

# More than a Name in History



A Study of Visitors to  
*One Life: Ronald Reagan*  
At the National Portrait Gallery

September 2012

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## Foreword

*One Life: Ronald Reagan* captured the essence of a central figure in recent American history. Within a single room, the exhibition told Reagan's personal story, portrayed the major undertakings of his Presidency, and captured his personality. The gallery encapsulated an era and elicited visitors' reflections and remembrances from their own lives.

Sidney Hart, senior historian and curator of *One Life: Ronald Reagan* deserves accolades for his engaging visual biography. The exhibition provided an unbiased and compelling look at Reagan's contributions and the person behind those contributions.

This study would not have been possible without the dedication to understanding visitor engagement that the leadership of the National Portrait Gallery has continued to demonstrate. My thanks go particularly to its Commission, former Director Marty Sullivan, Associate Director Nik Apostolides, and Director of Education Rebecca Kasemeyer, for requesting this study.

I also wish to thank the personnel responsible for this study. The project was led by OP&A staff members James Smith and Lance Costello. Together they designed the study and supervised the survey administration. They were assisted in survey administration by staff member Sarah Block and interns Hyemin Kim, Nadine Hanemann, Chungil Lee, Mina Son, and Taeyoung Im. Sarah and Nadine also contributed to the qualitative interviews. Hyemin provided valuable assistance in preparing the data for analysis. James analyzed the survey data and wrote the quantitative portion of this report; Carolyn Behmer, an intern, analyzed the interviews and wrote the qualitative section. Lance reviewed these sections and compiled the final report.

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## Background

To commemorate the centennial of Ronald Reagan's birth, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) displayed *One Life: Ronald Reagan* on the first floor of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture. The one-room exhibition was presented in NPG's "One Life" gallery from July 1, 2011 through May 28, 2012. Each exhibition in the "One Life" series focuses on the life and contributions of a single deceased American historical figure and tells his or her story through "portraiture as biography."

The exhibition focused on Reagan's Presidency—specifically his priorities of the economy and the Cold War—but also touched on his formative years; time in radio, television, and film; and early political career to provide a "visual biography" of the man who sat in the oval office.

Reagan's story is told through photographs, paintings, press book images, film lobby cards, objects, and video excerpts. Highlights of the exhibition included Andy Warhol's 1985 portrait of Reagan, which mixes personality, politics, and public image; a bronze sculpture of Reagan as a cowboy by renowned caricaturist Patrick Oliphant; a fragment of the Berlin Wall; and the original copy of Reagan's letter informing the public of his Alzheimer's diagnosis. A video kiosk with excerpts from his speeches was also available for visitors.

This study, which was conducted by the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) as part of a series of visitor studies requested by leaders of the National Portrait Gallery, focused on the Gallery's temporary exhibitions. It examined visitors' reactions to the *One Life: Ronald Reagan* exhibition and to the "One Life" format.

# Methodology

## Quantitative Surveys

Random samples of adult visitors<sup>1</sup> entering and exiting *Ronald Reagan* between March 19 and 30, 2012 were intercepted and asked to complete a survey.<sup>2</sup> In total, 269 entering and 301 exiting visitors completed surveys, with response rates of 84% and 74%, 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 31 semi-structured interviews with 42 visitors outside the “One Life” 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 visitor was intercepted, 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> Survey administration was conducted over seven entrance and seven exit sessions, each lasting 90 minutes and 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 269 and 301, the 95 percent confidence interval for survey figures is  $\pm 5.98\%$  and  $\pm 5.65\%$ , 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

### Visit History

Those visiting the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture for the first time comprised three quarters of survey respondents (75%), while one quarter of respondents (25%) had made at least one previous visit to the Reynolds Center.<sup>5</sup> In this report, the former will be called “first-time visitors” and the latter, “repeat visitors”

This is an unusually high figure for first-time visitors in comparison with other NPG exhibitions that OP&A has studied, particularly considering that the survey was conducted outside of the summer months, when the percentage of first-time visitors to the Reynolds Center surges. One clue to this puzzle is that repeat visitors who responded to the survey appeared to be more inclined to have negative views of Reagan and his Presidency than first-time visitors—perhaps a reflection of the more Democratic-liberal demographic of the Washington D.C. metro area.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that repeat visitors may have been less likely than first-time visitors to enter the *Ronald Reagan* exhibition because of negative views about the subject. This hypothesis would be impossible to confirm with the available data, although it is supported by some other circumstantial evidence, as noted below.

### Visit Purpose

About 6% of respondents indicated that they had come to the Reynolds Center specifically for *Ronald Reagan*. We will refer to these as “exhibition-specific visitors,” and others will be called “general visitors.”

Although the exhibition-specific visitor figure can vary on the basis of factors that have little to do with the exhibition or its subject (time of year, location of the exhibition within the Reynolds Center, coverage of the exhibition in the media, and so on), it should nevertheless be noted that the figure for *Ronald Reagan* is very low in comparison with other recent NPG exhibitions studied by OP&A. Only the 5% figure registered for the *Americans Now* exhibition was comparable.

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<sup>5</sup> For questions asked on both the entrance and exit surveys, the figures given here are for the merged responses from both, weighted as appropriate.

<sup>6</sup> About one quarter (25%) of repeat visitors admitted to having “Negative” or “Strongly Negative” views of Reagan and his Presidency, compared with closer to one in six (17%) first-time visitors. However, repeat visitors were no less likely to hold “Positive” or “Strongly Positive” views of Reagan and his Presidency than first-time visitors.

## Visit Groups

About one quarter of respondents (23%) were alone. The vast majority were visiting with others, whether adults (69%) or children (9%).

## Sex

About 50% of visitors were female and 50% were male, a slightly higher percentage of male visitors and slightly lower percentage of female visitors than are typical for an exhibition at the Reynolds Center.

## Residence

Nearly nine out of ten respondents were from the United States (89%); about one in ten (11%) was a resident of another country. About one in five (19%) was a resident of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region.

As with the repeat-visitor figure, the local-visitor figure is unusually low in comparison with other NPG exhibitions studied by OP&A. This provides further circumstantial evidence for the possibility of ideological self-selection for entry into the exhibition, with (presumably relatively Democratic-liberal) visitors from the D.C. metro area perhaps less interested in an exhibition on Reagan than other visitors.

## Age

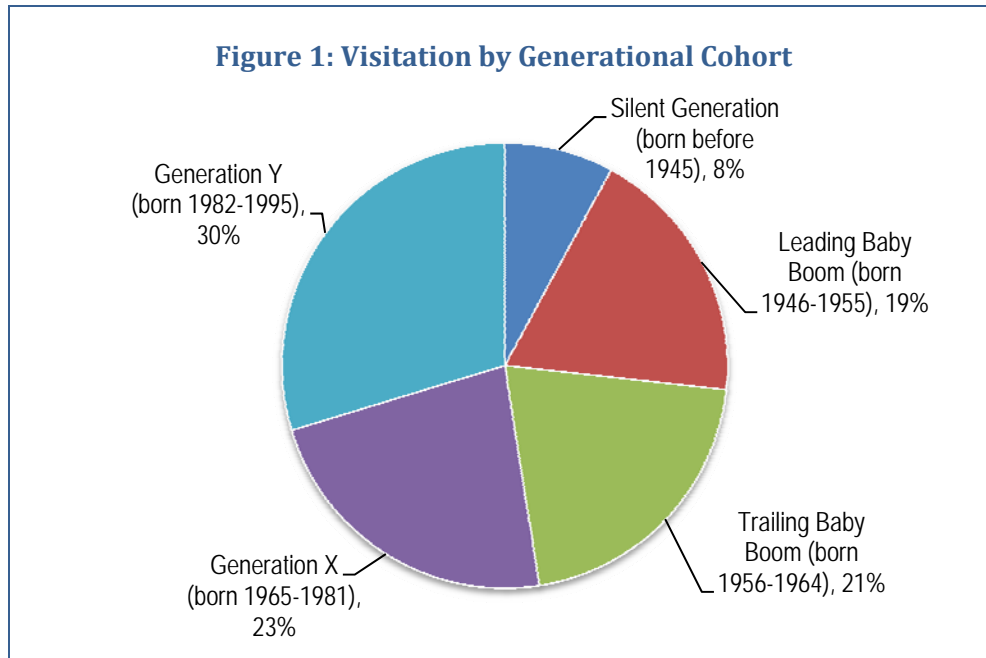
The mean age of visitors was 44 and the median age was 46—comparatively older than most other NPG exhibitions studied by OP&A, although comparable to the figures for the recent *Seeing Gertrude Stein* exhibition<sup>7</sup>.

By generation, visitation consisted of 30% Generations Y and Z (born 1982 and later); 23% Generation X (born 1965-1981); 21% Trailing Baby Boom (born 1956-1964); 19% Leading Baby Boom (born 1946-1955); and 8% Silent Generation (born before 1946). (Figure 1)

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<sup>7</sup> *Seeing Gertrude Stein* was on display on the second floor of the Reynolds Center from October 14, 2011 to January 22, 2012.



