

Listening to Diasporic Audiences

Phase 2 report of the Diasporic Audience Research Project for the
National Museum of African American History and Culture
Smithsonian Institution
Washington DC



Prepared by
People, Places & Design Research

**Diasporic Audience Research Project
for the
National Museum of African American
History and Culture**

Phase 2: Listening to Diasporic Audiences

Executive Summary	1
Research Method: Understanding the focus group strategy	7
A. Expected Highlights of the Museum Experience Five themes from focus group participants	17
B. Challenges from the Perceptions of Likely Visitors Eight themes from focus group participants	35
C. Reactions to the Three Exhibit Previews	61
D. Seeking Descriptors about Visitor Experience	85
Appendix: Other Results (“green sheets” during focus groups and post-session questionnaires)	91

prepared by
People Places & Design Research
Jeff Hayward, Christine Larouche, & Jolene Hart
Northampton, Massachusetts
July 18, 2016

Executive Summary

This research was commissioned to explore the perceptions of African-descended diasporic people regarding the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). The Museum felt this research was necessary because it wants to enhance its reach and relevance to people of the African diaspora (beyond those who identify themselves as African American):

The main purpose of this audience research project is to illuminate the perceptions of diverse African diasporic audiences in order to meaningfully engage with them and offer them a fulfilling visitor experience at the Smithsonian's newest museum...¹

Therefore, audience research was warranted because little is known about the likely perceptions of diverse black audiences in relation to a museum experience about African American history and culture. "This [research] will enable the Museum to gain a deeper understanding of visitors from different backgrounds in order to obtain a useful picture of their interests, perceptions, expectations and their potential contributions to the NMAAHC."²

Phase 1 of this Diasporic Audience Research project focused on "finding and defining" diasporic audiences,³ and this report summarizes phase 2 of the research project, which focused on "listening" to the perspectives of those audiences, using the format of focus groups. The key questions driving this phase of the research were:

- Do African diasporic audiences feel ready to engage with the Museum? – in other words: will they feel like this is about "me" or about "others"?
- Will the interests of African Diasporic people be the same or different as African Americans regarding exhibition themes and experiences?
- What could we do to be more inclusive and welcoming of African diasporic people? (what matters to them?)

The research approach

Ten focus groups were conducted to listen to African-descended audiences in the Washington DC area. Seven of the focus groups were composed of people who identified themselves in some way other than African American (e.g., Afro-Caribbean, African, Afro-Latino) – including people who only describe themselves that way, as well as people with multiple identities that include African American. For perspective and comparison, three of the focus groups

¹ Smithsonian Institution Solicitation No. F15SOL10026, Audience Research Project, March 2015

² A Research Strategy for Understanding Diverse Black Audiences, PPD Research, Sept. 2014, p. 3

³ Title of the phase 1 report: Pre-Opening Analysis of NMAAHC Constituencies: African Diasporic Audience Research for the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

were composed of people who only identified themselves as African American. More discussion about the research process and structure of the focus groups is included in the next section about the research method: “Understanding the Focus Group Strategy.”

The Findings

There are two ways of describing the findings: first, *the “big picture”* – an overview of broad findings addressing the questions this research was seeking to answer – and second, a perspective on *“what people said,”* not necessarily about the main research questions, but related issues that matter to the participants.

First, the “big picture” of results

Three big ideas emerged from these focus groups:

1. Diasporic audiences are ready to embrace NMAAHC as a source of connection with all of their related cultural groups –
2. but the experience will be disappointing if they don’t feel that diasporic audiences are recognized as part of the Museum’s presentations.
3. Diasporic people have a unique perspective on the African American experience and culture, and on the ‘American dream,’ based on their immigration experience, and this perspective could be integrated into the narrative of the African American experience.

Evidence for these big ideas is presented using quotes of participants, in the grid that starts on the next page.

Three secondary-but-important ideas also emerged:

4. African Americans seem less aware of diasporic cultures and perspectives.
5. Many people began their focus group session with worries and concerns, perhaps prompted by high expectations or perhaps by a compelling desire to feel represented, and the focus group discussions and conceptual previews⁴ of three exhibitions apparently did not eliminate their concerns.
6. NMAAHC Members and African Americans were less enthusiastic about the previews, compared to non-members and diasporic audiences.

Evidence is presented through participants’ quotes in the grid that follows.

⁴ Previews consisted of PowerPoint presentations projected onto a large screen in a conference room, showing conceptual sketches from the exhibit design portfolios. See p. 13 for an overview of the various PowerPoints. First, people were shown a presentation entitled “Overview of the building” (see images and captions of the presentation on pp. 14-16 of this report). People were later shown “Slavery and Freedom (pp. 64-66), “A changing America: 1960 and beyond” (pp. 71-73) and “Cultural Expressions” (pp. 79-80).

Big Idea #1: Diasporic audiences are ready to embrace NMAAHC

I'm so very glad we're going to have this museum to teach other people—and ourselves!—Because a lot of us don't know a lot about our experiences in this country. (quote from a diasporic + African American person)

[It's] the black person's story. It's everyone who is black in this country and it means so many different things. And I think of black Africans but then the story also goes into how these black Africans became American blacks, so that is part of the story. For me, the constant is: blackness in America. ... I think it's an umbrella story about blacks. (diasporic, not an African American)

As a black American, I hope I go through it and feel like it's about me. I'm hoping to feel like I belong. This talks about the black experience because it's all—the culture we have is kind of connected. (diasporic + African American identity).

Big Idea #2: Diasporic audiences want to be recognized as part of the African American story

I know you gathered us all here and I know they're trying to reach out to the diaspora—and there's much work to be done—but I think it's important that if they do reach out to us that they don't relegate us to a little bit of a footnote. That we're actually really incorporated into the museum. (diasporic, not African American, Millennial)

An important part of the Museum could be to interpret the many terms by which we've been known over the years and the complexities laden with that. The other part is we're all mixed, I don't care how dark or how light we are, we are all mixed and that is an important part of the story. So we need a big sign somewhere that says "Our history is complex and intertwined with so many other cultures". (diasporic + African American identity)

Big Idea #3: Diasporic audiences have a unique perspective on the narrative of African American culture

It is also a question about the immigrant experience. My family happened to emigrate before the Civil Rights Movement but that doesn't change that it was very much "the immigrant experience," and they came and had to assimilate into a culture. My family had the choice to come here and that is very different from people who have been here since the 1800s. And you know the culture that we have assimilated into is different than a lot of the immigrant stories that you hear. You hear about the Irish, the Italian, the Polish, the Jewish, coming in to try and get the American dream and the American dream is for white people, so what happens to the immigrants who come in who are not white passing? We're assimilating into something entirely different, and our story is very different. So it would be pretty important to have that story shown. (diasporic, not-an African American, Millennial)

"African American" is a term that people use when they don't want to use "black". Because I'm not African American. I'm Afro-Caribbean, I'm Afro-Latina, I'm of African descent and I'm part black. I would never say I'm African American because I'm a first generation American. My father emigrated here. 'African American' is very specifically people whose history is integrally tied to the long history of America. My family's history is a small blip in that. That does not decrease the fact that I am black and that African American history has some effect on me, because when my family immigrated, we immigrated into the narrative that is African American history. (diasporic, not-African American, Millennial)

No matter where you're from—a person of color—your experience in America is the black American experience. It's the African-American experience. So, I know many of us around this very table come from very diverse international backgrounds, but one thing that really unites us is that coming here and having the opportunity to have our lives here was really shaped and molded by the experience of African-Americans here. (diasporic, member)

Secondary-but-important ideas:

Idea #4: African Americans seem less aware of diasporic cultures and perspectives
<p><i>Well, I think it's broad enough for it to be easy [for 1st or 2nd generation immigrants to connect with the exhibits], but it really depends on the person, if the person comes from a country, and they're anchored in that other country. If they have an interest in maybe learning about the history of <u>our</u> country, it's there for them. I don't really know if there's anything that we could do to motivate them to come and learn. (African American, member)</i></p>
<p><i>My perspective would be someone who's first or second generation would be much like—or even less so, than white Americans. They don't—culturally, it's different for them. It's going to be more of a curiosity rather than a part of their story. (African American, member)</i></p>
Idea #5: Many people began with worries and concerns, and continued to express them throughout the focus groups, before and after the slide previews
<p>BEFORE ANY DISCUSSIONS OR PREVIEW, participants were asked: What questions do you have? <i>Will the museum include successful African-Americans and innovations in other areas such as science?</i> <i>Relevant topics created by who?</i> <i>Will slavery be treated with adequate gravity? Or softened to make white visitors feel more comfortable?</i> <i>Will it be truthful about our history? Or repeat the same narrative that has been told?</i></p>
<p>A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE DISCUSSION, participants were asked: Is there something you are concerned or worried about? <i>I feel like the museum won't give us things we've never seen/heard before. I'm also concerned that it is very "safe" and does not challenge people to think about the current state of African Americans in Society.</i> <i>I'm worried that the 'good' portion of the story of African Americans will be displayed but the 'bad and the ugly' will be glossed over so that it isn't shocking to the masses.</i> <i>I am worried that the museum will focus on the splashy money makers (sports, artists) and not spend enough time recounting the smaller but very important contributions and milestones of many whose faces don't hit the headlines. For too long, the value of our community has been defined by media outside of the community.</i> <i>The exhibits don't have much link to the African Continent. Some authentic exhibits must be brought from Africa to patch that gap.</i></p>

Idea #6: Members and African Americans were less enthusiastic.	
REACTIONS AFTER SEEING CONCEPTUAL PREVIEWS OF EXHIBITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All focus group participants rated terms that were offered as possible descriptors of visitor experience of the Museum (they did this privately, on comment sheets that were used throughout the focus group sessions). Diasporic participants and African American participants indicated similar reactions to terms such as ‘reflects my identity’ and ‘standard history,’ but African Americans and members were significantly less likely than diasporic audiences and non-members to say that the terms “pride” and “emotional” would describe their experience of this museum.
RATINGS AFTER PREVIEWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Members gave significantly lower ratings to two of the three galleries compared with non-members: ‘A Changing America’ and ‘Cultural Expressions.’
RATINGS IN POST-FOCUS GROUP SURVEY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Members expressed lower interest than non-members in two of the nine galleries they were asked to rate a few weeks later: ‘Visual Art,’ and ‘Taking the Stage.’ (The differences mentioned above were not significant in the follow-up survey.)
Comments during the focus group discussions	<i>We move from “Slavery and Freedom” to “A Changing America” to “Cultural Expressions” and I think what’s missing is the fact that the oppression that Africans in this space had felt is still happening today. It has this connotation as if we’ve moved beyond slavery and freedom and I would argue that it’s sad because I don’t think we have. (African American, Millennial)</i>
	<i>I’m going to be totally non-PC. To me, that piece [Cultural Expressions] said: “Don’t worry white people, they’re happy.” I don’t think I saw anything about Negro spirituals or how we use culture to express our pain in this country. I feel like there may be some other parts of our history and our culture that white people aren’t going to be comfortable with and they don’t have to be. (African American Millennial)</i>
	<i>Disappointing, not profound or moving, not provoking strong emotions</i>

The second level of findings: representing “what people said”

One of the great advantages of qualitative research is that by “giving voice” to a particular audience, issues and themes might emerge that the research sponsor had not anticipated. Therefore, in focus groups such as these, patterns or themes in the discussions are derived to represent the participants’ perspectives.

