visitors, respectively, were more likely than non-African American visitors and general visitors to read most of the text (45% and 55%, vs. 22% and 19%, respectively). However, controlling for this, both non-African American visitors and general visitors who read most of the text rated the exhibition higher. In fact, reading most of the text was a better indicator of higher ratings than visiting the exhibition specifically for *Black List*.

**Film:** While most visitors noticed the film only one-third of those reported watching any of it (92% noticed; 31% of those who noticed watched). Within the group that watched it, a third reported viewing one segment (33%), a quarter saw two segments (26%) and two fifths watched more than two (41%).

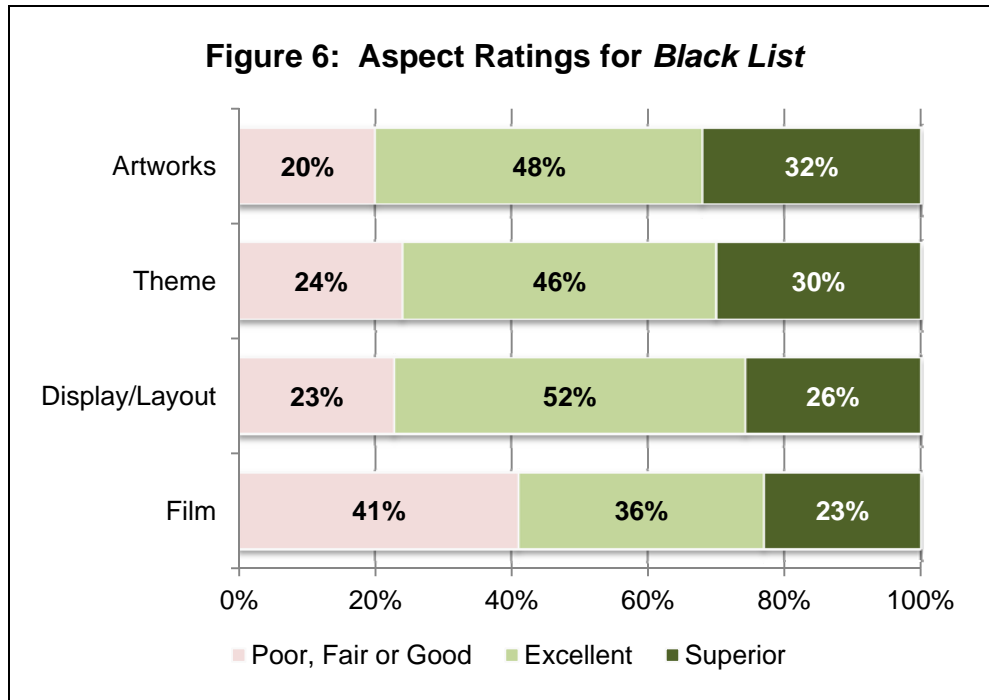
Similar to reading most of the text, watching the film was positively correlated with ratings; visitors who watched at least one segment were more likely to rate the exhibition *superior* (38% vs. 18% of those who noticed and did not watch) and less likely to rate the exhibition lower than *excellent* (14% vs. 26%).

African American visitors and exhibition specific visitors were more likely than non-African American visitors and general visitors to watch some of the film (48% and 49%, vs. 28% and 26%, respectively). Again, controlling for this, both non-African American visitors and general visitors who did watch at least some of the film rated the exhibition higher. In fact, watching the film was a better indicator of higher ratings than visiting the exhibition specifically for *Black List*.

**Aspect Ratings:** Visitors were also asked to rate four exhibition aspects—artworks, display/layout, film, and theme—on the same five point scale used for overall rating.

*Superior* ratings for each of the aspects were similar to the overall ratings for the exhibition, as were the low ratings for artworks, display/layout, and theme. The film received slightly more low ratings. (See figure 6 for percentages)