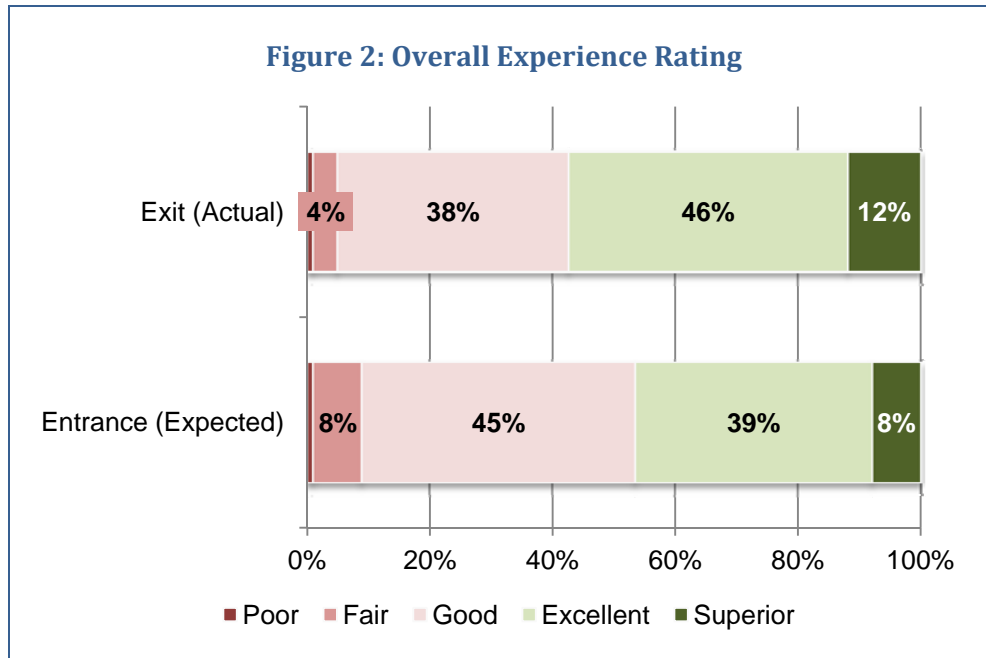


## Ratings

Entering visitors were asked to rate their expected overall experience in the exhibition, using a five-point scale that has been applied by OP&A across Smithsonian exhibitions: *poor*, *fair*, *good*, *excellent*, and *superior*. Exiting visitors were asked to rate their actual experience in the exhibition on the same scale.

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 experience tend to mark *excellent*; for most Smithsonian exhibitions, the modal rating is *excellent*. Those who have very positive responses tend to mark *superior*.

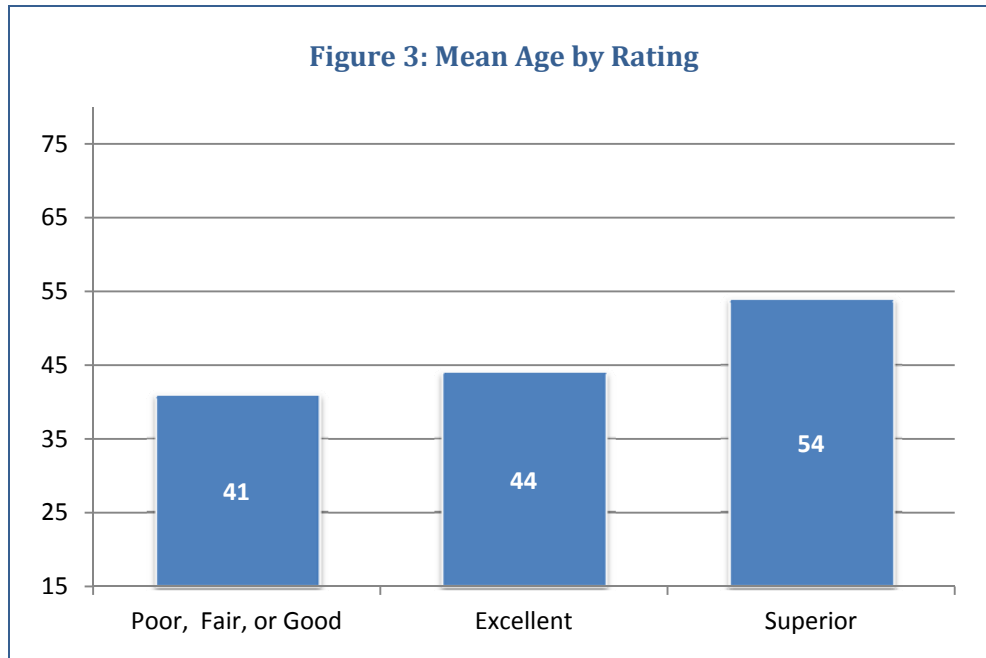
About two fifths of visitors to *Ronald Reagan* rated their overall experiences in the lower three categories, although only a small fraction rated it in the lowest two categories—*good* (38%), *fair* (4%), *poor* (1%). Just under half rated it *excellent* (46%), and about one in eight rated it *superior* (12%). (Figure 2) Taking into account sample sizes and the resulting statistical uncertainties, these results are a bit lower than average for a Smithsonian exhibition.



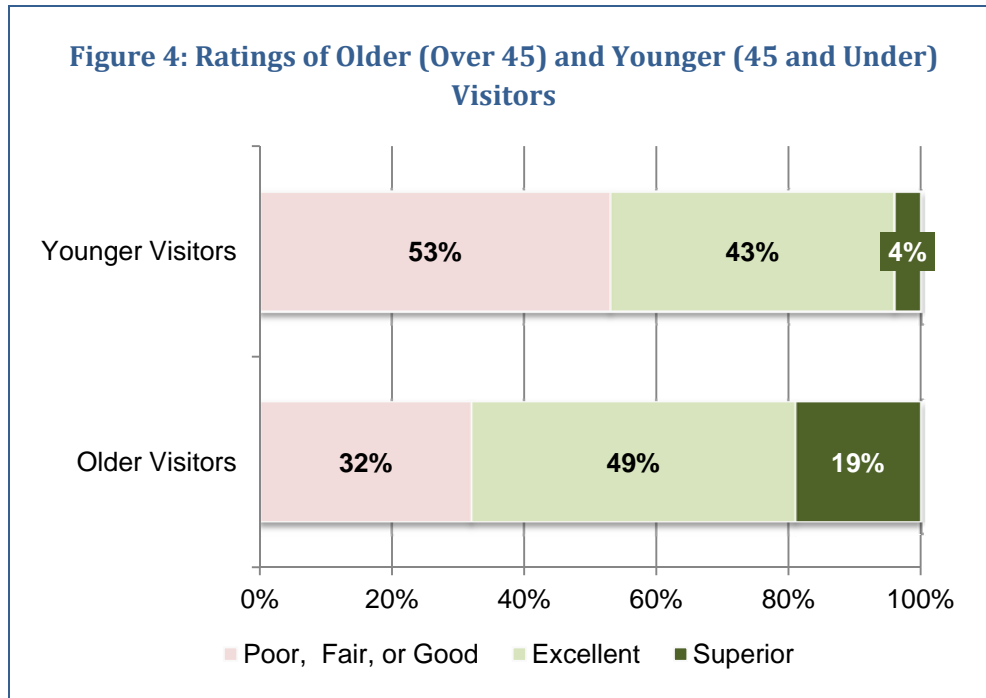
Exhibition-specific visitors tend to rate an exhibition they have come to see more highly than general visitors do. They are almost always more likely to rate it *superior*, and usually less likely to rate it in the lower categories of *poor*, *fair*, and *good*. While this pattern held for the exhibition-specific visitors responding to the *Ronald Reagan* survey, the absolute number of such visitors was too low to allow any statistical generalizations to the larger population of visitors.

A correlation was, however, found between age and overall rating. The mean age of visitors giving *Ronald Reagan* one of the lower three ratings was about 41 years; the mean age of those rating it *excellent* was slightly higher, at 44 years; and the mean age of those rating it *superior* was about 54 years—obviously, much older than those who did not rate it *superior*.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 3) In other words, those who had the best experiences in the exhibition were, on average, much older than other visitors. However, as discussed below, the effect of age on overall exhibition rating was most likely mediated by the effect of age on visitors' *familiarity with* and *approval of* Ronald Reagan and his Presidency, both of which were closely correlated with age.

<sup>8</sup> Using standard ANOVA tests and using  $p = .05$  as the cutoff for statistical significance, the differences between the first two means was barely statistically significant.



That said, the qualitative interviews conducted for this study suggested that age itself may have had an indirect influence on positive experiences in the exhibition for at least some visitors, as a result of a “nostalgia effect” among visitors with personal memories of the Reagan years. Additional evidence for the effect of personal recollections of the Reagan years on visitors’ positive responses to the exhibition was obtained by creating a new age-based variable that roughly separated respondents into those likely to have well-formed memories of Reagan’s time in office and those not likely to remember much from the early and mid-1980s. The former group was defined, albeit somewhat arbitrarily, as consisting of respondents who were of voting age at the time of Reagan’s re-election in 1984, and therefore older than 45 today; the latter group as respondents 45 years of age and younger. When looked at separately, the older of these two cohorts was far more likely to rate the exhibition *superior* (19% versus 4%), and far less likely to rate it in the lower three categories (32% versus 53%). (Figure 4) We will refer to this variable subsequently as the “cohort variable.”