Listening to diverse black audiences, we identified themes in two categories:

Highlights, which offer positive reactions about the Museum, and **Challenges**, which suggest unmet needs. Themes in both of these categories contributed to the first level of findings – the ‘big ideas’ and ‘secondary-but-important ideas’ – as we sought to answer the main questions of this audience research project. But in addition, these themes speak to the larger goal expressed by the Museum: gaining a deeper understanding of the interests and perceptions of potential visitors from diverse African-descended backgrounds. These 13 themes are identified and documented in the body of this report:

Highlights (section A of this report)

- A.1 Excitement about visiting the new museum
- A.2 Pride that African Americans will finally be represented on the National Mall
- A.3 Desire to learn about our history
- A.4 Diasporic (non-African-American) audiences feel connected with African American culture
- A.5 Emotional connection to remembered history by older participants

Challenges (section B of this report)

- B.1 Conventional stories, not enough depth
- B.2 Stereotypical heroes (e.g., sports, music)
- B.3 Lacking achievements of scientists, inventors, doctors
- B.4 Some African Americans are less likely to embrace diasporic identity
- B.5 Diasporic audiences want their contributions and perspectives to be recognized
- B.6 Desire for more connections to Africa
- B.7 Skepticism: questioning who is telling the story
- B.8 Encouraging repeat visits

Refer to sections A and B for elaborations of each of these themes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Understanding the Focus Group Strategy:

What was the structure? Who were the participants?

What were they thinking as they arrived? What did they see?

The big goal for these focus groups was to “listen” to diasporic audiences – including their expectations about the Museum, seeking an answer to the question of how engaged or detached they might feel about it, and their reactions to brief previews of a small selection of exhibitions – hoping to find out what matters to them and whether they are likely to feel welcome at, and enthusiastic about, the Museum.

The structure

Ten focus groups were created:

- ▶ 7 were composed of diasporic audiences, and 3 were composed of African American audiences to help interpret and compare with the diasporic audiences. However, ‘diasporic audiences’ are not a monolith: there are people who identify themselves only as rooted in a non-US culture (e.g., Jamaican, Afro-Latino/a, Senegalese), and people who describe themselves with multiple identities including African American,⁵ among other variations. To pursue Museum curators’ interests in understanding the diasporic audiences, the focus groups were constructed to also investigate possible differences across:
 - ▶ generations (some groups specifically recruited to be older adults, some were young adults, some were mixed ages of young and middle-age adults), and
 - ▶ the array of groups was structured to emphasize non-members (7 groups) but some member groups (3) were created for comparison (an assumption had been that members would be more knowledgeable and enthusiastic, so we would have that benchmark to compare with non-members’ perceptions).

The participants in this research were already aware of NMAAHC. They were interested enough to have been following NMAAHC on social media or responding to invitations posted on the Museum’s website. This strategic choice about the audience was based on two considerations:

- ◆ First, when investigating potential visitors, it’s very useful if they *know something*, rather than almost nothing, about the proposed initiative or venue. By talking to people who are already aware of NMAAHC, we reduced the risk that the discussion would be unfocused (e.g., about needs in their lives rather than about the Museum’s exhibits) or superficial (they might not be interested enough to actually visit, and therefore the answers would be very hypothetical).
- ◆ Second, the Museum staff said that so little was known about diverse black audiences (in relation to their likely perceptions of a museum about African

⁵ An example of multiple identities would be a person who said: “I moved to the US when I was 10, and now I mostly say I’m Dominican but depending on the circumstances I might say African American.

American culture) that it seemed wise to find people who might have already formed some opinions. The more they could talk about issues in detail – e.g., representation, cultural identification, objects, stories, what kind of museum experience they would like to have – the more likely we would be to get at the question of what the Museum could do appeal to, welcome, and accommodate diverse diasporic audiences.

Key to the composition of discussion groups

Later in the report as participants' quotes are cited, the number of the focus group will refer to this list. The focus group number is not essential since almost all the quotes are accompanied by reference to the diasporic category of the person quoted. When representing the ethnicity of participants, the 'Description' below gives the overall sense of the composition of the groups, and the number of participants is shown for various components of the group, using these abbreviations: AA = African American, 'not-AA' = people who do not identify themselves as African American, and 'combination' = people who cite multiple identities for themselves including African American as well as something that is not African American.

Group #	Description	ethnicity	age	membership
1	Diasporic non-members	3 not-AA 8 combination	mixed	No
2	Diasporic members	4 not-AA 6 combination	mixed	Yes
3	African American members	7 AA	older adults	Yes
4	Diasporic non-members	6 not-AA	older adults	No
5	Diasporic non-members	2 not-AA 5 combination	mixed	No
6	Diasporic non-members	7 not-AA	Millennials	No
7	Diasporic non-Members	9 not-AA	Mostly GenX	No
8	African American non-members	11 AA	Millennials	No
9	Diasporic members	2 not-AA 4 combination	older adults	Yes
10	African American mixed	8 AA	Mostly GenX /Millennial	4 yes 4 no

The participants

Demographic characteristics of the 82 focus group participants are summarized below. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were non-members and one-third were members. Overall, there were more young adults as requested by NMAAHC's criteria for this project (emphasizing young adults under age 35).

Throughout this report, we refer to three heritage categories: people who identify themselves as only being African American, people who only see themselves as a non-US identity (e.g., Brazilian, Afro-Caribbean, recent immigrant from Liberia), and people who report a non-US identity as well as African American (referred to as 'combination'). The emphasis of this research was on diasporic audiences, and two-thirds of the focus group participants fit that definition while one-third identified themselves as only African American.

The 'follow-up' sample refers to participants who responded to an online questionnaire a couple of weeks after the focus groups.⁶ The composition of the follow-up sample was very similar to the entire focus group sample.

	<u>Participants</u> (n=82)	<u>Follow-up</u> (n=52)
<u>Relationship to the Museum:</u>		
members	35%	39%
non-members	65%	61%
<u>Heritage:</u>		
African American	32%	25%
Diasporic – not AA	40%	40%
Diasporic – combination	28%	35%
<u>Family History:</u>		
goes back many generations, to slavery	48%	not
is more recent	43%	asked
both	10%	
<u>Gender:</u>		
men	25%	33%
women	75%	77%
<u>Age:</u>		
Millennial	43%	44%
Gen-X	21%	18%
Gen Jones	18%	18%
Boomer	12%	16%
WWII	6%	4%

⁶ The point of that follow-up questionnaire was to obtain some quotes as a "safety net" in case there was too much difficulty transcribing the actual focus group discussions from the back-up camera, due to difficult sound quality on six of the sessions. However, most of the transcribing turned out to be feasible.

Participants' expectations before the focus groups began

When practicing qualitative research, it's all too easy to influence respondents' comments and possibly limit or bias what they have to say (the researchers' "joke" is: I'll tell you what I want to hear, and you'll tell it to me). So we came up with a strategy to hear something from focus group participants before any discussion began, before they saw any previews, or heard any questions from the focus group facilitator. Specifically, participants were asked to answer three questions on their "green sheet" as they took their place around the table (while eating and waiting for the discussion to begin). The three questions asked them to write down a question they had about the Museum, whether and when they expected to visit, and whether their family history in the US extended back in time to slavery or not?

Their questions about the Museum are summarized on the next two pages. So we found out that when they arrived, participants expressed a variety of questions and concerns about content and the Museum's decision-making process. Aside from the enthusiasm expressed in their desire to visit as soon as possible, they brought worries. These worries are the foundation of some themes presented as "challenges" in section B of this report – e.g., wondering if and how Africa will be represented, concerned that all of the contributions be presented, questions about who is making the decisions about what stories to tell, and hoping that it won't be a whitewashed version of the truth. All of those concerns were in the minds of some participants before seeing any exhibition previews.

A question I have about the Museum (not including when it will open):

(answered "right away" before any discussion started)

20%	Requesting general info about exhibits and/or programs/facilities
18%	Whether Africa/diaspora is included in exhibit content
17%	Question about representation of different aspects of African American history and culture (e.g., contributions)
12%	How decisions are made /what is the museum's mission/mandate
11%	Question about museum's ability to present racism/unvarnished truth/AA reality, past and present
10%	Questions about opening
9%	Work/volunteer opportunities
6%	Content for children?
7%	other
5%	blank, nothing

Written answers by category, all focus groups combined

General Info about exhibits/programs

Will it have comparable programming to other Smithsonian cultural institutions e.g., Freer gallery?

How often will exhibits change?

What types of exhibits will it contain?

What types of public programs are planned for the next few years?

What kinds of exhibits will the museum open with and why?
What are the top exhibits being considered?
Will there be special events hosted at the museum outside of normal business hours? What features of this museum are the most unique?
Will there be special events at night similar to the other Smithsonianians?
What will the exhibits be like? How far reaching are they?
What types of educational courses/extended sessions will be available to the public?
What types of exhibits will be on display? (subjects, interactive displays, etc.)

Diaspora included?

If there are any exhibits about the African diaspora story as part of the African-American journey
Will we see Nubian or Egyptian works?
Is the sole focus on American experience or will it incorporate other nations in connection w/slave trade & migration?
Change name to reflect whole African diaspora, i.e. Smithsonian black history & culture museum or African diaspora museum
Will it include subjects that reach back to African culture?
Devote section to African Americans from British W. Indies who migrated to US and made significant contributions to African American culture
Will the museum include the African diaspora?
Will there be stories of both African American & African immigrant experience?
Will months such as June Caribbean-American heritage month be used to feature special exhibits highlighting the role/influence of Caribbean-Americans?
Will it connect all Africans? Will it tell a comprehensive story?
What is the inclusive history about South and Central America African slavery in the museum?
How much will be included pre-slavery/African history
How well will the cultural legacy of Africa be represented as well as that of genealogy?
How will the museum incorporate the African diaspora and its connectedness to African American history & culture?
Will the pre-slavery history be examined, possibly by specific countries from which a large percentage of people were taken?

Representation

What historical figures will be incorporated?
What time periods specifically are the most important to the museum to display?
I would like to see the non-typical black professionals.
Will you incorporate performing arts?
Will there be a section that covers President Obama? What is the museum going to cover about impacts that African Americans have had on culture and food in the country?
What exhibits are there going to be about science and math?
How much emphasis placed on history of black excellence (Wall Street, etc.)?
Will the classical arts/performers/composers be represented (e.g., Matlowida Dobbs, Mme Evanto, Kirsty Copeland, etc.)?

Will the museum include successful African-Americans and innovations in other areas such as science?

Will the information from the African American civil war museum be included?

Will there be an exhibit / section dedicated to up and coming artists?

Will the museum have any exhibits on the contributions of black immigrants to America?

Decisions /Mission

What methods / perspectives informed the exhibits?

What is the mission of the museum?

How is the term African-American defined?

Relevant topics created by who?

Why are we coming in at the tail end with the focus group as opposed to giving input for the structure of exhibits?

How will it sustain funding after it's raised all the money? Will it continue to receive gov't support?

What will differentiate this museum from others (ex. "America I Am" exhibit)?

What is its main goal/mission statement?

Unvarnished

Will museum address or explain institutional racism's impact on African Americans & people of African descent in U.S.?

How will the museum address the current racial climate in the US? (Black Lives Matter, Ferguson, etc.)

Will information touch on the racism w/in the African American/African diaspora?

Will slavery be treated with adequate gravity? Or softened to make white visitors feel more comfortable?

Will it be truthful about our history? Or repeat the same narrative that has been told?

How accurate and in depth is the info presented?

How will the exhibits approach questions of cultural empowerment?

Will you include the tragedy that was done to our community (i.e. crack epidemic, housing market, Tulsa Oklahoma)?

Opening

How many patrons are expected in the first month? When will notifications go out across the country?

Will there be a special registration online to get tickets for the grand opening?

Would like to know more information about the grand opening

Will there be tours/guides/curators upon opening?

How will opening day be handled? Will tickets be given? Will there be long lines? Special programs? Crowd control?

Will there be "hard hat" visit before the "opening"?

Will the grand opening be open to the public, or invite-only? Will focus group participants receive an invitation?

What did participants see in the 'previews'?