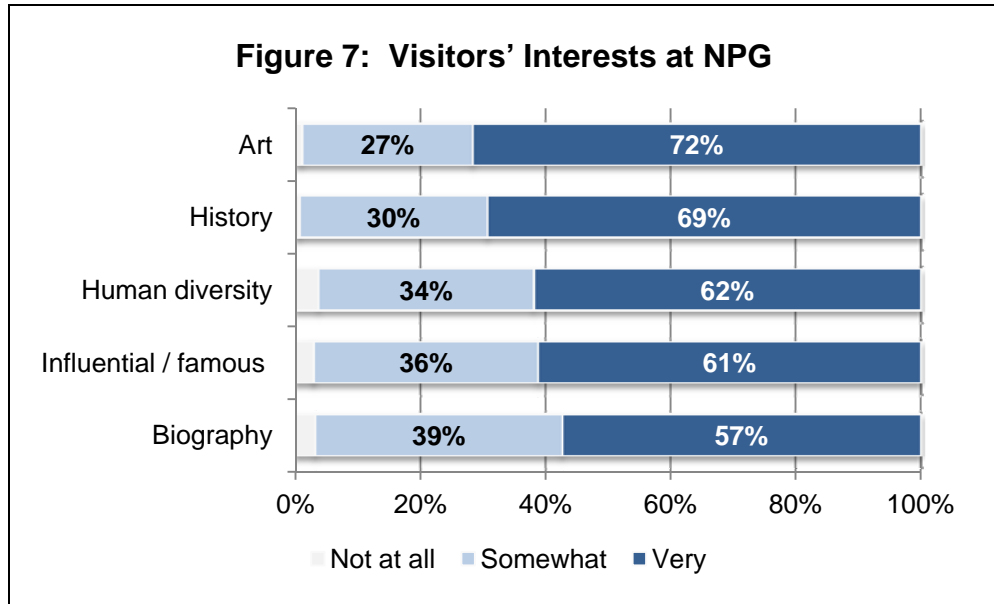
As would be expected, ratings for each of the aspects correlated with the overall exhibition rating. Of particular note, the majority of African American visitors rated the theme as *superior* (51%) and only one in ten rated it low (10%).



### Interests and Categorization

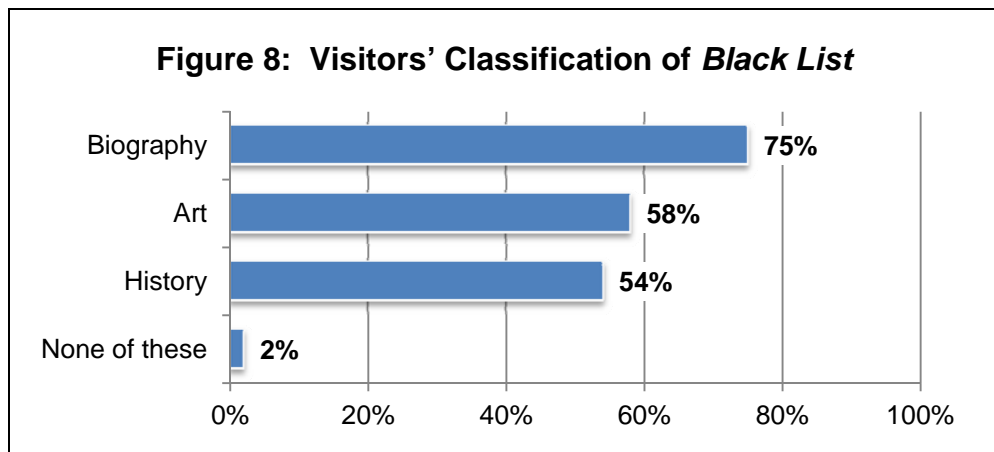
**Visitor interests:** Entering and exiting visitors were asked how interested they were, in the context of the National Portrait Gallery in general, in five broad categories—art, history, biography, images of America’s human diversity and images of influential and/or famous Americans. Across the three responses offered—Not at all, somewhat and very interested—the percentages of people who were interested in each of these aspects did not change significantly between entering and exiting visitors. The majority of visitors were very interested in each of the five broad categories, with about seven in ten expressing such for art (72%) and history (69%) and six in ten for human diversity (62%), influential/famous (61%) and biography (57%).

Those who said that they were ‘very interested’ in any of the categories were more likely to rate their overall exhibition experience higher than those who were somewhat or not at all interested.



**Exhibition categorization:** Exiting visitors were also asked whether they would categorize *Black List*, as an art, history or biography exhibition (respondents were able to mark all that they thought applied). Three quarters classified the exhibit as biography (75%); both art and history were selected by more than half of visitors (58% and 54%, respectively). Only two percent responded ‘none of the above.’

Visitors very interested in art were more likely to classify *Black List* as art and visitors very interested in history were more likely to classify *Black List* as history.



## Qualitative Findings

Qualitative interviews for *Black List* were conducted from January to April 2012. Thirty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted with 42 visitors inside the *Black List* gallery. Interviewees consisted of 22 females and 18 males, ranging in age from early 20s to late 70s. Approximately half of the interviewees were local visitors. The interviews provide rich insight into the significance of the exhibition.