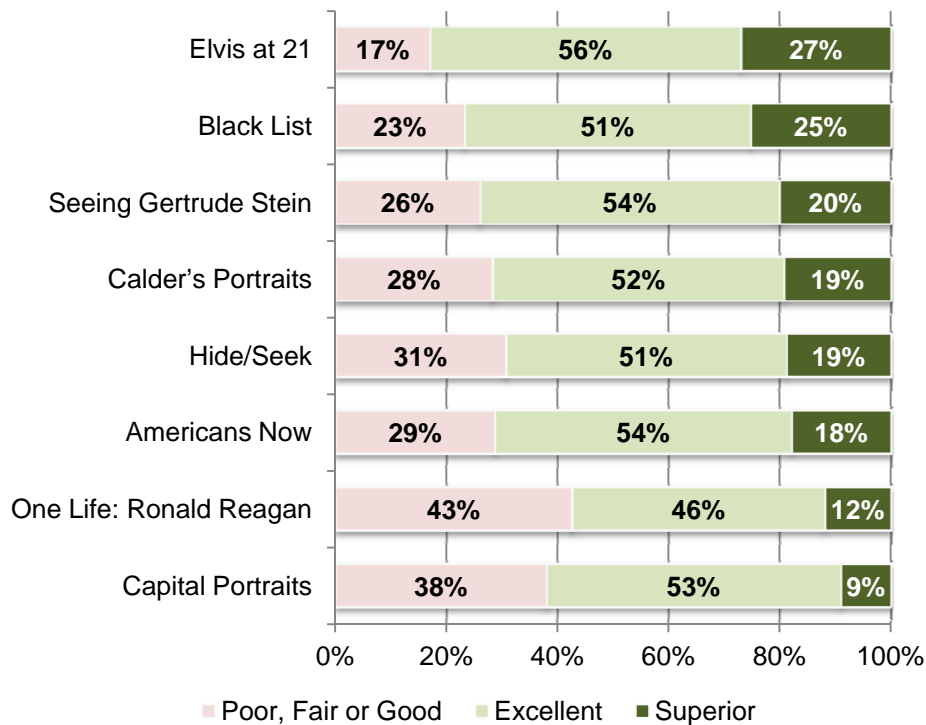
A comparison of entering visitors’ expected ratings with exiting visitors’ actual ratings indicates that, as with other NPG exhibitions OP&A has studied, *Ronald Reagan* exceeded entering visitors’ expectations. Lower ratings (*poor, fair, and good*) decreased from 53% (expected) to 42% (actual), *excellent* ratings rose from 39% (expected) to 46% (actual), and *superior* ratings rose from 8% (expected) to 12% (actual).

### 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. Ratings for *Ronald Reagan* were slightly lower.

In terms of *superior* ratings, *Ronald Reagan’s* 12% is slightly lower than the figures registered for *Calder’s Portraits* (20%), *Seeing Gertrude Stein* (20%), *Hide/Seek* (19%) and *Americans Now* (18%); considerably lower than the figures for *Elvis at 21* (27%) and *Black List* (25%); and similar to the figure for *Capital Portraits* (9%). Conversely, when looking at the lower ratings of *poor, fair, and good*, *Ronald Reagan*, at 43%, did about as well as *Capital Portraits* (38%) and less well than *Elvis at 21* (17%), *Black List* (23%), *Seeing Gertrude Stein* (26%), *Calder’s Portraits* (28%), *Americans Now* (29%), and *Hide/Seek* (31%). (Figure 5)

**Figure 5: Comparative Overall Experience Ratings for Recent NPG Exhibitions**



### Portrait Gallery-Specific Interests

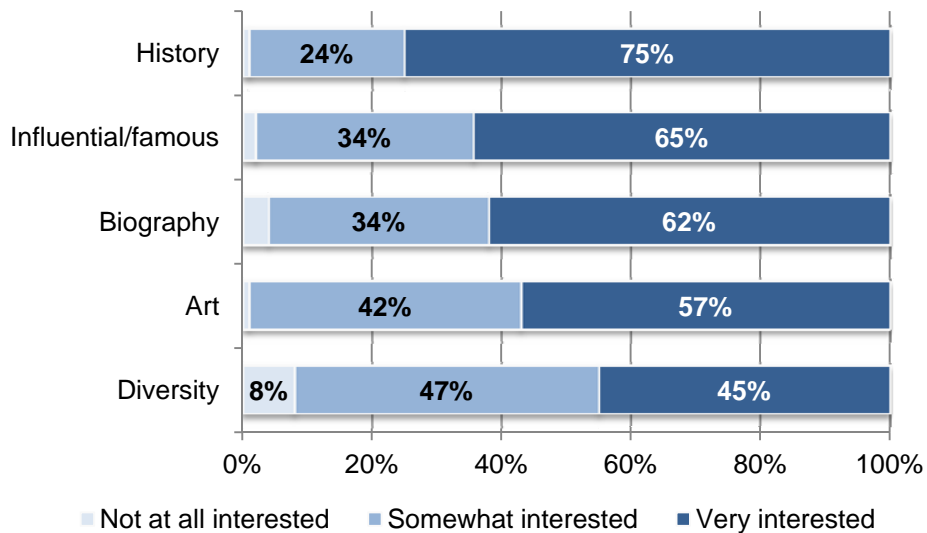
On a previous NPG survey (for *Seeing Gertrude Stein*), OP&A piloted a question focused on experiences that visitors might specifically expect in NPG exhibitions, as opposed to any museum exhibition. It was phrased as follows:

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

The answer choices were “Art;” “History;” “Biography;” “Images of America’s human diversity;” and “Images of influential and/or famous Americans,” each of which visitors were asked to rate on a three-point scale of *very*, *somewhat*, and *not at all* interested.

Respondents’ interest in all of these areas was high, although interest in “Images of America’s human diversity” was lower than interest in the other areas, with 8% of respondents saying they were *not at all* interested in this theme and less than half (45%) saying they were *very* interested. *Very* interested figures for the other areas ranged from 57% for “Art” to 75% for “History.” (Figure 6)

**Figure 6: In the Context of NPG in General, How Interested Are You in the Following?**



The only area of interest that correlated with overall rating for *Ronald Reagan* was “Biography,” which is easily explicable in terms of the essentially biographical character of the exhibition. Although visitors indicating that they were very interested in “Biography” were no more likely to rate Reagan *superior* than other visitors, they were much less likely to rate it in the lower three categories of *poor*, *fair*, and *good* (34% versus 55%), and correspondingly more likely to rate it *excellent* (54% versus 34%).

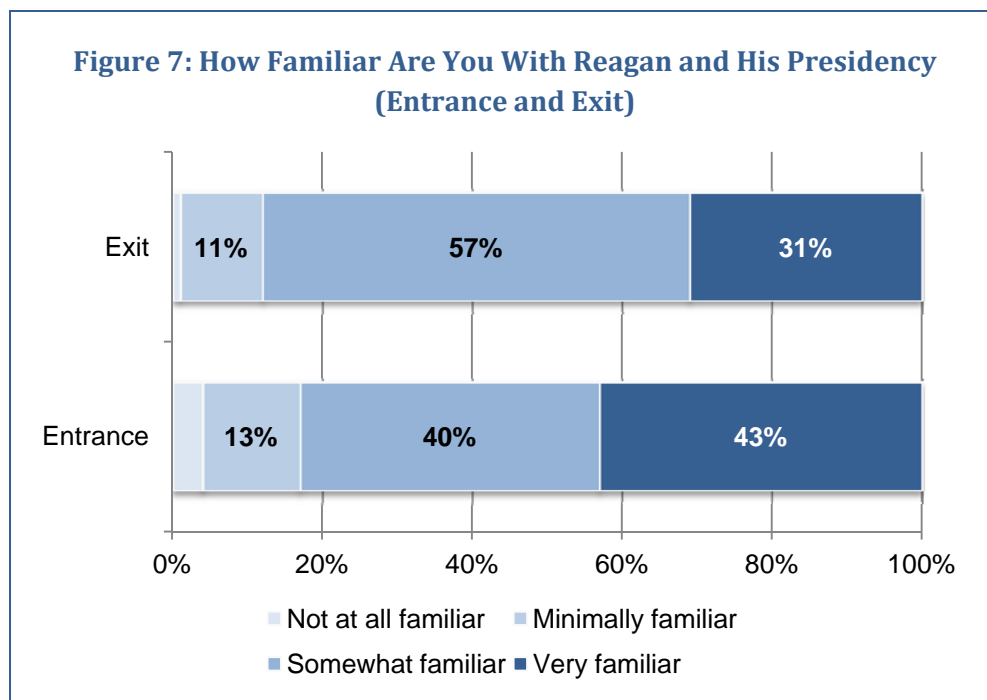
Reinforcing a finding from the *Seeing Gertrude Stein* study, age appeared to correlate with a number of interests, always with the implication that younger visitors were less interested in the area in question than older visitors:

- The mean age of visitors who were *very* interested in “Art” was 46, while the mean age of those who were not was 41.
- The mean age of visitors who were *very* interested in “History” was 46, while the mean age of those who were not was 40.
- The mean age of visitors who were *very* interested in “Biography” was 46, while the mean age of those who were not was 40.

## Familiarity with Reagan and His Presidency

On both the entrance and exit surveys, visitors were asked to rate their familiarity with Reagan and his Presidency on a four-point scale: *not at all*, *minimally*, *somewhat*, or *very* familiar.

Comparison of entrance and exit survey results shows a somewhat puzzling pattern. The percentage of visitors choosing *somewhat* familiar increased dramatically (from 40% to 57%)—which is not unexpected, as most visitors probably would have at picked up at least a few new facts or ideas, even from a relatively small exhibition such as this. However, most of this increase came at the expense of a decrease in those selecting *very* familiar (which fell from 43% to 31%), rather than a decrease in those selecting *not at all* familiar or *minimally* familiar. (Figure 7)



The magnitude of these differences on the entrance and exit surveys make them difficult to write off as flukes of the sample selection process. Since the exhibition was fairly small, perhaps it would have been unrealistic to expect an increase in *very* familiar responses among exiting visitors. But the significant decrease in *very* familiar responses was unexpected and not easily interpretable.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The only possibility that the study team can suggest is that perhaps the exhibition contained enough unfamiliar material for some visitors who initially considered themselves *very* familiar with Reagan to reassess this judgment.