The slide show 'preview' as presented during the focus groups came in four parts:

Part 1: Overview of the building and types of exhibitions (shown on the next 3 pages)

Part 2: "Slavery and Freedom" gallery (shown in section C.2)

Part 3: "A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond" gallery (shown in section C.3)

Part 4: "Cultural Expressions" gallery (shown in section C.4)

<< slides begin on next page >>

PowerPoint presentation as shown to focus group participants after the first half hour of discussion

1: An overview of the building

The slide show for the 3 exhibit galleries is presented in Section C of this report (p. 64 and beyond).



The new National Museum is part of the Smithsonian museums on the National Mall



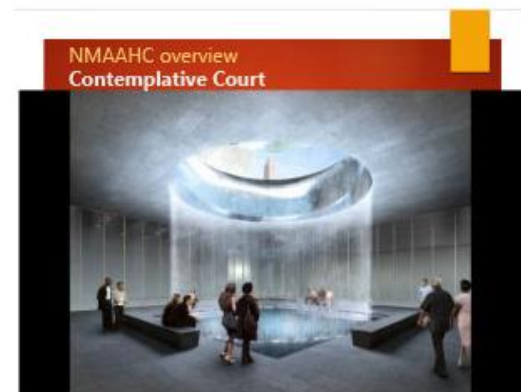
This is what the building will look like.



In case you haven't heard, the Museum will open on September 24.



Here's an overview of part of the interior.



And there are special architectural features being incorporated, such as this.



There are many exhibits being installed in the Museum. They're organized in 3 categories: History, Culture & Community



This cross-section shows that there are exhibits below ground and above ground.



Here's a quick overview of the history exhibits.



One example of part of the history exhibits (I'll be showing you more later).



An overview of the community galleries



One example of part of the community galleries: The Sports Gallery



And an overview of the third area – the culture galleries.



One example of part of the culture galleries: Musical Crossroads.

A. Expected Highlights of the Museum Experience

This section of the report presents *positive aspects of participants' interests* in the new Museum. Participants' comments were analyzed from 10 focus groups: 3 African American groups, 3 groups with diasporic participants who do not identify as African American ('not-AAs'), and 4 mixed diasporic groups with 'not-AAs' and people who identify themselves as having combined heritage (both African American and something else).

Five themes are derived from participants' comments, ordered here in terms of probable magnitude of value to the institution (i.e., "big picture" impacts first, smaller impacts lower on the list). The themes are:

1. Excitement about visiting the new museum
2. Pride that African Americans will finally be represented on the National Mall
3. Desire to learn about our history
4. Diasporic (non-African-American) audiences feel connected with African American culture
5. Emotional connection to remembered history by older participants

Each theme begins with a short narrative 'Overview' to summarize the meaning(s) expressed by participants, followed by verbatim quotes drawn from any sessions.

A.1. Excitement about visiting the new museum

OVERVIEW: The vast majority of focus group participants (85%) said they would visit the Museum within a month after it opens. This is an indicator of very high interest, and also underscores the commitment of these participants, which is very likely higher than will be found in a general public survey of interest.

People expressed interest in being a part of this important historic/symbolic event, and want to attend the opening ceremony when President Obama cuts the ribbon. People are curious to see the exhibitions and wonder how the stories will be told. Some have high expectations for this opportunity to “tell our story” and some are hoping “it’s done right.”⁷

A noteworthy finding is that participants who did not identify themselves as African American were just as excited as the African Americans.

When I’ll visit the new National Museum:

(participant questionnaire⁸ results; n=82)

within the first month after opening	85%	no differences by member vs. non-member or by heritage: AA, combin., not-AA ³
within the first 3 months	13%	
within the first 6 months	1%	
within the first year	0	
hard to say; wait until I hear how good it is	0	
depends; when someone else wants to go	0	
with me, maybe out-of-town visitors		

⁷ See also section B.7 for some skepticism and worry that it won’t be accurately presented.

⁸ During the focus groups, each participant had a questionnaire on which they were asked to answer questions at various points in the session. For example, as people were getting settled around the table, before any discussion or presentation, they were asked to answer the first three questions on their sheet – one of which was to indicate their intention about when they would visit the museum.

⁹ In this report, a notation system is used to concisely refer to three categories of African heritage: ‘AA’ = African American, ‘combin’ = people who identify themselves as African American as well as something else (e.g., Afro-Latino, Haitian American), and ‘not-AA’ = people with any kind of African heritage but who do not identify themselves as African American (e.g., Afro-Latino or Haitian American might be their only preferred identity, or they might be an immigrant to the US with multiple heritages but do not, or not yet, identify themselves as African American; in some cases the term ‘diasporic’ is used, indicating that it was unclear in the transcript who was talking and it could be someone who is ‘not-AA’ or ‘combin.’

(The evidence in this report consists of verbatim comments from participants in the discussion groups, which are in *italics*, with a notation in parentheses about the number of the focus group they were in, plus their self-identified category of African heritage. Questions from the facilitator are rarely included but when they are, they are in plain type, not in italics.)

Do you expect to visit the National Museum of African American History & Culture?

I want to be there when President Obama cuts the ribbon. I want to say that I was there. (3-AA, Member)¹⁰

I would just like to say whatever (inaudible) this museum, we will come. We will enjoy it. We will see its greatness. I'm just as giddy as I can be with excitement and anticipation of its opening. (10-AA)

So, on top of what everybody else already said, I mean, it's just very personal. We talk about the history of African American people and I kind of feel personally that I'm here to make sure – not only here tonight but also in general – that I hope that it's done right. You know, cause we, rightfully so, are very sensitive about how we're portrayed and I want to make sure it's done right. (8-AA)

You've got to go down there and witness this. You've got to be a part of it in some fashion (1-combin.)

I'm planning to go. I have two children, and I plan to take them. It's nice to have a place where you know you belong. (2-diasporic Member)

I'm planning on going. I'm curious to see how they cover the entire history and what exhibits they decide to focus on. (2-diasporic Member)

I'm going for the sheer—I guess it's the anticipation and joy to just walk in and I'm already overwhelmed! I'm just happy to go! I've been watching it since they broke ground, and it feels like they've been building for ten years. I just can't wait!
(2-diasporic Member)

I'm really excited to see it in terms of just the collection of art that's going to be there as well as whatever the different images are that are really going to show us over the course of evolution. (9-diasporic, older)

Yes, opening day! (1-not-AA)

¹⁰ Throughout this document the quotes from focus group participants are accompanied by a notation with a number indicating the specific focus group, and then a category of African heritage. The number indicates which of the 10 focus groups the quote came from (the key to focus group composition is available in the Research Method section). The African heritage category was explained in the footnote on the previous page, either 'AA,' 'combin.' or 'not-AA.' Due to some technical issues in the transcribing of groups where the composition was a mix of categories, the notation about heritage category was not always possible to determine.

I like history. Actually I love history. But more importantly I like African American history. I'm not African American, I'm actually Trinidadian, but I came here when I was 6. So, just another opportunity again, but it's definitely true that unless we tell our own story everyone else is going to butcher it, so you know I'm hoping that they don't – that we all tell it. (5-not-AA)

There's museums that you go out of your way to go to and there's museums that you go to cause you run out of museums. I think this is one I'm going to go out of my way to go to. Because it's- it's our people, it's our community, it's how- I want to see how we are being represented to those who are not part of our community. (6-not-AA)

And I do want to be there opening night and I am connected to the diaspora and I want to hear about the stories; it feels like I've been watching a child grow (referring to building construction). (6-not-AA)

I'm interested because the museum is very symbolic. It marks a very important experience. I was here when they opened the Native American Museum and that was a very special experience for that community – it really galvanized them and brought them together. And I think this museum has a symbolic representation beyond DC and beyond the United States. It could be a very powerful moment in history if it's done well. Beyond the opening and beyond the content – this has experiential, community potential. (7-not-AA)

A.2. Pride that African Americans will finally be represented on the National Mall

OVERVIEW: This Museum elicits feelings of pride that the role of African Americans in U.S. history is finally being recognized, happiness that “we finally got our spot here,” and excitement that we have a place where we belong. These comments were primarily made by people who fully or partly identified as African Americans (e.g., people identifying as ‘not-AA’ didn’t initially express this theme of pride, although some commented in the follow-up survey that the museum is long overdue).

(discussion comments, from a variety of questions, and a notation about who said it)

I do like the idea that we do have a central place for this just like we have the Native American Museum. I've also been to the Holocaust museum. We're all in this country together. We all need our history told. I think it's very, very important that we do. A lot of times we were really left out—a lot of it. To have this, I think it's wonderful. (3-AA, member)

I remember when I first saw the sign – I walked past the construction. My first reaction was “Well, it's about time.” I was very happy, I think I took a selfie and posted it. But I was immediately like, “yes, a whole space dedicated to the complex history and identity that is African American.” (8-AA millennial)

I'm so excited about the new museum! I know it's been a long time in the making, decades in the making. I've read a lot about it. I'm excited about seeing the synthesis of information that's come from across the country and across the world – of all the artifacts that they've been collecting. So I'm really excited to see how we've been building on things, and now to see this bigger manifestation of it down actually on the Mall. I think it's going to be wonderful. (8-AA millennial)

I view African American as a source of pride. I think there's so many spheres in the United States where we're excluded. I'm grateful to have a place where I'm included. I think historically, in the United States, you know, black people have been pushed out of so many different spheres. We had to create something for ourselves. I think that's one of the reasons why this museum is coming to there. This will be the first museum that's really dedicated to our community. We've been such a large part of the United States that needs to be represented somewhere. It gives us a new way of being a part of what's happening on the National Mall and what's happening in the Capital. Now, we're not just on one wall in one of the museums. This is a space saying this is a significant and important aspect of the United States. We want to have it recognized here in the Capital. (10-AA)

I'm just excited that we finally have a spot on the National Mall! I'm fascinated with history and historic people of color, so I think it's a nice opportunity to have a

place to go that is not in the Southeast or in another part of DC. (2-diasporic, member)

It's just a long time coming, (many sounds of affirmation from others) a long time coming for that museum. (1-combin.)

I have an 8 year old and we have been doing a great job of just exposing her to anywhere where black people are – and she is so excited. We always go to the Anacostia one and it's so small and she says “why isn't it downtown?” and I say “it's coming, it's coming”. So, we're really excited, in our household, to see it. I just want her to get the connection, because it's so important to her and she has such pride. (1-combin.).

I do think that people, particularly African Americans, are going to converge on that museum. I think people are going to feel like we finally got our piece of the rock here. And then I do feel like, it's going to be everybody! And it's a new museum and it's going to be something new and intriguing and people are going to feel like they want to see this. (5-combin.)

I still feel like a lot people are going to say “we finally got our spot here”, like everybody came to Obama's first inauguration and maybe the second one, too, because we don't know when we'll get that chance again. (5-combin.)

[from the post-discussion survey] As you imagine visiting the new Museum, what's the best thing you're likely to say about it?

There's a space specifically dedicated to African American culture and contribution on the National Mall. (AA)

About time to have a museum on African Americans. (AA)

I'll just be glad that it came into existence. I'll always be proud simply that the museum is there telling a piece of the African-American story. (AA)

I'd like to say that I would be so proud to see African American history told as fully, accurately, and correctly as possible in this magnificent presentation. (combin)

My first and best impression will be that the museum actually exists! It is a grand accomplishment; a magnificent monument. (combin)

Reflecting on the discussion later, a few ‘not-AAs’ also came to express this theme, thankful that the museum finally exists.

To finally lay eyes on this dream. (not-AA)

That it exists at all is great. That it is necessary and long overdue. (not-AA)

This is the culmination of a long-needed exposition of the African American experience for the entire public. (not-AA)

A.3. Desire to learn about our history

OVERVIEW: There is interest in learning about African American history (the true story that people may not have learned in school). This interest is shared by all participants. Although some are more concerned about teaching other people (especially youth), some who consider themselves to be very knowledgeable expect that they will also learn something new at this museum. People expressed curiosity about a variety of topics, including: slavery, the African American experience, contributions, genealogy, and awareness of the connections and shared struggles of many different people of the diaspora.