### Overall Experience

On the whole, interviewees enjoyed the exhibition and had many insightful comments about their experiences in it. Some commented that they spent more time in the exhibition than expected. In addition, several interviewees said that they would recommend *Black List* to friends and family.

*I thought it was wonderful. I'm just trying to absorb the photos and put them into words. And it's about time that we had one like this. It's good to see the faces of the prominent black people that have made a difference in our lives—not just black people's, but everybody's lives.*

*I loved that exhibit; I would love to see more like this! Because I think it was inspirational ... I think it creates a dialogue. It sort of opens a door to these people's story and in opening the door to these people's story; you open a door to get a better understanding of African American culture.*

### Individual Exhibition Aspects

**Artworks:** Some interviewees commented on being impressed with the quality and size of the photographs. The size of the portraits made them look realistic.

*I think the photos are very realistic. They seem to look at you from whatever angle you are at and they are very sizable which makes it powerful.*

*The portraits are just stunning.*

*It was intimate—they look like they are looking right at you because they are almost kind of on your level. So it feels like they are in the room with you. I like that a lot of them, you can see their hands, which to me kind of communicates more. And you get their personality; this guy, he wants to be taken seriously, but some of them are a little bit more relaxed.*

*If you look into the eyes of these people you don't have to know them to know what they have seen, it's just that telling. I haven't been moved by anything in a while, this is an experience.*

*I like the simplicity of it, there is the particular pose, the straight one—this is who they are! And I think that this is what the exhibit is all about. There is no thrill to it... It's these people in a very plain setting and I think it really captures who they are.*

One visitor knowledgeable about photography was pleased that the photos were shot with film as opposed to a digital camera, signifying that this medium requires a large amount of time and effort.

*These are shot with a viewcam. You can see by that black line that goes around the etchings at the top, that's the film, that's an exact print. So that means it was shot on film, which is even more amazing that they were printed like this. What I hold very dear about the process of photography is exemplified here. That means a lot to me that these are prints.*

Overall, interviewees reacted positively to the uniformity of the size and framing of the artwork. A number commented that this format allowed them to focus on the individual subjects without distractions. Others mentioned how the uniformity communicated a sense of equal importance among the individuals in *Black List*.

*I really liked how huge the pictures were, how there were no distractions to person, top half of their bodies, all was uniform. I liked that.*

*I think it adds to it—even though the background may be similar, the clothing, the facial expressions of the individuals are what stands out to me. The businessman may have more of a business attire, whereas Russell Simmons, being a CEO of Def Jam, he may have something more colorful. And to me it's the clothing that brings out the artistic expression. Their clothing also kind of symbolizes what they stand for too. Somebody who is in the rap game may have more urban clothing on whereas General Colin Powell may be in a suit with a tie, so the background, to me, actually helps the facial expression, helps me to understand the body language of a person. So I thought it was an awesome idea. To see that everything is still organized in a way where it flows so smoothly is just amazing because it is just like I said, you may have a rapper over here, but you have a CEO over here, but to see similar background, same picture frame—that also stood out to me.*

*I like that. I find that I paid a lot more attention to the subjects. I mean, I'm literally examining the people in the portrait.*



*In a way it keeps everyone on the same plane and on the same plateau.*

*I think the uniform size of the photos granted the same importance to everyone.*

**Display/layout:** The portraits in *Black List* were not displayed in a chronological or thematic order; portraits of individuals of varying ages, backgrounds and fields of endeavor were displayed next to one another. There was also not a suggested route or order to move through the exhibition. In general, visitors appreciated the free-form arrangement. Interviewees commented that the lack of organization based on profession or age or other classification encouraged them to look at portraits of both individuals they were familiar with and those with whom they were not.

*It's just more personal this way... it's more human this way. It's more human. He's not just a politician; he's a human being who took up politics for a particular reason. Or they went to school and found an interest—there was a hope—they wanted to do something for someone. So this—it's a humanitarian piece. This is their humanity. We are looking at someone's life and looking in his eyes, looking at his arms, how he's posed. That matters. I like the way it's set up.*

*I kind of like it better that way because I think that we focus too much on what they do—I mean, I think it's good that it is a cross-section of everything... I think if you set it up in an entertainment section or something like this, section wise, particular kids, they would gravitate to that particular section because they know... they are more familiar with those people. So I think that if you mix them up, it gives them an exposure like Charley Pride, Samuel L. Jackson or Michael Lomax who is the head of the United Negro College Fund. Like people they would normally seek out.*

*There doesn't need to be a chronology. Each of these people stand in their own space, in their own time so there doesn't need to be a chronology...It's all of us. It's inclusive. I like it. I like it as it is. I don't think there should be an order because we come and go in the world that way. I can just as soon run across these people in an airport than confront them with a camera.*

**Film:** Consistent with the survey findings, not many people that the study team interviewed had watched the film in the exhibition. Those who did watch it were very positive about the experience. Interviewees appreciated that it added deeper context to the individuals and overall theme of *Black List*.