Not surprisingly, age correlated closely with familiarity, with older visitors more likely to consider themselves familiar with Reagan and his Presidency. The mean ages of those who were *minimally*, *somewhat*, and *very* familiar with Reagan and his Presidency were 31, 43, and 52 years, respectively.<sup>10</sup> Looking at the cohort variable, among visitors over 45 years of age nearly half (47%) considered themselves *very* familiar with him, and practically all (97%) were at least *somewhat* familiar.

Familiarity was correlated with overall exhibition rating. For example, those who considered themselves *very* familiar with Reagan were much more likely than others to rate the exhibition *superior* (26% vs. 6%), and much less likely to rate it in the lower categories of *poor*, *fair*, and *good* (28% vs. 49%). Conversely, those who considered themselves *not at all* familiar or *minimally* familiar with Reagan and his Presidency were more likely to rate it in the lower three categories (71% vs. 38%) and less likely to rate it *excellent* (29% vs. 48%) or *superior* (less than 1%, vs. 14%). The last of these comparisons is particularly noteworthy, as it implies that some degree of familiarity with Reagan and his Presidency was essentially a prerequisite for a *superior* overall experience in the exhibition.

The relationship between familiarity and overall exhibition rating continued to hold up when controlling for age using the cohort variable, although its statistical significance decreased somewhat—becoming borderline significant in the case of visitors 45 years of age or under.<sup>11</sup>

The converse was not true, however: the relationship between age and overall exhibition rating essentially disappeared when familiarity was controlled for. Within the separate groups of *minimally*, *somewhat*, and *very* familiar visitors, mean age differences among those rating the exhibition *superior*, *excellent*, or *good/fair/poor* were generally not statistically significant.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that age per se did not have a meaningful influence on visitors' overall experience in the exhibition—rather, familiarity with Reagan and his Presidency appeared to be the operative influence, and age entered into the equation only insofar as older visitors were more likely to be familiar with Reagan.

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<sup>10</sup> The number of visitors who considered themselves *not at all familiar* with Reagan was too low to form a statistically meaningful estimate of the mean age for that category.

<sup>11</sup> T-test  $p = 0.032$ .

<sup>12</sup> Results from a one-way ANOVA test on data split by familiarity category suggested borderline statistical significance for the *somewhat* familiar group ( $p = 0.044$ ) and no statistical significance for the other groups. A chi-square significance test on the data split by familiarity level also failed to turn up significant results in a cross-tab of the cohort variable and overall rating variable.



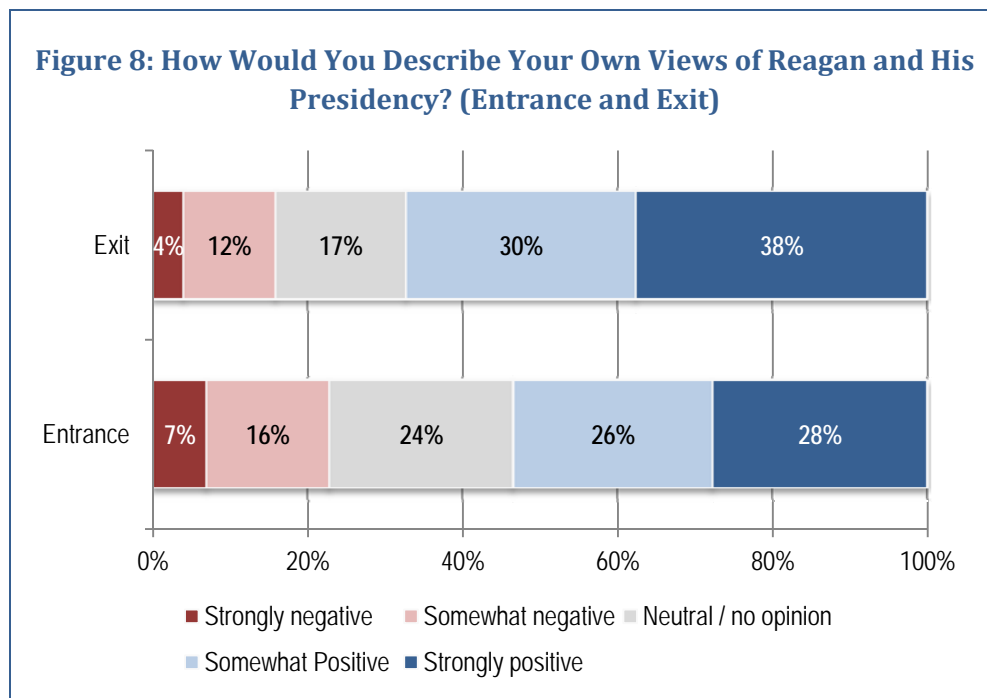
## Approval of Reagan and His Presidency

On both the entrance and exit surveys, visitors were asked to rate their personal view of Reagan and his Presidency on a five-point scale: *strongly positive*, *somewhat positive*, *neutral / no opinion*, *somewhat negative*, and *strongly negative*.

Comparison of entrance and exit survey results suggests most visitors tended to come in with a positive or at least neutral attitude toward the exhibition subject, and to leave with even more positive views. (Figure 8)

- Over half the entrance survey respondents came in with a positive view of Reagan, split almost evenly between *strongly positive* (28%) and *somewhat positive* (26%); whereas under a quarter held negative views—6% *strongly negative* and 16% *somewhat negative*. The remaining quarter of entering survey-takers (24%) were *neutral* toward the exhibition subject.
- Among exiting visitors, positive opinions had risen to over two thirds (38% *strongly positive*, 30% *somewhat positive*) and negative opinions had dropped to about one sixth (4% *strongly negative*, 12% *somewhat negative*), as had neutral views (17%).

Thus, while there might have been some self-selection among entering visitors based on their initial attitudes toward Reagan, the exhibition nonetheless had the effect, on average, of raising visitors' estimation of Reagan.



Age correlated with responses to this question. In terms of mean ages for the different response categories, there appeared to be a roughly U-shaped relationship, with older visitors over-represented among both the positive and negative groups,<sup>13</sup> and under-represented among the *neutral* group. The mean age for those who held a *very positive* or *somewhat positive* view of Reagan was 45 years and the mean age for those who held a *very negative* or *somewhat negative* view of Reagan was a similar 48 years,<sup>14</sup> while the mean age for those who held a *neutral* view was a much-younger 35 years. Looked at in terms of the cohort variable, no difference existed between the over-45 and 45-and-under cohorts with respect to negative views of Reagan and his Presidency, but over-45s were less likely to be *neutral* toward Reagan (9% versus 27%) and more likely to hold a positive view (75% versus 59%).

Visitors' personal views of Reagan and his Presidency were correlated with overall exhibition rating. For example, those who had a *strongly positive* personal view of Reagan were much more likely than others to rate the exhibition *superior* (30% vs. 1%),<sup>15</sup> and much less likely to rate it in the lower categories of *poor*, *fair*, and *good* (17% vs. 57%). Conversely, those who had a *somewhat negative* or *strongly negative* view of Reagan and his Presidency were more likely to rate the exhibition in the lower three categories (71% vs. 37%) and much less likely to rate it *excellent* (27% vs. 50%) or *superior* (2% vs. 14%). Interestingly, those who had a *neutral* view of Reagan, or no opinion at all, did not rate the exhibition much better than those with a negative view of Reagan (68% low ratings, 32% *excellent*, 0% *superior*).<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between personal views of Reagan and the overall exhibition rating continued to hold up strongly even when controlling for age using the cohort variable described above.

The converse was not true, however: the relationship between age and overall exhibition rating disappeared completely when visitors' personal views of Reagan were controlled for. Within the separate groups of *strongly positive*, *somewhat positive*, *neutral*, *somewhat negative*, and *strongly negative* visitors, mean age differences among those rating the

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<sup>13</sup> With "positive" here defined as the sum of *strongly positive* and *somewhat positive* responses, and "negative" defined as the sum of *strongly negative* and *somewhat negative* responses.

<sup>14</sup> Statistically, the mean age for those with negative views of Reagan was no different from those who held positive views of Reagan, but was different from those with no opinion.

<sup>15</sup> In effect, almost all the *superior* ratings for this exhibition were conferred by visitors who held a *strongly positive* personal view of Reagan.

<sup>16</sup> The overall exhibition rating also correlated positively with answers to the opinion questions about whether Reagan was "successful..." and "transformative...", and whether the exhibition was "fair." However, it is probably safe to see these as second-order relationships, mediated strongly through the primary relationships with pre-existing approval and familiarity levels.

exhibition *superior, excellent, or good/fair/poor* were not statistically significant.<sup>17</sup> This reinforces the idea that age per se was not a direct influence on visitors' rating of the exhibition.

## Exhibition Messages

Two important themes that the exhibition attempted to convey were that Reagan was a pivotal figure in modern American politics, and that Reagan was successful in focusing on a small number of important issues during his Presidency and making a major impact in those areas.

To see if visitors picked up on these messages, the survey asked visitors to rate their agreement on a five-point scale (*strongly disagree, disagree, neutral/ don't know, agree, and strongly agree*) with the following two statements:

- “Reagan was successful in pursuing the priorities he set for his Presidency”
- “Reagan was a transformative political figure.”