I think one of the things that I would like to do is to have the museum conduct classes—master classes so that (inaudible) all of the information that is housed there. This museum, to me, is the expert. I want to learn. I want to be able to absorb and to digest and interpret what is in there. (10-AA)

I'm reasonably well-versed in many aspects of the African-American story, so I'll be very excited as the museum teaches me something new. (AA)

I'm so very glad we're going to have this museum to teach other people—and ourselves!—Because a lot of us don't know a lot about our experiences in this country. (1-combin.)

Knowing that some of my ancestors were from slavery, I feel like I'm in a time in our history as Americans where that history of slavery is being rewritten, and being rewritten in a way that's not accurate. It's being written out of the history books in Texas. So my connection to the museum is in trying to preserve the truth of what actually occurred in the Americas so that's not actually lost and so we can respect the experience and that evolution where we came from. I think that the museum could be a resource for what the truth is. (1-combin.)

I think it's important, again, when you talk about young people or the kids who are coming from the Southeast – I think it also helps them to see that we identify—folks in the Caribbean identify with our struggle. We are one—the struggles of one. It impacts those young people to reach out to people who are not from their community. I think part of the museum's goal is also helping us to look at the unity within us. Also, to encourage people to try to find out what their heritage is. (9-diasporic)

The way I see this is that this kind of opens up the conversation beyond Black History Month for a lot of children—not just black children—which is very important, because everyone else actually probably needs this more than we do, and that's even more so because of the tenor of the conversation and the dialogue we're having. Not just in terms of political discourse but just our conversations

around race and place and economics in this country. So, people need this exposure, and so that's one step is making sure that kids get in there—that everyone gets in there to have this experience. (2-diasporic Member)

I'm the genealogist in our family. Any additional clues of information that I may be able to gather there in terms of how to put this puzzle together - the history in terms of migration patterns of African Americans in this country. (9-diasporic, older)

I'm happy that the museum is coming and I feel like it's such a wonderful thing for the younger children to really see and understand why our parents—why your family is the way that they are. (1-not-AA)

Because it is a part of my history and my culture. And because like you I love history and African culture. I want to see it done and I want to explore. I know a lot but I figure there is a whole lot more I can learn just by visiting the museum. (4-not-AA)

Well I'm an immigrant myself, from Jamaica, so I guess I'm trying to just get a complete picture because there's certain things you can (inaudible) or they tell you but there's always some holes that you might ask later and be like, wait, no I don't know where that goes. So hopefully this museum will try and connect things I've learned. (7-not-AA)

I think—whether you're born here or whether you have a connection to slavery through the South and plantations or through South America, we long to belong to something, right? We want to connect. I want to know what's going on, I want to know what happened, I want to know—I think it's this inquiry we all have, this interest. I think we all should identify. (7-not-AA)

What drew me to the states in the first place was the African America story, obviously, that's why I chose Washington as the place to be. Because growing up in London I've read African American writers. So I was really interested in getting to know the story myself. (4-not-AA, older)

I think that we need to educate America. It's not just the question of the museum being there for African and African American history but also to educate people who now live in a global society. (4-not-AA, member)

I want to be impressed by the details of history I didn't know. (not-AA)

Learning about individuals at all levels of contribution that I did not know about before. (not-AA)

A.4. Diasporic (non-African American) audiences feel connected with African American culture

OVERVIEW: One of the major questions of this research was whether people who don't self-identify as African American would feel engaged with NMAAHC, or perhaps not feel represented by it. From participant quotes in this section, there is a strong answer: diasporic audiences ARE engaged with the Museum, and see it as something that they are part of. Earlier highlights have already noted that diasporic audiences have considerable enthusiasm about the Museum, are excited to see African American culture represented on The Mall, and are eager to learn about "our" history and culture. This additional theme focuses on the foundation of feeling connected with African American history and culture, and the ways that people think of the connections.

While expressing the feeling that "we are all connected," diasporic participants have probably frequently felt as though they are outsiders in American society but their psychological orientation is to feel like they belong to this venture, and to share it with all of their black and African American "brothers and sisters." They would like to feel included in the broadest sense, as semi-humorously expressed by one person who asked if the name would change to the Smithsonian Black History & Culture Museum. To some people without multiple identities, it might feel normal to label diasporic populations with another name or culture (e.g., Afro-Latino, or Jamaican or Jamaican American), but several participants revealed their connection simply by expanding the definition of 'American' – namely that it embraces all of the Americas (South America, Latin America, the Caribbean). One participant synthesized others' interests by saying that *"the Museum's job is to show us how we all connect."*

Another important foundation for connecting with African American culture is that black people who come to the US find themselves being defined and treated as African American whether they intend that or not ("*...we immigrated into the narrative that is African American history*"), including racist attitudes and other obstacles. While some are consciously seeking to embrace this new identity (in the same sense that centuries of other ethnic groups have come to the US seeking to become "an American"), others find themselves in the mode of go-with-the-flow – that is, accepting and then to some extent embracing others' definition of them as African American because of their blackness. Due to the shared experience of immigration and assimilation to the US, a diasporic perspective facilitates them feeling connected with other black people from other places. In this sense of recognizing and wanting to have shared cultural connections, embracing African American culture is part of feeling grounded with a sense of belonging, making one's self at home in this society.

**Diasporic people feel that
“we are all connected”**

As a black American, I hope I go through it and feel like it's about me. I'm hoping to feel like I belong. This talks about the black experience because it's all—the culture we have is kind of connected. (2-diasporic, member)

Looking at certain things that we can find in common. Like, the weaving here is from Ghana and still, something still lingers on. Over the years it hasn't died in us, it remains in us. (7-not-AA)

With the people that are sitting here, we all come from so many different backgrounds, and somehow we are all tied together. And for me, I would like to see how the museum will kind of tie that all together so everyone can feel included, like, "Oh, I hear this story about the (inaudible). I can identify. Or I hear this story about West Africa or East Africa or Southern Africa or Northern Africa, and I get it that way." So, it's just to see how that all twines together so people can understand it's a part (inaudible) one place. (2-diasporic, member)

I see myself in any black person (sounds of affirmation from others). Yes, I can see myself in there. Anywhere there is another black person I see myself. But the hope for this museum is that it would have, I think the one word in here I have heard a lot of, is connectedness. We want to see connection, you know – a different story of African Americans, the Africans and the Americans. (7-not-AA)

I think it's inclusive because no matter whether you came from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal—no matter where on the coast you came from—when you lived here—that became a unified experience. I remember when I was in Ghana on a project I found that I had more in common when I first went over there with somebody from Alabama or Tennessee than I did with the Africans. Why? Because my ancestry was African. My culture was American.

And so that passion runs in me that when I speak of diaspora, it is a living, vibrant connection with my brothers and sisters through this Earth.

[Who's story is this?] The black person's story. It's everyone who is black in this country and it means so many different things. And I think of black Africans but then the story also goes into how these black Africans became American blacks, so that is part of the story. For me, the constant is: blackness in America. I said "black" on purpose because I know how vague it is, but that's how I feel. I don't feel this is a story about Haitians. I don't feel it's a story about—Africa is such a big continent—I don't think it's a story about Ghanaians. I don't think it's a story about blacks from Latin America. I don't think it is individually a story about all of those I just named. But I think it's an umbrella story about blacks. (7-not-AA)

Diasporic audiences identify with African American culture because they've lived here and experienced it

How does this Museum connect to your own heritage?

As a West Indian person living in DC for the last 10 years, two things have come out of it: my understanding of African American culture because I now live in it, and the other thing is that I get these little glimpses of things that are like “oh we have things like that here because they were building things at the same time as they were building them back home”. Little bits of things of this shared history, and I love seeing those connections. This is an opportunity to present that shared history, to begin to see that there is shared experience and connections to talk about. (4-not-AA, older)

It is also a question about the immigrant experience, clearly. My family happened to emigrate before the Civil Rights Movement but that doesn't change that it was very much “the immigrant experience,” and he came and had to assimilate into a culture. My family had the choice to come here and that is very different from people who have been here since the 1800s. And you know the culture that we have assimilated into is different than a lot of the immigrant stories that you hear. You hear about the Irish, the Italian, the Polish, the Jewish, coming in to try and get the American dream and the American dream is for white people, so what happens to the immigrants who come in who are not white passing? We're assimilating into something entirely different, and our story is very different. So it would be pretty important to have that story shown about what that means. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

No matter where you're from—a person of color—your experience in America is the black American experience. It's the African-American experience. So, I know many of us around this very table come from very diverse international backgrounds, but one thing that really unites us is that coming here and having the opportunity to have our lives here, you know, really shaped and molded by the experience of African-Americans here. I'm excited, and I feel very strongly linked to that experience. So, I feel like although my history in this country does not go back that far, I still share in that struggle. I benefit from the fruits of that labor as well. (2 diasporic, member)

We are from different countries outside of America, and in America, simply because of the color of our skin, we're black. So, because of that, we are also part of the African-American group. (2-diasporic, member)

We still inherit the same history regardless, you know, in terms of surviving in a white world. If I get pulled over by the police and I'm like “hey I'm Sudanese –” (everyone laughs). We all share this common struggle that is going to have African at the beginning or end of the words. For me, African, African American, so—I really think that for such a minor discrepancy that for all of us in terms of our survival and the struggle to keep living, it's just doesn't do much benefit to divide or

declare distinction, at least that's what I learned growing up as a Sudanese American. I realized, you know, me and Black Americans who had been here for longer, there is really not that much of a difference. (5-not-AA)

People with combined heritages recognize the complexity of identity, and the potential for a feeling of disconnection.

My family is weird bunch of connections. We're from Liberia. I was born Liberian, moved here in 1990 due to the war. But my grandmother—her family migrated to Arkansas in the 1910s. And now my daughter's here and she's like "well I'm Liberian someday and on the other hand I'm African American." I want Africans who don't see the connection sometimes and those who do see the connection to be able to come into a space and connect. And even within my family sometimes the connection is there and I hope that this museum is also reaching back for a connection for when African people moved, and what that meant. So I am interested in how that story is told. (1-combin.)

I see myself as an African American. I also see myself as an African American Caribbean. I don't want to neglect my origins but I am very much a part of the African American culture. I've been part of the African American culture since 1969. Even though I love my Caribbean heritage and my Caribbean culture, I also love my African American culture and also to the same extent as my African culture. I just see myself as somebody—I was born in Guyana—but I see myself, wherever Africans have settled, I will go in and I will assimilate and I will become part of that. (4-not-AA)

An important part of the museum could be to interpret the many terms by which we've been known over the years and the complexities laden with that. The other part is we're all mixed, I don't care how dark or how light we are, we are all mixed and that is an important part of the story. So we need a big sign somewhere that says "Our history is complex and intertwined with so many other cultures". (5-combin.)