*Oh, I love it. It's kind of nice to see... that you see the pictures and you can read the blurbs about who they are and give a little bit of insight to who they are. But here, the*

*longer conversations about their perceptions and other people's perception of them. It just gives you a little bit more context about what that whole exhibit is about.*

*They talked one on one, relaxed, with the camera. They talked with character about their lives, the things they went through.*

*It takes the photographs to another level. It gives a little bit deeper meaning, it gives it a little bit more context and ... like for instance, I didn't know a lot about Michael Lomax until I sat down and listened to him. Now, I like some of the individual stories, I mean, Whoopi Goldberg—I love her part. And she gives a little bit more depth and perception of being a black woman in the entertainment field, and what she's had to go through. I mean, I don't think you could say all of this in a little blurb next to the pictures. It does add that to the exhibit itself.*

**Theme:** Some interviewees spoke very passionately about the themes of the exhibition, as many were able to connect to it through their own experiences. Interviewees of all backgrounds connected to the exhibition in a variety of ways.

*It's interesting and I think that in terms of empowerment, it's a really good exhibition in terms of bringing to light how people have overcome oppression in the past, well forever. For the black community it's definitely important to be highlighting people who have really come to the forefront. I think calling it the Black List too is sort of harkening back to that idea is pretty powerful.*

*It has characters of people who have chronicled my life.*

*I think it's an attempt, to be honest, to create a certain picture of what African American communities are like and I think that in putting it into a certain frame it allows you to look at the pictures in a certain way... but I guess the idea of creating a black list it seems like there was a very thoughtful attempt to say "Here is a list of people you should know." So there is a formality to it. I guess that's what I mean—they are formal.*

Comments from some African American interviewees illustrated how African American visitors, in particular, connected strongly to the theme. For many, coming to *Black List* was an empowering experience. Interviewees spoke of their visits as emotional experiences—evoking feelings of pride, sadness and inspiration. Interviewees were self-reflective of their place within African American history. It was an exhibition that “spoke” to certain audiences. Several people commented that they wanted to return with other family members or thought the exhibit should be a permanent fixture within NPG.

*For me, this exhibition speaks to me very personally. So, I guess it is kind of hard to explain what 'this' means because what I see when I look around, I see... I look at it like, 'this is my people.' But we all are very different. Michael Lomax talked about how he is the poster boy of upper class blacks. He is part of, you know, the different fraternities, sororities, and social clubs and everything... but then you look at Samuel L. Jackson who, you know, went to Moorehouse College, struggled through a cocaine addiction... You see all these people in all these different fields or different lines of work, and different shades and colors and backgrounds and everything. But like I said, they all have this measure of success and it is inspiring to me, so to me an exhibit like this speaks directly to me. But, I think I would find something like this even as interesting if it was about Asian Americans, Native Americans, or anybody! You know? Because I like to hear those kind of stories. And I would sit down and listen and watch and do all of that. So, I guess that when I say an exhibit like 'this,' it's something that speaks to me deeply and personally. Does this make sense?*

*I think for one, as an African American, it's a sense of pride. Walking through and seeing this cross-section of life, I get inspired. You know, listening to the stories and the biography—it's inspirational to me. I am not sure if everyone gets the same feeling, like I said, because I'm African American, I think it means a little bit more to me maybe than to someone who is not. But to me it's very inspirational to see this cross-section of contributions—and to me a personal story. You know, it's one thing to see the achievements and accomplishments of all these people, but when you hear Vernon Jordan talking about some of the trials and tribulations you're going through, you are like 'Oh, wow! I understand that,' because maybe I've gone through the same thing. And to see someone else go through the same thing and achieve a certain degree of success—and I think most people would say that these people are successful—it's inspirational.*

*I really like it. I think it gives hope and inspiration to a lot of, not only African Americans, but to a lot of people around the world. A lot of the people in the Black List have struggled, overcome a lot of obstacles and for me it was—I was looking at Tyler Perry, that's one of the people in the Black List that I really can connect with—because he suffered a period of homelessness just for doing what he always wanted to do. For me that was kind of the connection point for me. As someone who has just moved to the Washington D.C. area, I too have been in a homeless phase and so that was the connection to me. So to see something like this is just very inspirational, and it's not about people who are gone and all knowing—it's still about people that are living today and still doing a lot of what they love to do. And, that's the connection point for me. It gives hope and inspiration to those who someday want to be also put on the Black List.*

**Title:** The title of the exhibition attempts to take the dictionary definition of a “black list” which is “a list of persons who are disapproved of or are to be punished or boycotted” to “a roll call of distinction.” It aims to shed the term’s negative connotation to become a term of affirmation or empowerment. The introductory panel at each entrance included the artist’s statement discussing this idea and the inspiration for the project. Interviewees were asked about their reaction to the title.