Responses to the first question did not differ significantly between entering and exiting survey respondents, although the level of agreement with this statement was relatively high at the baseline.<sup>18</sup> However, exiting visitors were significantly more likely to *strongly agree* that Reagan was a transformative political figure than entering visitors (34% vs. 23%).

## Fairness

Because Reagan is a figure who continues to elicit strong feelings across the political spectrum, the exit survey asked visitors if they agreed with a statement that the exhibition represented Reagan and his Presidency in a “fair and unbiased” way.

On the whole, there was little disagreement with the statement, with only 1% of respondents *strongly disagreeing* and 3% *disagreeing*. Another one fifth of respondents were *neutral* or had no opinion (20%), while over three-quarters either *agreed* (54%) or *strongly agreed* (22%).

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<sup>17</sup> Results from a one-way ANOVA test on data split by approval category. A chi-square significance test on the data split by approval level also failed to turn up significant results in a cross-tab of the cohort variable and overall rating variable.

<sup>18</sup> Casual inspection of the frequency tables in Appendix B may suggest an increase in the likelihood that exiting visitors *strongly agreed* with this assertion, but the apparent difference was not statistically significant using a chi-square test at the standard  $p = .05$  level.

However, views on this question were correlated with visitors' familiarity with, and personal views of, Reagan and his Presidency. For example, those who were *somewhat* or *very* familiar with Reagan and his Presidency were much more likely to *strongly agree* or *agree* with the statement than those who were *unfamiliar* or *minimally* familiar (80% vs. 41%). Likewise, those who held a *positive* or *very positive* personal view of Reagan were far more likely to *agree* or *strongly agree* that the exhibition presented him fairly (83%) than those who held a neutral (60%) or *negative/strongly negative* (62%) view.

## Miscellaneous

### Video Kiosks

On the exit survey, visitors were asked "How did you make use of the audio-visual kiosk?" About a third reported that they "Did not notice" the kiosk (32%). Slightly more than two in five "Noticed, but did not watch/listen" (44%); about one in five "Watched/listened to one speech (or part of one speech)" (22%); and three percent "Watched/listened to more than one speech (or parts of more than one speech)."

Using the kiosk was correlated with ratings. Visitors who watched and/or listened to any of the speeches were more likely to rate the exhibition *superior* than those who did not (25% vs. 7% of visitors who "Noticed, Did Not Watch," and 9% of those who "Did Not Notice"); and less likely to rate it *good/fair/poor* (22% vs. 46% of those who "Noticed, Did Not Watch" and 54% of those who "Did Not Notice").

### Information Sources

The entry survey asked respondents where they found out about the exhibition. The only response that was selected by a substantial percentage of respondents (78%) was "Visiting this building today." All other responses were in the single digits—indeed, with the exception of "Friends/Family/Colleagues" (6%), in the low single digits.<sup>19</sup>

These results are fairly typical, except that the percentage of visitors who learned about the exhibition through word-of-mouth ("Friends/Family/Colleagues") was low. Except in rare cases of exhibitions that are heavily marketed, walking-by ("Visiting this building today") and word-of-mouth, in that order, are by far the most common ways that visitors find out

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<sup>19</sup> About 9% of respondents also selected "Other." Write-in elaboration on this response suggests that many of these those who selected "Other" in fact fell into the "Visiting this building today" category.

about temporary Smithsonian exhibitions. However, the figure for the latter on other surveys where OP&A has asked this question is typically more in the range of 10%–15%.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> OP&A does not ask this question on all or even most exhibition visitor surveys, as the result is usually predictable and unhelpful. Figures obtained for most information sources are usually far too low to allow for any conclusions about which sources (other than walking-by and word-of-mouth) are most effective in reaching potential visitors.

## Qualitative Findings

From late April through May 2012, the study team conducted 31 in-depth qualitative interviews with 42 visitors exiting the *One Life: Ronald Reagan* exhibition. Overall, visitor feedback was positive about both the exhibition and the “One Life” format.

General comments from visitors on their overall impressions of the exhibition included the following:

*I was intrigued. I grew up in the Reagan era. I remember doing a mock election in the fourth grade and getting to know about the democratic process, and Reagan was the first political figure that I had ever had any interest in at the age of nine or ten years old. Having reflected back forty years now, seeing exactly what kind of President he was and what he was to America at that time, he was the person that we needed as President. You really get a sense of the type of man he really was and the type of President he was for the United States during the 80s.*

*I feel that Presidents should not be judged by their speeches or their public appearances; they should be judged by what they do behind closed doors, how they effect real change that influences real people. ... I think this gave me a glimpse of that, and made me want to stay in there a little longer. I was considering passing the whole Reagan exhibit by and just going on to something else.*

*You know, I don't [remember other “One Life” exhibitions]. [But] I'm likely to remember this one, whereas, if I saw one before, it slips my mind. ... Because lately, and like a lot of people, I've been thinking about the President and the upcoming Presidential race. And so I think that's what makes this kind of germane for me right now.*

## Themes

Visitors were asked about the underlying themes or messages they saw in the exhibition. Among the themes that emerged from visitor comments were the accomplishments of Reagan's Presidency and a view of Reagan, the person.

### Reagan, as President

*I feel like you've tried to show, in a very small space...all phases of his life. And I can't help but think that you've tried to show some of the key accomplishments of his Presidency. Particularly, what he accomplished with Russia, and what he accomplished to bring down the Iron Curtain.*

*It reminded me that he was the President at the end of the Cold War, and that he contributed to international peace, in a sense. When you hear [people talk about him today], it's mostly in the context of agreeing with his domestic policy and the ideals that he supposedly promoted domestically. ... [But when] I looked at the photos in the gallery, I thought, "Yeah, he had to address some real problems and some real dangers," [and he did so] in a seemingly pragmatic way. He was willing to negotiate; he did not see America as a big stick you would wave around to influence others through our power.*

## **Reagan, the Person**

*I think this exhibit wants to make the point of Reagan as a man—not just as a former President or a political icon of some kind—but as a human being; a person who had very much a private life as well as a public life, and there was a balance.*

*You are reminded that he was just a normal person who was responding to the [challenges] then in a pragmatic way. There was that one quote about how negotiating with Gorbachev was like negotiating with the movie studios. So it humanized him a little bit more.*

*I think [this exhibition emphasized] his humanness—the picture of him on the Time magazine cover in his jeans and work shirt; and pictures on his ranch with his horses; and just portraying him as a man and [allowing me] to identify with the more human parts of his life, I think. I liked that.*

## **Other Themes**

*I thought it was a positive view of him as kind of an underdog at first and then as a decision-maker.*

*I could tell that the curator had a very favorable view of Reagan. I mean, he has his detractors; so I could tell it was a very favorable, patriotic, pro-Reagan thing—which is perfectly fine with me.*

## **Memories and Learning Experiences**

A number of visitors who were alive during Reagan's Presidency talked nostalgically about their memories of Reagan's Presidency, his policies, relations with the Soviet Union, and the 1980s more generally. For these visitors, the exhibition was less about learning something new and more a chance to reminisce about the past.

*[The exhibit reminded me] of some of the key accomplishments of his Presidency that maybe weren't at the forefront of my mind before I went into it. I certainly was familiar with them, but this made me think, "Hey, he really did achieve some very important things during his Presidency."*

*There are some things [in the exhibition] that reminded me of some things I had forgotten, like the animosity between he and Mikhail Gorbachev initially. What I remember about him is the good relationship [Gorbachev and Reagan] seemed to have at the end of the negotiations. [But this exhibition] kind of reminded me of some very, very tense times that I had forgotten about.*

*I didn't realize how contentious the whole "arms race" was. I mean, I remember it as kid, but I didn't realize that [Reagan] and Gorbachev were just butting heads. And it seemed to never stop. ... The whole Cold War aspect of it, I found to be really interesting. And that was an aspect I wasn't really familiar with.*

*I guess I liked the information about the nuclear negotiations. I also liked the joke he had about Gorbachev driving his car around. I don't know if you've read it but there's a nice joke in there that he told. Most of the information, I was familiar with; but it was a good reminder.*

An area of particular engagement with some visitors was learning more about the personal details of Reagan's life. Several interviewees noted Reagan's Alzheimer's diagnosis and his letter announcing his condition:

*One thing that did surprise [me] was the Alzheimer's disclosure and then the letter, too. I thought that was interesting.*

*I read his letter to the country when he found out he had Alzheimer's. That he sat down and just wrote that with one minor little scratch-out was pretty impressive.*

*I didn't know that he wrote most of—close to all of—his own speeches. And the fact that he was able to write that Alzheimer's letter about himself...*

A number of visitors found the artifacts pertaining to Reagan's earlier careers to be fun and interesting. For some younger visitors, the exhibition was the first exposure they had to Reagan's careers prior to his Presidency.