My paternal grandmother is the first person I know of coming to the states. This is in the late 70s. So I guess I'm going to define that as recent? I do think that the fact that my family came after Civil Rights is very—like they have a whole different set of experiences. So like that understanding of anything pre-Civil Rights, I don't—I know that I probably don't have a good grasp on it because my grandparents didn't, they don't have any way to speak on being black in America in that era. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

I'm caught in the middle like many people who are born here but have parents that are from someplace else. Because we're raised here, we have American mannerisms, you know? But our parents don't and we also have those roots. And I would like to say that I think African Americans hopefully are moving towards

being more inclusive, you know, as Africans are coming here and there is intermarriage. It's not that I don't empathize, it's not that I don't feel I'm a part of it because I grew up in this country and it's part of my heritage too. Although it (slavery) didn't directly affect me like it affects some people. So the museum needs to also connect to those who aren't African American so they can also see that we're all connected. We do come from Africa, no matter where we are. (7-not-AA)

For me it is very broken. The way that we are multi-cultured. Especially in the African diaspora, around the world, we said that this museum is American, Afro-American. You know that the continent, the American continent, is connected with South and Central. That black culture is not really expressed in what you showed. We need to make the connection with the culture. (7-not-AA)

Some diasporic people don't want to call themselves 'African American'

My dad is from Sudan, if you called him African American he'd say "I'm not African American". What my mom likes to say is black Americans, she calls them our cousins because, you know, we descended from the same area but there's still slight differences. (5-not-AA)

"African American" is a term that people use when they don't want to use "black". Because I'm not African American. I'm Afro-Caribbean, I'm Afro-Latina, I'm of African descent and I'm part black. I would never say I'm African American because I'm a first generation American. My father emigrated here. African American is very specifically people who- their history is integrally tied to the long history of America. My family's history is a small blip in that. That does not decrease the fact that I am black and that African American history has some effect on me, because, you know, when my family immigrated, we immigrated into the narrative that is African American history. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

I've been really quiet because this is nice, but I know all this from TV, friends I interact with, and what I learned at school. I cannot connect with this 100% — maybe like 30%. If my parents went to this, they're going to be like, yes, we know this, but this is not me. The entire experience is completely different. It's something nice to be informed about. It's just more like this is for American blacks. I understand why it doesn't really touch base on Africa Africa. I don't think it's necessary. This is just to inform us about black people here. (10-not-AA)

I don't feel that the Afro-Latin will be a part of the Afro-American story. Because you use this word only about the US. As an Afro-Latin I don't feel the right to be called an Afro-American. I am from South America. I think I have the same right to be African American but I don't feel inside, inside (inaudible). It is the reason I'm here, to try and understand why we can't be in this umbrella of Afro-America. (7-

not-AA)

This is the story of black people in America, in the United States of America, who trace their roots back to slavery. (7-not-AA)

“African American” I think is a very narrow term because most of us are, I think it’s pretty obvious to everyone, that we’re an amalgamation of many cultures. (4-not-AA)

I’m not African American because I was born in the Dominican Republic. So there are certain things that are attached to “what is African American” even though the more you travel and the more you meet people from the African diaspora—we’re the same exact people. So I’m interested in coming because I want to—there’s a big gap in what is African American and what I, myself, feel comfortable in. Like, I can never say I’m “white” (laughter) nor do I want to, but I want a black dad for my black kids, but what does that mean is—is evolving. (6-not-AA Millennial)

Some diasporic audiences see an opportunity for connections, if the Museum is inclusive

What’s it going to take for the museum staff to really make it feel like the Museum is about you and your experience?

I think that as a West African sometimes we miss the opportunity to see we have connections. And how close those connections are, and I think that is sometimes missing in some museums where I go where it is exclusively African or exclusively African American. I know that is the bridge that needs to happen, that we are more alike, people with our experiences, whether it be (inaudible) or Civil Rights, how we connect those two things and if two people walk into that room to say “this is why”. Our struggles are kind of aligned with African people and I think that’s important. And that’s why I want to see that in the museum, and I think that you’ll probably do a much better job at aligning African people to truly see how powerful they are across the board instead of just putting us in categories that way. (1-combin.)

I did see a part that said African diaspora. In the description it said Jamaican. Both of my parents are Jamaican. I can relate to this, but I was just wondering, was it just a description, or are there really going to be some features of Jamaica in there? I thought that was one of the parts that I really liked. If there were some things culturally that was in there. (10-AA)

I think you can find an entry point into a culture by food, by clothing, by music, by whatever. At the Native American museum, their cafeteria is just fantastic because you get to sample cuisine from around the continent of the United States of America. So wouldn’t it be wonderful if the National Museum of African American History and Culture also had some sort of food court that kind of did that. Sort of a thread that goes through and different foods that are similar but not the same. (1-

combin.)

I was going to say that I don't really know much about slavery. My family's Jamaican so I don't know much about slavery in Jamaica and that's something that I'm really interested in learning about – the different diasporas and how they experienced slavery. And I think that could be a thing, like where you have a section on slavery and you talk about all the different kinds of slavery in parts of the diaspora. (1-combin.)

I'm from Jamaica and came here when I was five. I remember being in South Carolina and hearing the women talk and feeling like it felt like home because of how she spoke it sounded just like me. I can see myself down South; when I hear those people that they call "Geechee," I hear myself. (1-not-AA)

Well, definitely representing the connectedness. What you pointed out on Stokely Carmichael was a really important one. A lot of people don't realize he was from Trinidad, right. And, well, everybody's an immigrant, right? Well, an immigrant or a migrant. We're also all connected. So people, I think, black folks of many diverse backgrounds—Africans as well as people from all over the world are going to want to visit here at least one time. (5-combin.)

But I think that the biggest point of it all is in the whole aspect of the connectedness. The museum's job, I think, if it has a core process of a job, is, especially when it comes to black people, people of color in the world, is to show us how we all connect. And nobody should come into that joint feeling like nothing in here represents me. You know? If I don't open my mouth like you said earlier and I get pulled over by the police they're not going to be like, "hey, he went to Howard University, he's educated." They'll just be like "nigga get out the car" (laughter). I mean, they just see that black face, it doesn't matter where you fall on this diaspora. And you know it's unfortunate that brothers and sisters who come from other places that look like us think "well I'm not a black American so they going to treat me differently" Uh, no. (laughter) No. I definitely think that's a piece of it, in showing us how we all connect cause we all do connect—cause I'm not African American, but I definitely understand that. Don't get it twisted: you still black in America, bro. (5-not-AA)

I think the bulk of it tells the story of African Americans, but I think it also touches on Africa and the diaspora. I think that individuals, whether they are African immigrants, more recent immigrants, or back in the 60s, I think can identify with it. But I think the bulk of the story tells the story of African American experience in this country from slavery. I think even before that at the beginning of the slavery period, it also—people from the continent can also identify. It also helps African Americans to begin to identify with where they've come from on the continent. It tells a little of it. (9-combin.)

As someone from the Caribbean who has lived most of my life here, I "get" the perspective of Caribbean people who only think of themselves as Caribbeans living in America. And then the perspective of African Americans who think the Caribbean people are not like them so it is an opportunity to kind of breach that. Because

without neglecting my own Caribbean history I feel very much a part of the African American history and culture. (4-not-AA, older)

So June is Caribbean-American Heritage Month, right? So in June different organizations throughout the USA feature stuff like prominent persons of color, prominent Americans who have Caribbean heritages, how they contributed to the fabric of the American story. So, to ask this question sort of implies that we are not part of the story and we are part of the story. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

But my other take on that is that, just historically, the stories have been connected. The Civil Rights Movement—Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, have been in this country for many years but there's been—I feel like African Americans have gone to the stories of Jamaica, have gone to the stories of Ghana, have gone to the stories of Cuba, as a source of inspiration for their own movement so I don't think we can—I don't think you can separate the two movements and to leave it out would actually be a disservice to African Americans because they lose the perspective that this struggle was not just yours, the struggle belonged to people—powerful people, black people—around the world and we all drew inspiration from one and other, right? And we all learned from—they all learned from each other. So to leave that out, that space, that narrative out—is unfortunate, truly unfortunate. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

I know you gathered us all here and this and that and I know they're trying to reach out to the diaspora—and there's much work to be done—but I think it's important that if they do reach out to us it is important that they don't relegate us to kind of a little bit of a footnote. That we're actually really incorporated into the museum. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

I think a lot of people in here are at least descended from non-Americans. Would those groups be interested in attending or in visiting more than once? And I would be hesitant to say they would. Well it would depend on if I could design an experience for them that specifically spoke to something that personally related. Like for instance, if they went to the Black Power section and Stokely Carmichael was there then all the Trinidadis would be like "OK! Now I understand this museum is cool" they can relate to that, you know? It goes back to Spike Lee: "Black people, people I know, have to be on the wall." (5-combin.)

A.5. Emotional connection to remembered history among older participants

OVERVIEW: As with many history museums, older visitors will likely feel more connected to the content, especially those parts where they remember the events (e.g., in *A Changing America*). Baby Boomers and Generation Jones participants felt emotional about seeing stories of Malcom X, the Black Power movement, and the Civil Rights marches in Washington, because they lived through it and can identify with those struggles.

Well, it's something we can relate to. Especially when you're talking about civil rights movement, my era, I can really relate to that as someone who really took part in that. (3-AA member, older)

I think about the last (inaudible) that we looked at. This is how I grew up—this is the era that I grew up in—and I remember a lot of those things. I think a lot of those things will come back as we go back. I can just see myself with somebody else at the museum and just talking about what my experience was when I come across a particular exhibit. (3-AA member, older)

I grew up here in D.C. I wouldn't want to be up doing 250,000 marches. (inaudible) March on Washington. I was in school during that (inaudible) 60. I was around when Martin Luther King was shot and killed. I remember how the city was. I think there's a lot that more people can really relate to—more of that experience that they can truly extend—no matter what age—what color you are, you know. I think a lot of us went through this. In the Civil Rights movement, everybody was (inaudible). A lot of white people were involved in the Civil Rights movement who lost their lives for that movement. I think it could affect a lot of people. (3-AA member, older)

It made me feel pretty good because (inaudible) but there was something on there, there was a sign about, um, Cesar Chavez or something? So I am from San Diego and I was in the inner city high school back then, and we did have a lot of Mexicans going to our school. Some documented, some not documented, but during that time it was (inaudible) so we would participate in marches and write letters to the government (inaudible) and so personally I really connected with that. (1-combin., boomer)

It is a significant struggle. Again, I lived that 60s–70s. It was a significant time for me. Struggles. Feelings of it's not going to get any better. Feelings of, okay, is education going to do it for me. Feelings of I've got to go do something. Feelings of, you know, why are you not with me to do something to make the change. So, it was a struggle for me. (9-diasporic, older)

I see a full circle. The struggle. The victory. The struggle all over again. So, my connection is the connection with the Civil Rights movement because I feel that that's exactly what we go through all over again. (9-diasporic, older)

1968—but that's because I was born before that era and I can attest to all the kinds of things that were going on at that time. I have a personal connection because Malcolm X actually moved into the community where our family eventually lived, and were fire bombed. And then, yeah, the Puerto Rican Liberation Army did something and they were always shooting young black boys, so—all that stuff was going on, so I have a personal connection. (7-not-AA)

B. Challenges from the Perceptions of Likely Visitors

These seven themes derived from the focus group discussions represent *dimensions of participants' concerns* about the experience at the new Museum.

Themes articulated in this section:

1. Conventional stories, not enough depth
2. Stereotypical heroes (e.g., sports, music)
3. Lacking achievements of scientists, inventors, doctors
4. Some African Americans are less likely to embrace diasporic identity
5. Diasporic audiences want their contributions to be recognized
6. Desire for more connections to Africa
7. Skepticism: questioning who is telling the story
8. Encouraging repeat visits

B.1. Conventional stories that we already know, not enough depth

OVERVIEW: There is a strong desire and high expectations that this museum will tell the African American story in a different way than has been traditionally told in the textbooks. Participants want to see the unsung heroes, the unfamiliar stories, and the full complexity of the African American experience. Based on the exhibit previews, some people worried that it wasn't going to have enough depth. Although it may be a challenge to meet the high expectations of some people, it's clearly a positive finding that these audiences want to see depth and complexity of content.

Each quote is identified to note where it came from: the number of the focus group (see page 8 for the master list) which tells you what kind of group it was (e.g., older diasporic non-African American as in group 4), and in which of the three diasporic categories the person identified themselves. Quotes begin with African Americans (AA) then continue with people who identify themselves as a combination of African American and other diasporic roots (combin., or 'diasporic' if their identities were not specifically identified in the transcript), and then people who do not identify as African American at all (not-AA).