*“The Black List”? I like it... well, I mean, it’s the name of the book, it’s the name of the movie... and I saw the explanation about the black list as I walked in, about what it meant. What it... sort of a dictionary definition and then just ‘This is... it changes the definition’. What I got in the beginning... I got that it’s taking the negative connotation and making it into something positive. Something like, ‘Yeah, you want to be on the black list!’*

*Historically speaking black has been used as a pejorative entity. Black listing is a negative thing and they tied those two things and put them together into something powerful and positive so I think it’s awesome.*

## **Selection of Individuals**

The 50 individuals included in *Black List* encompassed a variety of professions, ranging from athletes to social activists. Interviewees appreciated this diversity and felt that it added to the exhibition. It also introduced them to people who they were not previously familiar with. Some visitors felt that the contributions and accomplishments of the individuals could not be compared to each other but rather that the success of each person was unique in their own field and individual context. As to be expected, there were individuals who visitors were surprised about being included and excluded from the exhibition.

*I found it intriguing; and it’s more encompassing than I thought it would be. It’s not just actors, actresses, and professional sports; it’s people from a lot of walks of life.*

*I like the new people like John Legend and Diddy. I wouldn’t expect to see them here yet because they are recent. But it is nice to see them up there already because they are our generation so we can relate.*

*I think what all have in common is that no matter what they have done, they have had a measure of success. They’ve had a great deal of success in what they do or what they have done. There are... Most of these people are pretty recognizable. But, I think that’s why they are in this particular exhibit, because these aren’t necessarily no-name-people. There are plenty of people out there that are successful but they don’t*

*necessarily have the name recognition. But this is also the product of basically one individual's vision and people that he... and he's like, 'okay, these people should be on this list,' and he had a huge list and he narrowed it down to 50. So, you're not going to get everybody that deserves to be here—not deserves to be here, that could be here on the wall—you need another building for that.*

## **Information**

**Exhibition text:** Labels next to the portraits displayed biographical and anecdotal information about the featured individuals. Information about *The Black List Project* was found on the two introductory panels and in the film. A number of interviewees commented that they were satisfied with the amount and kind of information included in the texts and that they learned something new, both about individuals they were familiar with and those who they were not.

*You know I didn't want to spend so much time reading about one person's life and then forget about the other persons. So having that little small biography about that person kind of helps me to move on quicker so that I can know about the next person. And then do more research... you know as soon as I leave here, with the pictures and all that good stuff I get to say 'okay, this is somebody that I saw at the Smithsonian's Black List exhibit.' So this is going to cause me, you know, when I need to know something at school or just on my personal time to say 'oh, okay, this is the time to do research on this person.'*

*I was a little overwhelmed by how much I didn't know about many of the people, quite honestly. That was my first impression as I left. I didn't look at all of the photographs or read all of the labels, but there were many who I didn't know and many who I did know; once I read their card, I felt that I didn't know as much as I thought.*

*I was able to learn a lot about some people I didn't know and about people I thought I knew... little things... for instance, I didn't know that the Jacksons are married. I knew them separately, but I didn't know... so little things like that...*

**Catalogue:** In interviews, OP&A asked visitors if they would have bought an exhibition catalogue if one was available. A number of people said that they would have bought one for the information—some explained that this meant a summary of what was in the exhibition, while others were interested in extended biographies of the subjects. In other cases, visitors were interested in having copies of the photography; and some of these visitors extended the question and expressed an interest in purchasing coffee table books, postcards or calendars featuring the portraits.

**Comment Books:** Visitors were also asked if they would have contributed to a comment book, had one been available for this exhibition. There was a mix of responses. Some responded that they would have written in it; others responded that they would not write but would read responses. Another line of suggestions was to include an online space for comments, rather than a book in the exhibition. Some visitors simply expressed that they had no interest in reading or writing in a comment book.

## **Exhibition Categorization**

Mirroring the survey, interviewees were asked about how they would categorize *Black List*—as an art, history, or biography exhibition. Visitors' responses reflected the findings from the survey—it could fall into more than one category. Some comments displayed visitors' appreciation of these multiple dimensions.