*His earlier career, as the radio commentator—that was something new for me!*

*It's very interesting. I didn't know Ronald Reagan was a radio announcer, a radio sportscaster.*



*I didn't know he was an actor; I just knew [he was] President.*

## **Political Ideology/Feelings toward Reagan**

### **Strong Opinions**

Some interviewees felt compelled to share their strong positive or negative views of Reagan with the interviewers. These visitors either expressed their thoughts throughout the interview, or as soon as the interviews began, as did one woman:

*Well, first off, we like Reagan. I'll make that known right away.*

Other thoughts included the following:

*Yeah, it seemed very balanced for me. Personally, I love him and he could do no wrong.*

*Husband: Reagan is our favorite President. Growing up during the time that he was President, he was just the man I associated with the U.S. government. I think probably the second-to-last time I cried was at his funeral. I've always liked what Reagan stood for.*

*Wife: I agree with him. He's who we grew up with, and who we know, and who we relate to. He was a people's President.*

*I pretty much have strong opinions already so there's not much that's going to alter it unless it's really dramatic. And I don't think you have the time or space to be doing something like that.*

*I just have a distaste for the man, so I was trying to look away.*

One man noted his support for Reagan, drawing a parallel between his Presidency and the upcoming election:

*I'm not a huge Obama fan, so when I see Reagan I'm like "Wow! If [Obama] could just be a little bit more like Reagan, he might get another four years."*

### **Effect on Opinion of Exhibition**

A number of visitors who did not like Reagan still thought *One Life: Ronald Reagan* was a good exhibition. One family who made their strong distaste for Reagan known later spoke positively about the exhibit:

*It was an interesting presentation, even if you're not interested [in Reagan]. He was still the President. He was a good [representative of the] times from when he was President.*

However, some people who mentioned they were critics of Reagan's did have concerns about the balance of the exhibit's content:

*Certainly it was more positive than balanced. ... I voted for him both times, but in retrospect, the direction where he took the country I think has been very, very bad for the country. And I don't see any of that being reflected in the exhibition.*

*I don't know that I can separate [my response to the exhibition] from my own bias, so maybe it's not fair. But I did not see anything negative about him in there. I think his tax policies were very harmful, even though he did [later] raise taxes. I think his theory of economics has been very harmful to the nation, and that was not covered at all.*

*The negative perceptions of Reagan that many people have [were missing from the exhibit]. It's a kind of deification of Reagan, which, as I said to my friends when we walked in there, I can't get it. I can't understand it.*

One visitor felt the introductory text at the entrance to the exhibition did not match what he saw as a more balanced presentation inside the gallery:

*At first, I was a little skeptical. I didn't want to spend too much time looking at the Reagan stuff. ... When I read this first part [introductory text outside exhibition entrance], it seemed very pro-Reagan and it seemed to simplify his ideals in a way that I thought was maybe somewhat misleading. But when I went into the gallery, I felt like I was not seeing the Reagan that people refer to today—the generalized, ideologically perfect Reagan. I felt more like I was seeing it from the perspective of when he was President; I was seeing different things that happened “in real time.”*

In addition, a pattern emerged in which people who supported Reagan in the 80s felt reaffirmed in their beliefs after visiting the exhibit:

*It brought back to my consciousness how good he was. ... Now, I'm not sure Reagan would've been good if he'd have been fifty years earlier or if he was President now. [What I'm reminded of is] how good of a job he did at the time. The right man at the right time.*

*Having lived it, I knew the President that he was and I knew the very monumental events that he was responsible for. So, it didn't shed any new light in terms of who he was.*

*It confirmed what I thought about him as a great leader. His pictures with Gorbachev are very close to what we know about him in Poland, what we value about Reagan.*

## **New Perspective on Reagan, the Person**

Some visitors who did not support his politics, nonetheless, felt compelled to adjust their views of Reagan as a person. In some cases, they drew a clear separation between Reagan, the man, and Reagan as the personification of a certain ideology.

*I would have to say that having been around the exhibition, I was a bit more convinced; I could see how he was able to engage with people in a very folksy, down-to-earth way. His inaugural address touched a very important chord, which was about making government small, which still resonates today, at least with Romney and the Republicans. So I was a bit more convinced personally [about the grounds for Reagan's appeal] after visiting this exhibition, but I still can't get very enthused about him as a President.*

There were also interviewees, like the one below, who felt they did not appreciate Reagan's accomplishments prior to visiting the exhibit, and reconsidered their views of him upon their exit from the "One Life" gallery.

*I probably didn't appreciate Reagan. I was in high school and just [didn't pay] as much attention to world events as maybe I would have if I was older. ... So [this exhibition] probably [deepened my] appreciation for what he did and the kind of President he was.*

## **Favorites**

### **Objects**

Some of the objects on display that were repeatedly mentioned by interviewees included the piece of the Berlin Wall, Reagan's Alzheimer's letter, and his sketches and doodles.

When discussing the Berlin Wall artifact, some visitors mentioned their memories of the Cold War, Reagan's famous quote "tear down this wall," or where they were when the Wall came down.

*I was impressed with a couple of [the objects], [like] the Berlin Wall rock, because I was in Berlin when the wall went up. I'd just finished college and had an ROTC*

*obligation I had to fulfill in Berlin. I watched it on television and, frankly, it scared the hell out of me.*

As already noted, a number of visitors were impressed by Reagan's Alzheimer's letter, calling it "interesting," "touching," and "moving." They also found his sketches and doodles to be "sweet" and "personal."

*I don't feel like I learned anything particularly new, but I thought the exhibits were good. I liked the piece of the Berlin Wall, the [Alzheimer's] letter, and some of the other exhibits on the Wall.*

*[I liked the] speech scene; [the] page of his speech; [and] the caricature [he had done] of himself—the drawing, the sketching. How personal.*

*The sketches were kind of sweet.*

*How he dealt with Alzheimer's was very touching, and I liked the fact that he was honest. I liked [the same thing] about Betty Ford, with [her] breast cancer. She was one of my favorite First Ladies because of that. I think the fact that they come out and make it known is a positive.*

*His inaugural speech, as well as his letter to the public regarding his Alzheimer's diagnosis, were moving, even to someone [like me] who is pretty strongly anti-Reagan.*

Some people were surprised to see objects in the exhibit, as they were expecting *One Life: Ronald Reagan* to focus on portraits of the former President.

## **Pictures**

Overall, visitors enjoyed the exhibit's photographs and portraits. While some photos, such as Reagan at his ranch in California, his meetings with Gorbachev, and his personal life with Nancy, were mentioned individually, the images were often discussed as a group. Visitors appreciated seeing many sides of the former President.

A notable trend that emerged was that several visitors would have liked more photos from Reagan's childhood and personal life included in the exhibition, or in some cases, just more photos in general. Several visitors who commented on the photographs remarked that some of the images were new, or were something they hadn't seen before. Some visitors appreciated the inclusion of lesser-known photographs.

*You look at that [larger-than-life photo of Reagan outside the exhibition entrance], and that's the iconic [image of Reagan]—everyone there is cheering. [But the photos I liked] looked like they were taken by someone who wasn't necessarily supposed to be*

*there and was kind of 'spying in on him' to capture what he was like a little more naturally.*

*I guess there were some images I hadn't seen. That was exciting. And things that you can't get [to see anywhere else], like the actual handwriting and stuff. That was very good.*

## **Text**

Some interviewees would have liked more text, while others did not read the text that was available. Some visitors noted how the text helped them to better contextualize the images, and aided their understanding of the exhibition.

*It was good to have the text to completely explain [the images]. I would not have known enough just from the pictures. But the text was very helpful—succinct and to the point. It talked about elements of his personality and elements of his character.*

## **Video Kiosk**

Very few interviewees spent time any time at all at the kiosk to listen to Reagan's speeches. Some older visitors believed the kiosk would be helpful for people who did not live through the 1980s but considered it unnecessary for those who experienced the live television broadcasts of these speeches when they were younger. Other reasons visitors cited for not using the video kiosks included time constraints, having a general disinterest in video kiosks with museums, and availability of the same speeches online.

## **“One Life” Approach**

Visitors to *One Life: Ronald Reagan* noted many differences between the National Portrait Gallery as a whole and the single-room “One Life” display. In some cases visitors were interviewed after they had been through other parts of the museum, and were able to compare the size, brightness, contemporary focus, and other components of the *Ronald Reagan* exhibit to the museum's other galleries.

However, some visitors did not feel the “One Life” gallery was different than the rest of the National Portrait Gallery. This was due to various factors—simply not thinking it was different, being admittedly oblivious, or not having traveled through the rest of the museum to find grounds for comparison.

## Size

Visitors who noted the size of the *Reagan* exhibition was different than other NPG exhibits agreed that the “One Life” space was small. For some visitors, this was a positive.

*I'm just passing by; I only have an hour here. I came unprepared for all of this. And you do not have to be prepared to consume or to understand this exhibition. That's very good. If you don't have too much time, you can understand [the entire] message from this quite quickly; so that's a very, very strong [consideration] on the positive side of this.*

The exhibit left other visitors wanting more—either additional information about Reagan that was not included in the show, or a more extensive collection of the artifacts.

*The space could be bigger. It's just a room. [Although] it works for me ... I would like to see more ... about Reagan's life. The selection of examples from his biography is very good. ... I looked at every element of the exhibition.*

*I just thought there was going to be more. [Is it] disappointing? No. But I thought there was going to be more. That's why I'm looking at the other side [of the hall], going “Is there more to it? Is there more?” Eight years, one small room.*

*I would [have] liked to have seen more photographs and more information about him in his earlier years and his formative years. ... If they had two rooms, they could devote one to his early life, and one to his Presidency.*

*I'm surprised it's this small. I think there's an awful lot more you could say about Reagan. I don't think there's anything [in this exhibition] about his governorship or how he came to the Presidency. ... On the other hand, it's a good bite-sized chunk. And if you want to know more about Reagan, you can go and spend some time [at the library]. It's a small bite-sized chunk in a very large complex of museums.*

*[Reagan is] so contemporary. ... I would've liked to have seen some more pictures because there are many things that you could've put on the wall. And from my standpoint, it wouldn't have been overload. ... If I recall, there are only two paintings in there plus the movie advertisements. Because he's a contemporary President, there could've been more pictures, I thought.*

Some interviewees understood that presenting Reagan's life and Presidency in one room must have been a challenge, and opined that the curator worked well with the limited space.