Hoping to see more depth and complexity; the untold stories

I think the frustration comes because the content doesn't get deep enough. And I think that's the tension that I feel when I see that. Like "Oh I hope we get this right. I hope we delve deep." (8-AA, Millennial)

It's just, one feeling that I did get is I noticed I was a little anxious. Just because, there, as we went through the slides, there were certain things that I was hoping that would be touched on that weren't. Are they going to hit on like little things that I feel like, in that particular exhibit, there may be some small things that some of us are looking for that are not going to be there. And what is going to be there are things that we've seen and heard before. (8-AA Millennial)

I was kind of hopeful, when I first started seeing the exhibit I was like "there's so much you can do with it." And then I saw the Obama stuff and I was like "ok, what kind of new stuff are people going to be interested in?" Because we all know the Obama stuff. He is clearly important, but, like, what other new stuff are we going to introduce people to? Because this museum is not only for us, it is for everybody. And the importance is we're telling it through our own, an African American, lens. But what information—because we're controlling the way this information is shared – what information are we sharing? Are we sharing the same information that these people already have access to? So I'm just, I'm hopeful that it will go beyond what we already know and take it to another level. (8-AA Millennial)

I think it's important that people walk away from there with a greater appreciation of African-American contributions to the United States and worldwide and to realize that African-American people are not all the same. We don't all look the same. We don't all speak the same. We don't all speak the same language. We don't all come from the same heritage. We have different expectations. The African-American experience is not the one you see on TV every day. (2-diasporic Member)

One thing I would say consistently is I am not seeing the unsung heroes. I'm seeing the people that we all know. I want to walk away from there as an African-American person, and I want to learn something. I don't know who the target audience is here but it should appeal to everyone. Everyone should walk out of there and learn something new. But right now, it's like the faces that we've always seen—the same faces that they put in the books and the same faces that are in the paper. But we don't know about the unsung heroes. I think it's important for the museum to try to pull out those people and give them a spotlight and give them a place on the stage to be seen and to be understood and to understand their contributions. (2-diasporic member)

I'm hoping that people who come here will learn more than just what's been out in the pop culture or what's generic. They will know about more people behind the scenes that shaped this nation to where we are right now. (2-diasporic member)

I'm hoping to see little known facts or unknown facts that we are not so familiar with. I'm hoping to discover things—some of the things that we don't see on PBS every year or that has not already been explored extensively. (9-diasporic, older)

The information that I did see was a lot of, like, I don't want to say watered down but it seemed—I don't know the word that I'm looking for. It just feels a little watered down, and maybe that's because I'm an African American History major so I know a little bit more than other people but it just seemed a little bit kind of commercial to me. (sounds of affirmation from other participants) (1-combin.)

Reacting to the preview:

It's traditional textbook history

I feel disappointed. I definitely feel like I could get this off Google. We all know about Harriet Tubman. We all know about Sojourner Truth. We need to know about the unsung Underground Railroad folks. We need to know about the unsung, you know, free blacks who were trying to do things. That's what we need. (10-AA)

Kind of echoing on what everyone else said, it's—a lot of the content is stuff that we've heard and seen before. So, for me, I guess I want to see the stories I'm told something different—a different perspective, a different lens, not just something like "yeah, we know this but what else is there?" (8-AA Millennial)

Yeah, I feel like for me going into this museum, I would like to learn something that I don't already know from the very little history that I've already been given. Granted, I've read the autobiography of Malcolm X. I've also watched all of Roots. So, coming from that perspective, I would like someone who is more well-versed than me on African-American history. Everyone should learn something new. So, for right now, I feel like the very bare minimum, even a white person who went to a very white school, I feel like even them so far—although this is just a preview—I don't think even they have seen something they haven't been told before.

(2-combin. member)

Mostly what I saw there—I saw the typical. I saw what I learned in school and to walk into the museum and actually see some of the information that I was fed in school and some of it was created by those whose intentions were not our best. I want a little more. Here is our chance, you know, some people may not like it, but this is our chance to tell our story and you can't really lead a life with someone else's story because you will not have a true identity of self. (5-combin.)

And I think it [should not be] just showing the bad sides, but showing the complexity that is the life experience. Because it feels very surface right now. It feels very "introduction to black experience." (6-not-AA, Millennial)

It feels very monolithic. It's not—this is too monolithic. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

And I do feel like it's a primer, it's nothing different from what we learned in school—what very little we learned in school. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

If this is all about what we've been reading about in the sixth grade and the seventh grade and high school and college, then it's the same old thing. When there's so many layers to African history and the route to get to here and the Latin part and the different continents—the different countries and all of that. If it's not reflected in this very big and expensive museum then it's just the same thing.

(7-not-AA)

**Frustration at the apparent
absence of attention to current
issues and inequities**

Will they incorporate the Black Lives Matter movement and all these other things that are really burgeoning? I just wonder how much of an emphasis will that be? Because though it is uplifting to see this one [Changing America], it's also like we don't have a true sense of what is reflected in our climate and right now our climate is divisive. And I wonder if the museum will touch on that or just gloss over, the way that American history tends to. (1-combin.)

It seems very superficial. It shows those that "made it." But we know that a lot of people are still trying, and those people aren't even going to get there. They don't even know that there's a door to go through. (9-diasporic)

I think I was already sort of getting angry watching it. And that's part of that initial surface reaction, but my more mature reaction is wondering if I'm a white young male in 2016 and I come into this museum, how do I connect what's happening today to what happened in 18whatever, or 17whatever, or 14whatever, right? How can this museum educate white folks—I don't care if they're from Europe or from Virginia—how can this museum educate them about the impact—the true impact—that still continues, that we, that many of us, the many communities still deal with? How do we educate them and see that this wasn't just like a thing in a history book? Because honestly I don't know that anything there is new, per se, but what I hope is that there will be a new tickle, if you will, for the white person who comes into this. And hopefully they'll feel like "ok, this was janky, this was messed up. And this is systemic and there are still issues that we're dealing with because of this." I hope that it's not just like a textbook class or just another museum that people go to, to check off the box and that's it. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

B.2. Stereotypical heroes (sports, music)

OVERVIEW: There are mixed feelings among participants about showcasing African Americans who have excelled as entertainers or sports figures. For them, this reinforces society's notion that black people's contributions are limited to their ability to entertain, amuse, or impress with their physical prowess.

Quotes are identified with the focus group number where the comment originated from, and then the diasporic category of the person who is quoted ('AA,' or 'combination' or 'not-AA).

It depicts the stereotypical ideas that actually that have been passed down for so long. We can be much more than that, I mean don't get me wrong, that's part of us, but I want to see astronauts, I want to see the big guys, what about the guy who invented the cell phone? I'm not seeing them. I mean, don't get me wrong, this is all good and this is actually what has been showed to us for so many years: sports, music, and athletes, but where is the respect for the intellectuals? (5-combin.)

I'm a little disappointed in this one [Cultural Expressions]. I'm actually very disappointed in this one. I think it will say to visitors what I feel like the rest of the world feels like African Americans are, and that's a source of entertainment. And we're not. There's a lot of ways that we culturally express ourselves other than entertainment, dancing, telling a joke, and sports. A part of cultural expression—there's no part that integrates our intelligence. It's not represented there. Not on any other type of level. A lot of African Americans express themselves through academics. There's a lot of scientists. There's a lot of lawyers. Do you know what I mean? This is an opportunity to shed that stereotype that we're only here for your entertainment. (10-AA)

It appears to me to be the story that we've been given all our lives about who we are. Again, what we're not given ever is the benefit of the doubt. What we're not ever given is that we started way behind most other Americans. I don't get that here. I get a regurgitation of, again, things that are in my childhood school books and not the astronauts, the president of Dodge, the Hudlin brothers or people who were real pioneers—people who made a difference in the things that we can be. It seems to be very canned of, you know, here's Bill Cosby. Here's Martin Luther King. Here's the slave ship. We're more than that. We're much more than that, and I feel, again, like people are going to go that don't look like us and say, "Yep, exactly. Exactly why they are the way they are. If you spent more time in school, you'd have better opportunities instead of singing, dancing, and putting the ball in the net." That's what I take from this—that people are going to see it the way that they already perceive us versus the story that we can own of who we really are. (10-AA)

I would like NOT to see the stereotypical images that (inaudible) our history since we've been here. I would hope to not see any of that. (Inaudible) all of the derogatory stereotypical images. When I go to the museum for African American history and culture, I want to see the positive aspects of what we have contributed and not what racist America has put out there.

B.3. Lacking achievements of scientists, inventors, doctors

OVERVIEW: Several participants criticized the absence of exhibits about black people who have excelled in the intellectual arena, for instance, as inventors, scientists, astronauts, medical pioneers, jurists, or technological innovators. Some express great disappointment and see this as an important oversight that the Museum ignored.

Quotes begin with an African American (AA) then people identifying as a combination of African American and other diasporic roots (combin.), and then people who do not identify as African American at all (not-AA).

I think that there should be a section on black inventions. Black inventions or how we contribute to the world of science and math. I feel like that's really a part of our culture. That's one thing that I didn't learn until undergrad about how we really contribute to the world around us. I learned a lot about this artistry and African diaspora in high school, but I didn't learn about the inventions about how we really contribute to the world around us until college. I feel like that should be there.
(10-AA)

It's just that—I think that when you're talking about culture what I see is pop culture, which is good! But I'd like to see science, engineering, medicine. I'd like to see more technology. You know, we're known for sports and entertainment and where does that come from? So I'd like to see more of our contributions across the board. It's just a glaring omission from my perspective. I mean if you're just going to talk about how we entertain, how African Americans entertain people, then all you have to do is turn on the television. I mean I want to see the science, I want to see the engineering. Culture has a much broader definition than what we're seeing here. (1-combin.)

I'm noticing actually that so many things were left out. One time I went to a store to find African or African American books and the ones that I found were written by whites and I'm like, what's going on? But here's a chance to tell our own story, and I think a lot of that story goes unnoticed, like for instance inventors or some of the big achievements we got. So, that I would like to see. (5-combin.)

As much as I love our creativity—our entertainment and everything—I would like to see more of the scientists. It want to see more emphasis on the African American scientists, the mathematician, the engineer. People who have excelled in those areas. In a sense, so that people will know about them and know that we do more than hair, dance, and sing. Also, so that children in elementary schools—their only goal won't be to play basketball like whoever's out there, or sing, or dance. But to do something with their minds and intellects—on that perception. (9-combin.)

We still have leaders and leadership, you know, kind of coming to America for an education right? You know, so there's just so much more—you know, inventors,

business leaders—why does it just have to be civil rights? Civil rights is encompassing of so many different diverse aspects of our lives. So, business as well as culture. We’ve got culture and sports represented, but we have Howard University and Hampton University in Norfolk. These are places that are (inaudible) writers, scholars, and Supreme Court justices went there. There’s nothing in here that’s talking about how the education of black people has actually contributed beyond 1968. (2-diasporic member)

I think, and maybe it’s covered in another part, when youth hear about African American inventors who have played a powerful role that African Americans can speak of—I want to know where that fits in here in a sense of black ingenuity. Because it looks like it’s more resistance. And this part seemed like it was more of a power movement for me, as opposed to the changing of America or how blacks played an impact. I mean, we played a big part in the cotton trade and the American commerce and American rail roads, we built America in some senses, and I think that should be a part of the Changing America story. We want the others who will come to look at the story and not hear it only during Black History Month. That, you know, the street light that you take for granted that sits in front of you every single day in every single intersection was created by an African American. We want them to look at the story and say “these people suffered and they helped build this country, they are part of this country.” That, to me, is the changing of America. (7-not-AA)

Well the second exhibit—I feel it could be more contributions that our forefathers and brothers have seen. Even when it comes to the 1800s you had people who were really helpful. An example would be Benjamin Banneker. What about all those achievements? And then you limit it only to 1968. You know, that story has to be told. We have worked so much for it and it has to be told. (7-not-AA)

B.4. Some African Americans are less likely to embrace diasporic identity

OVERVIEW: Diasporic participants were very comfortable with embracing an African American identity (section A.4). However, African Americans were not so comfortable with these connections. They aren't necessarily familiar with the term 'diaspora.' Some feel that black immigrants from other countries of the diaspora cannot understand the unique African American experience. Further, they don't want to see their African American history diluted by including other people of African heritage in the narrative.