*A combination of all three. A lot of these people—like, for instance, General Colin Powell—even though he is not serving right now, he played an important part in our history. But the way that the photographs were taken, it's a form of art. And biography, having the synopsis right there beside them it's like their little tell me story. So that's why, I think that's what really makes this one stand out a lot is because it has history, it has art, and it has a biography to go along with it.*

*I think it is a mix. I think it's a mix of all. You can't really say it's one or the other because there are people who are part of civil rights movements, and there is all this beautiful photography, so it's hard; and then biography obviously, because it all ties to the society. It's a little bit of everything I think.*

*I think a good photographer captures who the person is and I think in simple ways, it does capture who these people are. So, yeah, I consider it to be an artistic exhibition. This has been one of my favorite exhibitions... [it is] more of a living history... It is also a biographical exhibit, because... they are telling their own story—particularly, when you look at the video. They are talking about their perspectives and how they identify themselves and how others identify them and what they do.*

## Discussion

*Black List* can be seen as a successful exhibition on several accounts. The exhibition drew a higher proportion of African American visitors than is typical for the Reynolds Center. Overall experience ratings for the exhibition were near the highest recorded by OP&A for recent NPG exhibitions. Notably, high expected entrance ratings from African American and exhibition specific visitors were met; and ratings from other visitors exceeded expectations.

Each of the individual exhibition aspects visitors were queried about—artworks, theme, display/layout and film—were also rated highly. Both watching the film and reading most of the text were positively associated with ratings; although a causal relationship cannot be inferred from the data, it was clear that, at least for visitors interested in the topic, both watching and reading provided opportunities for very positive experiences. Through their thoughtful qualitative responses, visitors expressed how both added rich context to the exhibition. In fact, viewing any of the film or reading most of the texts—both indicators of interest in the topic—were better predictors of higher ratings than whether a visitor was exhibition specific.

Visitors appreciated that *Black List* included individuals from a variety of fields of endeavor and were satisfied with the selection of individuals featured in the exhibition. In interviews, visitors also commented that they engaged with portraits of individuals they were familiar with and those whose with whom they were not familiar. The lack of order (chronological, grouped by age or otherwise) encouraged this kind of experience. The uniformity of the size and framing of the portraits was also cited as a positive aspect for many visitors as it put all of the sitters on equal ground and allowed for an easy and pleasurable viewing experience.

Another positive aspect of visitors' experiences in the exhibition that strongly came through in the interviews was the extent to which visitors were able to connect and relate to the theme of the exhibition. Interviewees, in particular African American interviewees, spoke passionately about identifying with the struggles faced by those in the exhibition. They spoke of the pride they felt when seeing "their people" represented in a positive and celebratory light in *Black List*.

# Appendix A: Survey Questionnaires

4107132389 ENTR

**National Portrait Gallery**  
*The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*

**Is this your first visit to this building, the Donald W. Reynolds Center?**  Yes  No

**How do you think you will rate your overall experience with this exhibition, *The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*, when you leave?**  Poor  Fair  Good  Excellent  Superior

**How did you find out about this exhibition? [Mark one or more]**

- Visiting this building today
- Friends / Family / Colleagues
- Newspaper / Magazine / Television
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- National Portrait Gallery website
- Other website
- Bus or Metro Ad
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Did you visit today specifically to see this exhibition, *The Black List*?**  Yes  No

**If you came specifically to see this exhibition, what attracted you to it?** \_\_\_\_\_

In the context of the National Portrait Gallery in general, how interested are you in the following?	Not at all interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Images of America's human diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Images of influential and/or famous Americans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**To what extent do you usually skim or read wall texts when you visit exhibitions?**

- None or little
- Skim some  Skim most
- Read some  Read most
- A mix of skimming and reading

**With whom are you visiting? [Mark one or more]**  Alone  Adult(s)  Youth under 18

**Are you male or female?**  Male  Female

**What is your age?**

**Do you live in the United States or another country?**  United States, specify zip code:

Other country, specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?**  Yes  No

**What race do you consider yourself to be? [Mark one or more]**

- African American/Black
- American Indian/Native Alaskan
- Asian (Chinese, Indian, Japanese, etc.)
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- White

*Thank you for your time and assistance!*

Ses  Seg  1  2  3  C  R  L  I ID



**National Portrait Gallery**

*The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*

Is this your first visit to this building, the Donald W. Reynolds Center?  Yes  No

Please rate your overall experience in this exhibition, *The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*.  Poor  Fair  Good  Excellent  Superior

Did you visit today specifically to see this exhibition, *The Black List*?  Yes  No

To what extent did you skim or read the wall text in this exhibition?  None or little  Skimmed some  Skimmed most  Read some  Read most  A mix of skimming and reading

How many segments of the film did you watch?  Did not notice it  None  About \_\_\_\_ segment(s)

About how much time did you spend in this exhibition, *The Black List*? About \_\_\_\_\_ minute(s)

Please rate the following individual elements of this exhibition, *The Black List*.