*In my opinion, it's pretty brief. But I also understand, given the size and complexities—you can't put his entire life in there. I enjoyed it.*

*I thought it was a little small. But then, you can also be too overwhelmed with too much stuff, too, and then it is all lost. So this isn't a bad size—maybe [it would be better if it were] a little bit larger, but not a lot. Because [if an exhibition gets too large], you just walk in, and everything gets lost.*

## **Contemporary Focus**

Some interviewees recognized the exhibit as having a more contemporary focus than much of the rest of the National Portrait Gallery.

*It's more modern. It's photography. You've got actual artifacts, whereas over there [in the surrounding areas of NPG] you just have paintings. It's different. It's more of a holistic exhibit.*

*There is the mixed media—you have the photography as well as the portraits that kind of grab you. ... And there is a little bit of history and things like that. So, yeah, I think it is different.*

A number of visitors to the “One Life” gallery identified the exhibit as being more contemporary because it evoked personal memories.

*I like the fact that this exhibition is a little more modern, and I can actually relate to it. ... It was in my time and I remember a lot of the things they are showing here.*

*I enjoyed it for what it was. [It was] my history—‘I remember that, I remember that, I remember that...’ It's not like some of the other halls [in NPG that show things] that happened two, three hundred years ago, obviously. So this is something more current for [me].*

## **Orientation**

In addition to the physical qualities of the Reagan exhibit (color, set-up, etc.), some visitors acknowledged that the “One Life” gallery was positioned near a hall of much older subjects. Some visitors found this confusing, while others found it thought-provoking.

*My question would be, why is it here with the older historical portraits and not up with the other American Presidents?*

*As I was looking at these portraits, reading a lot of the stuff on the wall, it's fascinating to see the old history of the Framers and whatnot. It makes some of the newer*

*characters in history more relevant, I think. It's [nice] to have [the Reagan exhibition] close to these folks [from the time of the nation's creation,] so you can try to kind of draw some parallels, maybe—the pressures that they felt versus the pressures that modern leaders feel, too.*

*I didn't expect to see it in the hall with all the much older figures and paintings. [But] that's why it caught my eye immediately, and I went right in. ... [Reagan] fits in with the evolution of America. He's right across from Benjamin Franklin and those pictures there. It makes sense to me.*

*I thought it was nice to kind of intersperse [a more contemporary subject] amongst some of the older portraits.*

### **Concept of “One Life”**

For various reasons, the idea of presenting an historical figure from American history in a single room was clearly a positive aspect of the “One Life” gallery among those interviewed for this study. When asked about this concept, a number of interviewees focused on the idea that the curator can expand on one person's life, allowing visitors to learn more about a specific person.

*One room that gets you saturated, that you can go through the person from a young age through all of their career—that's interesting. ... You don't get side-tracked. You're not jumping from one thing to another.*

*It's very sad that [children] don't seem to have any sense of history. They're like, “well, why are we looking at this?” They just want to go through as fast as possible. I think it's nice to have something that slows them down. [To a lot of children] Reagan is just a name in history. I think it's wonderful for them to see a close-up [so] that they can really concentrate on one person at a time.*

*[This exhibit has] a feel-good value. I mean, Reagan's not around anymore, so it's not like you can go visit him. This is the closest you can get, in a way, to being with the individual*

*I really like it. I like that it's not too overwhelming. ... You can spend half an hour there, but you could also spend five minutes there if you want. Just like any exhibit, I suppose, you could absorb as much as you want to from it. But I really like this approach.*

*I think it makes it incredibly interesting to see one person through the various stages of [his] life. Especially if it's [someone who is] relevant to you, which Ronald Reagan*



*was. When I was in high school [in Australia], he was President; and we get pretty inundated with American news as well. So, it's great. It gives you a bit more insight into [these figures,] rather than just one picture or painting. I really loved it.*

On the whole, interviewees appeared to enjoy the "One Life" format, and some expressed that they would like for the series to continue.

*Obviously, it's quite popular because you see people swarming in and out. I had to wait my turn in line to read the panels. So either people are being drawn to Ronald Reagan the man or they're being drawn to what's being exhibited.*

*Hope you keep doing this. It's a quick snapshot of an important person...*

*We have to find another room like this when we come back!*

## Subject Suggestions

When asked who they would like to learn about in future “One Life” exhibitions, interviewees described a variety of figures throughout American history. These subjects, both men and women, ranged from political figure to entertainers, among others.

### **Artistic/Entertainment**

Clint Eastwood

Dorthea Lange

Ernest Hemingway

Jimi Hendrix

Joe DiMaggio

### **Political**

Teddy Roosevelt

Harry S. Truman

Herbert Hoover

Barack Obama (eventually)

Jimmy Carter

Franklin D. Roosevelt

John Adams

Benjamin Harrison

Speakers of the House (Tip O’Neill, for example)

John D. Rockefeller

Any of the Founding Fathers

Jefferson Davis

John F. Kennedy

### **Other**

Phyllis Schlafly

Susan B. Anthony

Richard Morris Hunt (architect, Biltmore Mansion)

Industrialists

Frederick Douglass

Robert Oppenheimer

Bill Graham

Steve Jobs

Booker T. Washington

Nancy Reagan

## Discussion

It appears that overall opinions about the exhibition were strongly influenced by personal views about, and familiarity with, Reagan and his Presidency. It is difficult to sort out the causality in much more detail than this, as the personal view variable and familiarity variable are so closely correlated that it would be impossible to disentangle their effects. Still it seems that attitudes toward “Reagan the exhibition” were, in general, more a reflection of attitudes toward “Reagan the subject” than anything else. Perhaps the key take away here is that essentially all the *superior* ratings came from visitors who described themselves as having *strongly positive* personal views of Reagan and his Presidency.

There is a complication, however, in that the exhibition itself appeared to influence some visitors’ personal views of Reagan the subject, rather than vice-versa.

In principle, however, familiarity (regardless of personal view) may have been a direct influence on positive experiences in the exhibition as well. This position is supported by a number of interviews with visitors who did not necessarily have positive personal views of Reagan and his Presidency, but, nonetheless, had a positive experience of personal connection in the exhibition via personal recollections of the Reagan years—a nostalgia effect, if you will.

# Appendix A: Survey Questionnaires

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**National Portrait Gallery**  
*One Life: Ronald Reagan*

ENTR

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, *One Life: Ronald Reagan*, when you leave?  Poor  Fair  Good  Excellent  Superior

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

- Visiting this building today
- National Portrait Gallery website
- Other website
- Friends / Family / Colleagues
- Newspaper / Magazine
- Social media
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

Did you visit today specifically to see this exhibition, *One Life: Ronald Reagan*?  Yes  No

How familiar are you with Reagan and his Presidency?

- Not familiar at all
- Minimally familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Very familiar

How would you describe your own views of Reagan and his Presidency?

- Strongly positive
- Somewhat positive
- Neutral / no opinion
- Somewhat negative
- Very negative

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral/ Don't Know</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
Reagan was successful in pursuing the priorities he set for his presidency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reagan was a transformative political figure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Ses  
Seg  1  2  3
 C  R  L  I
ID

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

Did you visit today specifically to see this exhibition,  
*One Life: Ronald Reagan*?  Yes  No

Please rate your overall experience in this exhibition,  
*One Life: Ronald Reagan*.  Poor  Fair  Good  Excellent  Superior

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"/>

After seeing this exhibition, how familiar with Reagan  
and his Presidency would you consider yourself?  Not familiar at all  
 Minimally familiar  
 Somewhat familiar  
 Very familiar

How would you describe your own views of Reagan and  
his Presidency?  Strongly positive  
 Somewhat positive  
 Neutral / no opinion  
 Somewhat negative  
 Strongly negative

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/ Don't Know	Agree	Strongly Agree
Reagan was successful in pursuing the priorities he set for his presidency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reagan was a transformative political figure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The exhibition represented Reagan and his Presidency in a fair and unbiased way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In this exhibition, how did you make use of the  
audio-visual kiosk featuring six Reagan speeches?  Did not notice  
 Noticed, but did not watch/listen  
 Watched/listened to one speech (or part of one speech)  
 Watched/listened to more than one speech  
(or parts of more than one speech)

Did you learn anything new, surprising, or unexpected in  
this exhibition?

Are there any historical figures you would particularly  
like to see highlighted in a future *One Life* exhibition  
like this one?

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:

Thank you for your time and assistance!