Quotes begin with diasporic people or people with combination identities and then continue with African Americans (AA).

What do you think about the term diaspora—African diaspora?

Diasporic participants:

I love it. I think it's all encompassing, and for me it reminds me that black people are everywhere—not just on the continent. We are in Latin America, South America, Europe, Asia—we're in so many places that people don't really acknowledge. It seems like they just want to keep us in Africa and talking about slavery. So, that's why I love it. It reminds us—I feel like I'm in this one big, powerful family. (7-combin. member)

African American participants:

Well, it was a new term to me in the beginning. Now, I see the greater value of it because the little ones who are coming through now are very comfortable with it. They had no question about it. They also had a perspective that I didn't have as a child. (3-AA member, older)

I was thinking it kind of encompasses that first leap across the border. It's not a commonly used word, except when you're referring to Africans, like the African diaspora all in the same sentence. You don't really hear diaspora really utilized for anything else. (8-AA Millennial)

I think it's a collective term. "Diaspora" is kind of like encompasses everything. But to know that we all have different narratives, you don't want it to be a tell-all-be-all to encompass everything. Like different narratives, we kind of need to separate diversity in the cultures. (8-AA Millennial)

It depends on the day. I related to it negatively in the past, I relate to it somewhat more positively now. But not the extent that I felt compelled to raise my hand [when asked to indicate if they relate to the term or not]. (8-AA)

**Belief that only African Americans
can identify with this material**

I think that as African Americans, we have the unique (inaudible—speaking quietly) examples. I think that we—and it's grounded in our African roots. We know Africans moved to Europe and England—and went to the West Indies. They went to South America, and they went to the United States. I think all of our experience is different. Is it inclusive? I think it's inclusive of everybody who came to the United States. (10-AA)

But the question about using the terminology African American, I feel like there is a new generation that is more so saying, "I'm black," and disassociating themselves from the African part of African American. I think it's because there is a clear disconnect that we often don't speak about between Africans and African Americans, and the experience. It's not even necessarily negative. It's just not the same experience. (10-AA)

I was just thinking when I got back from South Africa—when I was there, I almost did that. I almost disassociated the name African American and just stuck with black because I didn't feel embraced. That kind of hurt me. I was like maybe I am just black. (10-AA)

Her parents are African. They're African. She's African American, I guess, but Africans are Africans. And African Americans of African descent are Americans. (10-AA)

My perspective would be someone who's first or second generation would be much like—or even less so, than white Americans. They don't—culturally, it's different for them. It's going to be more of a curiosity rather than a part of their story. (3-AA member)

So, it would be a good history lesson for them. There are things that we don't know about ourselves. And also, our history expands all over the world. I think they can relate to that. (3-AA member)

Well, I think it's broad enough for it to be easy, but it really depends on the person. If the person comes from a country, and they're anchored in that other country. If they have an interest in maybe learning about the history of our country. It's there for them. I don't really know if there's anything that we could do to motivate them to come and learn. (3-AA member)

A few people think it's inclusive and see the opportunity for connections with other diasporic audiences

There's something there for everybody. I think they touched on every aspect that—I don't see how you could not touch on (inaudible). (3-AA member)

Even if they aren't African American—let's say they're (inaudible). If it goes back to African diaspora like you talked about, there's something there for them, too. You have blacks that live in South America, you know, (inaudible) in our place in Brazil, Peru, and all those places like that. If they came here, they could identify (inaudible). There's something for them in that museum. (3-AA Member)

I think it's also important to tell not just how Africans got to the United States, but the fact that this, you know, happened in the Caribbean—not just in the United States. And (inaudible) about how the people might respond or connect to it. You think about Africans who live in other countries. That might be a way to get a connection with them also. (3-AA member).

B.5. Diasporic audiences want their contributions to be recognized

OVERVIEW: Diasporic audiences feel that they have contributed to African American history and that these stories need to be told. They want the identities of contributors to be acknowledged/labeled (e.g., Trinidadian, Haitian-American). Some people just want to see their own culture represented in some way.

These quotes are all from diasporic audiences.

Diasporic contributions should be recognized

It's not only that we're everywhere but we're everywhere and we're having influence everywhere, and it's not all negative. It's positive influence in other places around the world. I think that's important to reflect here. (2-combin. member)

The black immigrant experience in America is influenced by so many things including African-American culture. So, for me personally, I'm curious to see if the museum will highlight any of the contributions that black immigrants have made to America and also to black America because I think that's something that's really important, and I don't think that gets enough credit because we are from different countries outside of America. (2-diasporic member)

Yeah, and it goes to the comments I made earlier about the contributions of black immigrants. After 1968—really more in the 1970s and 1980s, that's when you saw a lot of immigrants coming—I guess more so from West Africa to the US, and that's not really reflected. If you're talking about Changing America, I mean, immigration is a part of how America changed especially if you're talking about African-American history, why not talk about the contributions of black immigrants in this "Changing America" and how that impacted African-American culture? (2-diasporic member)

I want to see how it tells a story about the connectedness in the African Diaspora. For example, the migration from the Diaspora and how those implanted individuals are becoming well-known African Americans. For example, Essence magazine—Susan Taylor's ancestry is from Trinidad. So, how will we make those linkages between those well-known African Americans and how they're connected to the Diaspora? I think those are some of the interesting stories that I would like to see told. (9-diasporic)

So I'm happy so far because there isn't a landmark in the US where people can see, not just the slavery part of it but other things. I came back from South Africa (inaudible) one of the pioneers of the Ethiopia airlines was actually one of the Tuskegee air guys, so those are some of the things that (inaudible) instead of being looked at as a people who are (inaudible), we've moved on and done all sorts of

things and that should—that is what I want the museum to be. (4-not-AA)

It's like there's this missing element of our connection to the Civil Rights Movement and the recognition for how we participated. I'm speaking, like Africans participating in the movement. I was just going to say that, at least in Ghana, there's a lot in the museums, there's a lot of note made of our specific roles and contributions to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and partnership with historical figures like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. But I've never actually seen that in a museum in the United States at all. Or any dialogue about that. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

**Will my culture be represented?
(more recent immigrants)**

It is an African American history museum but I would love to see other types of history in there. You know, me, I'm Haitian and so we were the first free black republic in the world, so you know just like I'm thinking maybe that can be represented in the museum, maybe that could be in there at some point because you know being born in the states I am African American but I do have this culture, of being Haitian. I would be interested to see how that is portrayed in the museum given that it is the African American History Museum. You know, I'm just interested in seeing what types of other perspectives, cultures are represented or mentioned even. (5-combin. Millennial)

I think I'd like to see going into diaspora communities, and how they're impacted, and how they have merged and blended within African American culture. There are African immigrant communities and all those immigrant communities are blending with African American experience and trying to tell those stories of how they're coming together—that circle. (9-combin.)

I want to see my culture, whatever that is—Jamaican culture, black American culture—I want to see that represented somewhere and I feel that there is definitely a gap in that representation in the museums. And so in that sense I feel the same as those African Americans who were here prior to whatever the cut-off date is that you want to call it or enslaved in America. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

I don't see any Afro-Latinos represented anywhere in there. (7-not-AA)

I think it really depends on “what is the mission statement?” Is your mission statement specifically focusing on African Americans, we're all hyphenated, we're pretty used to that not applying to us, to us being treated as something different and not necessarily as part of the narrative. But even just that reach out to want to hear the diaspora's perspective, that builds a trust that we're not used to hearing from the African American community. So I think little movements like that, that does a huge amount of building our trust. So, no, it's not hard, but it's not going to

be expected and it will be a pleasant surprise if it happens. (6-not-AA)

Now most black people in America who don't trace their history back to slavery in this country, didn't start coming here until after World War II. So I'm interested to know, if this exhibit—and if it doesn't, that's fine—but would anything in this exhibit focus on black people who are now in the country but hadn't been here since the 16 or 1700s? Well, the immigration laws started to change in the mid-20th century. It wasn't until after the mid-1900s that Latin Americans, Africans, West Indians started coming here. And that's a big part of the story, you talk about African American story (inaudible) in the museum. (7-not-AA)

Diasporic origins should be identified

[talking about Stokely Carmichael; should he be labeled as coming from Trinidad? All but one of the group raised their hands for yes]

In terms of building specific audiences, I think maybe the question is – I think a lot of people in here are at least descended from non-Americans – would those groups be interested in visiting more than once? And I would be hesitant to say they would. Well it would depend on if you could design an experience for them that specifically spoke to something that personally related. Like for instance, if they went to the Black Power section and Stokely Carmichael was there then all the Trinidadis would be like “OK! Now I understand this museum is cool” they can relate to that, you know? Black people, people I know, have to be up on the wall. (5-combin.)

Everybody, wherever they originate from, as far back as you know, they should be identified as that. I think that is a way that you get the connection to be reinforced. (5-combin.)

I don't think identifying him as Trinidadian is meant to exclude anybody else, I just think it's great to look at how we all contribute to this story. I mean, regardless, we all contributed to this story. (5-not-AA)

B.6. Desire for more connections to Africa

OVERVIEW: There were many comments about the desire for more connection to Africa – that the story needs to start in Africa. These ideas were expressed by African Americans as well as diasporic participants. Some view life in Africa before slavery to be a positive part of the story and they don't want everything to be about slavery and negatives. Some wish to learn more about their roots, which were lost to so many. Some want the glorious ancient African past to be showcased as part of the story.

Quotes begin with African Americans (AA) then continue with people who identify themselves as a combination of African American and other diasporic roots (combin., or diasporic if their identities were not specified in the transcript), and then people who do not identify as African American at all (not-AA).

**The story needs to start in Africa;
it should not start with slavery
[Actually, it does, but people are
projecting their own concerns]**

The question that I ask is “will the museum include (inaudible) that reach back to African culture?” I just think it's important that even though this is an African American museum, you would assume that you might want to go back to when we set feet on the ground here. That it's hard to discount how we got here. Even what happened before, you know, with our ancestors. (3-AA member)

(Inaudible) go back to Africa or to those Africans that sold us to the white people and brought us over here. I think it's very important to tell the whole story. Even though some of that whole story might be negative for black people here about how (inaudible) our African ancestors sold us. I think it needs to be told. (3-AA member)

I will be looking for that content because you can't tell the African American story without talking about Africa. I just don't necessarily think it needs to be a preponderance. (8-AA Millennial)

Well I liked the pre-contact part and I liked the cultural expressions. But I would have loved to see more information on pre-contact Africa. Africa pre-colonialism, so that we can see where we're coming from, where we've been and where we're going. (1-combin.)