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Superior
Display / Layout	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Artworks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Film	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Would you categorize *The Black List* as an art, history, or biography exhibition? [Mark all that apply]  Art  History  Biography  None of these

In the context of the National Portrait Gallery in general, how interested are you in the following?

	Not at all interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Art	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Images of America's human diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Images of influential and/or famous Americans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

With whom are you visiting? [Mark one or more]  I am alone  Adult(s)  Youth under 18

Are you male or female?  Male  Female

What is your age?

Do you live in the United States or another country?  United States, specify zip code:

Other country, specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?  Yes  No

What race do you consider yourself to be? [Mark one or more]  African American/Black  American Indian/Native Alaskan  Asian (Chinese, Indian, Japanese, etc.)  Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander  White

**Thank you for your time and assistance!**

Ses   Seg  1  2  3  C  R  L  I F   M     ID

## Appendix B: Frequencies of Responses

Is this your first visit to this building, the Donald W. Reynolds Centers?	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Yes (First Visit)	57%	57%
No (Repeat Visitor)	43%	43%

**ENTRANCE:** How do you think you will rate your overall experience with this exhibition, *The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*, when you leave?

**EXIT:** Please rate your overall experience with this exhibition, *The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders*?

	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Poor	0%	1%
Fair	2%	2%
Good	36%	20%
Excellent	47%	51%
Superior	16%	25%

**How did you find out about this exhibition?**  
[Mark one or more]

	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Visiting this building today	60%	
Friends/Family/Colleagues	21%	
Newspaper/Magazine/Television	8%	
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	1%	
National Portrait Gallery Website	4%	
Other Website	4%	
Bus or Metro Ad	5%	
Other	7%	

**Did you visit today specifically to see this exhibition, *The Black List*?**

	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Yes	18%	21%
No	82%	79%

<b>In the context of the National Portrait Gallery in general, how interested are you in the following?</b>			
		ENTRANCE	EXIT
<b>Art</b>			
	Not at all interested	1%	1%
	Somewhat interested	27%	27%
	Very interested	72%	72%
<b>History</b>			
	Not at all interested	1%	0%
	Somewhat interested	31%	30%
	Very interested	68%	70%
<b>Biography</b>			
	Not at all interested	5%	2%
	Somewhat interested	40%	39%
	Very interested	55%	59%
<b>Images of America's human diversity</b>			
	Not at all interested	4%	3%
	Somewhat interested	38%	32%
	Very interested	58%	65%
<b>Images of influential and/or famous Americans</b>			
	Not at all interested	4%	2%
	Somewhat interested	39%	34%
	Very interested	57%	64%
<b>To what extent do you usually skim or read wall texts when you visit exhibitions?</b>			
		ENTRANCE	EXIT
	None or little	2%	5%
	Skim some	13%	16%
	Skim most	12%	7%
	Read some	18%	23%
	Read most	27%	27%
	A mix of skimming and reading	28%	23%

<b>With whom are you visiting? [Mark one or more]</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Alone	27%	24%
With Adults	71%	72%
With Youth under 18	7%	9%

<b>Are you male or female?</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Male	41%	41%
Female	59%	59%

<b>Do you live in the United States or another country?</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
US	92%	93%
Another country	8%	7%
Local	40%	41%
Non-local	60%	59%

<b>Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Yes	6%	8%
No	94%	92%

<b>What race do you consider yourself to be? [Mark one or more]</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
African American/Black	20%	20%
American/Indian/Native Alaskan	1%	2%
Asian	7%	8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%	1%
White	75%	73%

<b>What is your age?</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Median	36	40
Mean	40	41
Silent (Born 1925-1945)	6%	4%
Leading Boom (Born 1946-1955)	16%	18%
Trailing Boom (Born 1956-1964)	12%	13%
Generation X (Born 1965-1981)	25%	31%
Generation Y (Born 1982-1995)	40%	32%
Generation Z (Digital Natives) (Born after 1995)	2%	2%

<b>How many segments of the film did you watch?</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Did not notice it		8%
None		63%
About __ segments		29%