Ses

Seg  1  2  3

C  R  L  I

ID

## Appendix B: Frequencies of Responses

**Is this your first visit to this building, the Donald W. Reynolds Center?**

	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Yes	76%	74%
No	24%	27%

**Did you come to this building today specifically to see this exhibition?**

	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Yes	6%	7%
No	94%	93%

<b>Overall experience</b>	<i>Entrance (Expected)</i>	<i>Exit (Actual)</i>
Superior	8%	12%
Excellent	39%	46%
Good	45%	38%
Fair	8%	4%
Poor	1%	1%

**How did you find out about this exhibition?**

	<i>Entrance (only)</i>
Visiting this building today	78%
NPG website	3%
Other website	1%
Friends/ Family/ Colleagues	6%
Newspaper/ Magazine	2%
Social Media	1%
Other (please specify)	9%

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

	<i>Exit (only)</i>		
	Not at all interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Art	1%	42%	57%
History	1%	24%	75%
Biography	4%	34%	62%
Images of America's human diversity	8%	47%	45%
Images of influential/ famous Americans	2%	34%	65%

**How familiar are you with Reagan and his Presidency?**

	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Not at all familiar	4%	1%
Minimally familiar	13%	11%
Somewhat familiar	40%	57%
Very familiar	43%	31%

**How would you describe your own views of Reagan and his Presidency?**

	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Strongly positive	28%	38%
Somewhat Positive	26%	30%
Neutral/ No opinion	24%	17%
Somewhat negative	16%	12%
Strongly negative	6%	4%

*Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.*

**Reagan was successful in pursuing the priorities he set for his Presidency**

	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Strongly disagree	3%	1%
Disagree	7%	4%
Neutral/ Don't Know	28%	25%
Agree	47%	48%
Strongly Agree	16%	22%

**Reagan was a transformative political figure**

	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Strongly disagree	3%	3%
Disagree	7%	3%
Neutral/ Don't Know	20%	14%
Agree	47%	46%
Strongly Agree	23%	34%

**This exhibition represented Reagan and his Presidency in a fair and unbiased way**

	<i>Exit (only)</i>
Strongly disagree	1%
Disagree	3%
Neutral/ Don't Know	20%
Agree	54%
Strongly Agree	22%



<b>How did you make use of the audio-visual kiosk?</b>	<i>Exit (only)</i>	
Did not notice	32%	
Noticed, but did not watch/listen	44%	
Watched/listened to one speech (or part of one speech)	22%	
Watched/listened to more than one speech (or parts of more than one speech)	3%	

<b>With whom are you visiting?</b>	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Alone	26%	21%
With other adults	66%	71%
With youth under 18	7%	11%

<b>What is your sex?</b>	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Female	46%	53%
Male	54%	47%

<b>Age Grouped by Generation</b>	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Silent Generation (born before 1945)	7%	9%
Leading Baby Boom (born 1946-1955)	20%	18%
Trailing Baby Boom (born 1956-1964)	18%	23%
Generation X (born 1965-1981)	23%	22%
Generation Y (born 1982-1995)	31%	27%

<b>Visitor age</b>	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
Median:	44	46
Mean:	43	44

<b>Do you live in the U.S. or another country?</b>	<i>Entrance</i>	<i>Exit</i>
U.S.	86%	91%
Other country	14%	9%

## Appendix C: Open-ended Survey Comments

### Did you learn anything new, surprising, or unexpected in this exhibition?

*Responses reproduced verbatim with minor edits for clarity. Unintelligible, illegible, and simple positive or negative responses excluded.*

Andy Warhol interest	How he wrote much of his own speeches
Andy Warhol liked Reagan	How long he lived
Anti Soviet Jokes	Human aspects of the political man
Childhood picture	I better understand the Reagan, Andropov dynamic
Christmas card, writing his own speeches, start in radio	I did not know much about Reagan as a person before this exhibit
Commercial Ad—Not familiar with it	I didn't realize the Iron Curtain had a physical component
Cowboy	I liked his doodles
Did not know he began as a sportscaster	I never knew about his Alzheimer's letter he wrote
Did not know he graduated Eureka College	Interested in early life, i.e., radio announcer
Did not know of his visit to South Korea	Iron curtain was made of Iron, Contra affair
Did not know the Gipper doodled	Knew quite a bit about him—covered him an a journalist
Did not realize he had any experience with livestock	Learned about Tip O'Neill
Didn't know he was a radio announcer, didn't know that he wrote much of his own speeches	Love his "ranch in the sky"
Didn't realize his first wife was Jane Wyman	Loved the photo of laughter, how that was a gift of Reagan's
Enjoy comments about his use of humor	Many careers, sense of humor
Enjoyed the Warhol print	Many countries opposed his defense spending
Feel like I know the person, Ronald Reagan, in a more personal and political way	More detail than originally learned in school
Freedom is one generation from extinction	My father had a picture taken with Reagan that I grew up looking at; this exhibition shows why I and my family respected him so much
He played harmonica	No, it reinforced what I remember
He wrote and edited his own speeches	
His better in 1994 about his health	
His movies	
His use of humor (I often laughed out loud); His determination and resolve	

Not new, but I appreciated the fact  
Reagan and Tip O'Neill worked  
together

Not really, I loved through the Reagan  
years and remember most of it, but for  
younger folks I think it is great to learn  
more about him

Not really, I'm a little "Reaganwea-y"

Photos from his youth

Radio announcer, collapsed when  
discharged from hospital, wrote most  
of his speeches, very positive, great  
sense of humor—all I didn't know

Reagan in honored now, during his  
Presidency media made fun of his  
being actor

Reagan played the harmonica

Reagan was an actor before!

Reagan's reaction after he was shot

Regan's entertainment career

Relationship with Gorbachev

Relationship with Soviet leader

Saw me art

Society has become too complex to be  
managed by self-rule

Some of the so-called "dud" Presidents of  
late 1800s, would be nice to experience  
their history, challenges, and  
accomplishments

That Nancy Reagan was critical in private  
at Ronald Reagan

That he had been a radio announcer

That he promised American people not to  
go to war (nuclear war)

That he wanted to be a cartoonist

That he went to Iceland

That Nancy was in films

That Ronald Reagan was a radio  
announcer

That the bullet almost hit his heart (when  
he was shot)

The letter about his Alzheimer's

The many diverse skills of Reagan  
Union President, worked for GE  
Van Heusen Ad

Was already familiar

Who radio work

Would have liked to see more, but realize  
space is limited

Wrote own speeches, liked seeing hand  
writing

Yes, didn't know there was an actual iron  
curtain

Yes, Goldwater was a friend

Yes, he was a lot smarter than I thought  
he was

Yes, I did

Yes, my impression of Reagan is more  
positive

Yes, never read Alzheimer's letter before

Yes, Radio background

Yes, RR liked cartoons and drawings (He  
scared me as President)

Yes, that he wrote many of his speeches

Yes, Van Heusen ad, Tip O'Neill photo was  
interesting

**Are there any historical figures you would particularly like to see highlighted in a future “One Life” exhibition like this one?**

*As a category, Presidents accounted for about half of all responses. Some visitors suggested categories rather than specific individuals: Actors/Actresses, Civil War Era Leaders, Founding Fathers, International focus, Revolutionary Leaders, U.S. Presidents, Women, and Writers.*

*Individual figures cited by multiple visitors are listed once. Unintelligible, illegible, and simple positive or negative responses excluded.*

**Deceased Americans**

Abigail Adams  
John Adams  
Louis Armstrong  
Lucille Ball  
Clara Barton  
Julia Child  
John Singleton Copley  
Walter Cronkite  
Miles Davis  
Marlene Dietrich  
Thomas Edison  
Albert Einstein  
Dwight D. Eisenhower  
Benjamin Franklin  
Alexander Hamilton  
Johns Hopkins  
Andrew Jackson  
Stonewall Jackson  
Thomas Jefferson  
Steve Jobs  
Lady Bird Johnson  
Lyndon Baines Johnson  
Helen Keller

John F. Kennedy  
Ted Kennedy  
Martin Luther King Jr.  
Benjamin Henry Latrobe  
Robert E. Lee  
Abraham Lincoln  
James Madison  
Richard Nixon  
Jackie Kennedy Onassis  
J. Robert Oppenheimer  
James K. Polk  
Elvis Presley  
Sam Rayburn  
Jackie Robinson  
Anna Eleanor Roosevelt  
Franklin D. Roosevelt  
Theodore Roosevelt  
Dr. Seuss  
Nikola Tesla  
Jim Thorpe  
Harry Truman  
Kurt Vonnegut  
George Washington

**Living Americans**

Maya Angelou  
George H. W. Bush  
George W. Bush  
Jimmy Carter  
Bill Clinton  
Hillary Clinton  
Neil Diamond  
Bob Dylan  
Billy Graham  
Tom Hanks  
Tom Harkin  
Henry Kissinger  
Dolly Madison  
Barack Obama  
Michelle Obama  
Colin Powell  
Tim Russert  
Clarence Thomas

**International**

John Bonham  
Mahatma Gandhi  
Mikhail Gorbachev  
Nelson Mandela  
Margaret Thatcher

## Appendix D: Qualitative Interview Guide

### Lead-in questions

Where from?

Exhibition specific?

Repeat NPG/DWRC visitor?

### Questions on “One Life” exhibition format

*Indicate at the outset that interview will focus as much on the “One Life” format as on the specific content of this exhibition. If necessary, give brief description of format: small “visual biography” exhibition focused on the life and contributions of a single deceased American historical figure.*

Does this exhibition seem different to you than other Portrait Gallery shows? In what way(s)?

Do you like the idea of a small exhibition that focuses on a single historical subject? Why or why not? What kinds of shows do you prefer?

If you are a repeat NPG visitor, do you recall any other “One Life” exhibitions? Which one(s)? What made them memorable?

Are there any deceased Americans you would be particularly interested in seeing highlighted in a “One Life” exhibition? Who and why?

### Questions on Reagan exhibition specifically

Did you learn anything new, surprising, or unexpected in this exhibition?

Did it in any way change the way you think about Reagan as a historical figure?

Did you pick up any main themes or messages about Reagan and his Presidency that were stressed here?