<b>Please rate the following individual elements of this exhibition, <i>The Black List</i>.</b>	ENTRANCE	EXIT
<b>Display/Layout</b>		
Poor		<1%
Fair		2%
Good		20%
Excellent		52%
Superior		26%
<b>Artworks</b>		
Poor		1%
Fair		3%
Good		16%
Excellent		48%
Superior		32%
<b>Film</b>		
Poor		1%
Fair		6%
Good		34%
Excellent		36%
Superior		23%

<b>Theme</b>		
	Poor	1%
	Fair	3%
	Good	20%
	Excellent	46%
	Superior	30%

<b>Would you categorize <i>The Black List</i> as an art, history, or biography exhibition? [Mark all that apply]</b>		
	ENTRANCE	EXIT
Art		58%
History		54%
Biography		75%
None of these		2%

## Appendix C: Open-Ended Survey Comments

Responses reproduced verbatim with minor edits for clarity. (Unintelligible or illegible responses excluded.)

### If you came specifically to see this exhibition, what attracted you to it?

Accomplishments & the photography	Interested in black history
Annie Leibovitz	It looked really interesting
Annie Leibovitz	It was at the end of the hall
<i>Annie Leibovitz: Pilgrimage</i>	I've seen it before + wanted to see it again
<i>Annie Leibovitz: Pilgrimage</i>	Just curious
Art	Just walking around
Asian American portrait gallery	My art teacher
Attention to critical history that seems sadly forgotten	New information
Because it features black people; some I know, some I will learn about.	Newspaper
Black history	Photo of Chris Rock
Celebrity	Portraits are of people who inspire. It also gives hope to the youth
Chris Rock Photo	Portrait of my governor
Chris Rock?	Portraits
Class meeting	Presidential gallery
Cultural significance	Signs
Curiosity	Subject matter
Curiosity	The lovely faces
Curiosity	The subject
Historical significance	The subject matter
I am African American and I want to see reflections of my life, heroes, history, etc.	The subject matter
I came from Brazil and there isn't exhibition like this theme	The theme
I enjoy photography & portraits	The title
I heard how great it is	The title & portraits
I wanted to see the "Black List"	The whole building/gallery
I wanted to see the people included in the <i>Black List</i>	Thought photographer was going to be here wrong day
Interest	Topic
Interest in seeing photos	Topic of course being taken
	Visiting Hall of Presidents
	Wanted to finish seeing it

## Appendix D: Qualitative Interview Guide

### Visitor information

Where are you visiting from?

What brings you to the museum today? *Did you know about this exhibition before you came? Did you come specifically to see it? If so, what interested you in it?*

Have you been to the Portrait Gallery before? *If yes, what Portrait Gallery exhibitions have you seen in the past year? If no, what exhibitions have you seen elsewhere in the past year?*

### Overall exhibition

Tell me about your experience in this exhibition. *Did it meet your expectations? Why/why not?*

How much time did you spend in *The Black List*? *Was that more or less than you expected?*

How did you travel through the exhibition? What did you think of the organization of the exhibition? *Would you have preferred chronological order? Some other order?*

Did you tend to look more at people you were familiar with or not familiar with? *Why?*

What do you think about the selection of individuals for this exhibition? *Did this exhibition change your perception of fields of endeavor where African Americans are successful?*

Did you find anything surprising or unexpected in this exhibition?

To you, was *The Black List* as an art, history, or biography exhibition? *Which do you generally prefer?*

### Exhibition elements

Was there enough information in this exhibition for you? *How much text did you read? Did you pick up the exhibition brochure? If yes, what did you think of it? If no, did you see it? Why did you decide not to take it?*

Did you watch the video? Tell me about your experience with it. *How many segments did you watch/how much time did you spend? How did it affect your experience in the exhibition?*

What did you think about the overall look and feel of the exhibition? *Did the uniform structure encourage you to look at more/less of the exhibition?*

What came to your mind when you heard the title *The Black List*? *Did you get the double (or different) meaning(s) of the exhibition title "The Black List"?*

### Museum visitation

When you visit a museum, do you usually decide to go for a specific exhibit or to see the whole museum? *What resources do you consult to decide?*

Did you visit the NPG website before you came? *Do you think you will visit it after you leave?*

What was the last exhibition you recommended to a friend or visited more than once? *What was special about that exhibition? How does this exhibition compare?*

Have you purchased an exhibition catalogue in the last two or three years? *If yes, what inspired you to do so? If *The Black List* had a catalogue do you think you would have purchased it?*

What do you think about comment books? *Have you ever left comments? Would you have liked the opportunity to leave a comment about this exhibition? Do you ever read comment books?*