That's the whole thing that kept rolling through my mind. I thought I would've seen something about those kingdoms or talk about the people in Northern African or something like that. (2-diasporic member)

I'm hoping to see—I'm wondering if they will have history prior to slavery—if they will be examining some of the countries where the largest—I know they possibly

can't do all, but the largest percentage of the slaves were—the largest percentage of people of Africa came from. (9-diasporic, older)

I am looking forward to feeling a story, the fullness of the story, of African Americans told from - I'm not sure when it will begin but I hope it will begin in a time when - a little before America, and take it to here. (7-not-AA)

They want to see the trail back or make sure that it starts before America, ok? (7-not-AA)

And it's the history of Africa, history of Africans in the Americas and so we should see Africa at every point. At every point. And I'm concerned. (7-not-AA)

I didn't see a big oomph more with the experience in Africa before we came here. But our history doesn't just start with Selma and I guess what I want to see is that we really looked at the origin of civilization, the African origins of civilization. That's what I hope the museum will bring to people. (4-not-AA, member)

I heard one of them talking about wanting to see the slaves right from (inaudible) bringing them in from Africa, and to really capture that and tell the story from that side. That story, the African story. (7-not-AA)

I think it's important to have African history in the African-American Museum but it cannot overshadow the fact that this is the African-American history. It's different. I think that there has to be a link and a tie to those people and to all of us who come from Africa. There is also another museum dedicated to Africa, and I'd like to see a linkage between the new museum and the existing museum on the Mall. (2-not-AA member)

Starting with slavery is ok but there's so much before slavery. Because I think it's important to know that we have people from Madagascar who came here as free people. I'm sure I'm not the only person who had ancestors who came as free people. So there's a whole history of sea travelers. We're talking about the 15th, 16th century. (4-not-AA, member)

It's very important that some people want to believe that African American history started with slavery. We need to dispel that. We need to consult some historians who can present the kind of document evidence that shows that African American culture did not start with slavery but that Africa made a big contribution there. I think it's important, especially for the younger generation, even for the older generation, important for people who come to understand African Americans did contributions prior to slavery. And our history in this country did not start as slavery. I think that there should be some kind of exhibit, some kind of narrative that documents that theme or piece. (4-not-AA)

Show positives about life in Africa, before slavery

I just would like our royalty to be deified. The Greeks have got Alexander, and everyone's telling the stories of these powerful people, and I'm not seeing that in the stories being told about Africa (inaudible) slavery. I'd like to be reading about pharaohs and power and the real fierce nature of what Africa really is. So, I want see that power and tell my sons and daughters, "You are coming from royalty, and this is the beginning." And I think that's more important to give us a deifying icon that we are people of power and fierce nature. (2-diasporic member)

You really bring up a great point which (inaudible) in terms of the greatness of Africa. That's what I'm trying to see with this museum. How far back would this museum go? Because when we're talking the (inaudible), we're talking about this tragedy, but slavery can only be a tragedy if it represents a setback in a positive movement, so that's why we have to go back and learn. Until we know how good we were, then can we reflect on the (inaudible) of slavery to us, and it goes back to the great Africa—you know, when you (inaudible) he had the greatest pilgrimage (inaudible). He was the richest—one of the richest kings the world has ever had! So, some of those things need to be told about us before slavery. What I need to see is the greatness of Africa. That's everything that reflects Africa and all the people. That's what's going to engage me. There's just a whole lot of negativity about Africa already that's in the news, and I need something positive. I need something that when I go, it shows me as a conqueror! (2-not-AA member)

To learn about our roots

There are people where I work who are from the continent of Africa, who knew their family history thousands of years ago. That really left me feeling—this is dramatic—but like an orphan. Our history is really new history relative to the mother land or European history. I think it's really important because (inaudible) beginning—a sad beginning, but perhaps the before and after can be exposed to those of us who don't have that. I know my family went back three generations here. From that point, I have no idea. (3-AA member)

Always trying to reach back across the ocean. Because we all say, "no one's from America because it's so new and the history of the country is so new" and we say that. But when we get down to African American people, I feel like we're researching genealogy, reaching back across the ocean to be like "so where does my family actually come from?" That is so integral and so unique to African American identities. For my experience of being African American that is the common theme

among us: of always searching, for who are we? (8-AA)

I do believe that African American history started way before the slave ship. But, if you were to actually ask African Americans where they came from on the African continent, most people would not know. And so here is your chance to actually light the path. There is much when especially we start understanding the trade that happened before then and how the whole slavery thing came about. It gives you more sense of self, I think the most important thing I came here to understand, I'm hoping the museum will actually help everyone understand is that, the real difference between a Haitian, a Jamaican, an African American and so forth and so on, is it's just a boat stop, that's it. When you start looking at things from that perspective then actually you start seeing yourself as a unified people, as compared to just splinters, the remnants of what we're seeing on the continent is to this day, and the Caribbean and Latin America and Central America and so forth and so on. Here's an opportunity to tell our story. (5-combin.)

Many people on the continent (Africa) do not know their history yet either. You know, we don't know what the origins were when it was just kingdoms before people came in and occupied us and created countries. So, my hope is that the museum would have the understanding of what it was like when it was just kingdoms before the migration and the breaking down of a continent to what it looks like today and as a result of that journey and experience. How can I find myself connected back home (Nigeria) with also understanding the reality of the life I live here? (2-not-AA member)

The other thing is I love is Henry Louis Gates, and on Thursday nights when he does the genealogy on PBS, I would like to see that opportunity being available to people when they come there. If they want to trace their roots and find out where they come from and know who they are, it would be great if this museum provided that opportunity for people visiting there—on some level. I don't know how they could do it, but I think that would be really important to do because it gives us an opportunity to link people from (inaudible) and Cameroon and Kenya and other countries in Africa. (2-not-AA member)

To see aspects of African culture that have been passed down

I want to see retainers from African culture. I want to see, like, when I went down to this plantation in Jacksonville, you can see amulets and things that they built into the threshold, retainers from Africa that they kept to fortify themselves in that space, before they took on this identity of the African American. (8-AA)

The one thing I can't stand, when they talk about it as though a boat ride made us forget what Africa is! Like, you said Africa was going to be there but I don't see it. (8-AA)

I like that were some African elements included in this part, but I just feel like it's missing—I don't know what it would say to visitors, but to me I would leave saying, "They didn't talk about African-American culture in its fullness."

(2-diasporic member)

I will catch up on something that you said, "It's a bit of Africa that's in there." And that's how it's always been. (Inaudible) Africa, but when it comes to the deeper things like we talked about the history and everything, I didn't see that Africa there! (2-diasporic Member)

B.7. Skepticism: questioning who is creating the story

OVERVIEW: Some participants were skeptical about who is telling the story – is it the government that is funding the institution? white folks? Others worried that the content might be too “rosy” and geared for a white audience. The skeptics were not just the African Americans, but the diasporic audiences as well.

Who is telling the story?

This looks very much like White America's story of African Americans. (sounds of affirmation from other participants) So the type of African American who identifies with it is the type of African American who is most trying to identify with white America's version of African Americans. (8-AA)

I think it's the black American story, but it does feel like it's not the inside scoop. There's nothing like—it's not a personal touch. I feel like just some personal touches in there would make it great. But nonetheless, I appreciate that it was even made—that somebody took the time to do this for us. I just hope that we are the ones that are making it. Right now, it kind of feels like—who's making this? No offense, you all. I mean, I understand, of course, why they were not in the room, but I honestly would like to see who they are. Who are you? (10-AA)

[after being told that the exhibit designers “look just like everyone in this room”] I started wondering where their directive is coming from. So, yes, they may look like us, but is someone saying to them, okay, you can't talk about that, but you can talk about this, which is much of what we've already been talking about. (10-AA)

As well as the “Justice for Trayvon,” I guess I had some reservations that the story is told correctly. I wonder who's really telling the story, like I understand that this is the Smithsonian Museum but who's like really telling the story. Are there going to be gaps? (8-AA Millennial)

The reason why I'm thinking that I will be visiting it. I would like to see exactly what the museum entails. Even though it says that it will be African American, what exactly are you going to be portraying in there? Will it be somebody else's interpretation or will it be those who have really tread this path and left their footprints in the sand? (5-combin.)

I just want to see who is writing the story because my experience with history of the black people—no matter where we come from and no matter where we are right now, we all come from—we have one (inaudible) which is Africa, and this history has always been written by the conquerors, the missionaries, but at this point, when I come in here and I see it's all (inaudible) talking about this, it gives

me some sort of reassurance that for the first time, we are about to write something great about ourselves and probably I hope that's going to be reflected.
(2-diasporic member)

You see, I honestly think the African American here in the United States, in the metropolitan area—the hype of the museum—we didn't have any input into it. The Caucasians, per se, did what they fear and think this is, what it is, they're not going. And I can say a lot of African Americans don't visit museums. Some would come, but the mindset would be: "They didn't ask us! They didn't come to us to ask us what we would like to see. They wanted a museum and they're putting in it what they think we want to see." (5-combin. member)

While I have not seen the full exhibit I hope that there would be a conversation about the role of the government. I know the government, in part, is funding the museum. From what I understand, the Jewish museums, they are funded privately so they can tell their own story because it's their money. So, in this case, if you are funded by the federal government, or if you've got partial funds from the federal government, I think there's a little politicking in how you present a certain story.
(6-not-AA, Millennial)

Seems too whitewashed / geared to white audience

And then for other audiences coming, like what are you teaching them or showing them? You're showing them that there's been black people who have done X, Y, and Z, but then talk about the different avenues they had to pursue to get there. It's not showing the ways we have black people making strides and how there's always an opposing force. I feel like this is again a very rosy, cute picture.
(2-diasporic member)

I've had many African Americans come up to me to ask me "are they going to tell our story? Are they going to let it be a white kinda thing? Are they going to please the white? Is it going to tell our story? Or whose story?" (7-not-AA)

This is a ploy for the Negros to blow off steam, and the white man is allowing that to happen. I think that's what's been happening here with this museum 'cause it doesn't capture. It just doesn't rate. We need to see the reality of what happened. Our women were raped and used for medical things of that nature. I'm not seeing any of that. I would also like the story for what happened about Malcolm X to be told with the FBI specifically tapping those phones and instructing ways to kill him. That stuff's not in there. It's a pretty picture of an assassination of a man who was peaceful. (2-not-AA member)

The Black Panther piece really struck me. The truth is the story of the Black Panther Movement wasn't chi-chi foo-foo like that. And we know how it went down. So I hope that there is some room to insert the other end, the other not-so-pretty part of the black experience in the United States. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

B.8. Encouraging repeat visits

OVERVIEW: The diasporic participants had some suggestions about how to keep them connected to the Museum, to want to visit more than once, including: cultural events and programs, changing exhibits, dynamic /unique content, and building partnerships with other community groups or museums related to their culture.

The question about coming back for additional visits was asked primarily to find out about diasporic audiences' intentions; all quotes are from people with some or all of their identity as being not African American.

Why will people come back, after the initial honeymoon?

Events, cultural festivals, programs

You know aside from family coming into town and dragging them to the museum, I myself want to be able to go back for, you know, programming, the different events, or hosting different events for different groups here in DC. You know, like, join us for insider type things, private events and programming. I think that would really help. (5-combin.)

I think that's where the programming stuff comes in. If, you know, there's events at the Haitian embassy, but if sometimes they hosted it at the museum, maybe a Haitian person who may not have had interest in going to the museum because they're just a black American museum, maybe they will be like "oh maybe I should come back here and actually visit this museum, not just for this event". And vice versa, if I go just for the museum part and there are different communities – I see it like a community center. You know like some of the libraries. That's what would keep feeding me. Not necessarily the exhibits – you know it's great, I'm going to go and see it once when it opens, maybe once a year or something, but I just want to see more. But switching out exhibits and inviting key note speakers from NASA, maybe – the top guy at NASA is black, I didn't know that. (5-combin.)

In terms of food and the culinary arts in particular, when they do culinary demonstrations they should be not just about Southern American cuisine, but the various locations, the West Indian, Dominican, the Sudanese cuisine. And then the cafeteria itself it should have food from all of the cultures. And it could become a destination, I mean, I love to go eat at the National Museum of American Art, they have a wonderful eating place there as they do in the Castle and some of the other museums. (5-combin.)

Events about culture (7-not-AA)

Celebrating events in different countries, I'm thinking like Carnival or something like that? Kind of like this is what's happening in [that] country at this time.
(7-not-AA)

I think about the Schomburg and why I respect them so much and why I trust them, it's because outside of the exhibits there's programming that comes against the mainstream conversation. I'd hope that outside of the exhibits there are programs, events, conversations, movies, whatever – that explore some of these issues in a deeper way. And I think that is where you're going to build trust. (6-not-AA)

And also the community programming. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

I really like what Linda was saying about making sure that there's community input, so like, in high school and college we had international night, right, and we had everyone from different countries show up to school after hours and there'd be cultural performances from all these different countries. I think the best thing to build trust would be something like a program made by visitors in the area, a poet from Ghana or a singer from the Caribbean, you can submit your idea proposal for one night where you have an international night for Africa, or for people of African descent who don't necessarily consider themselves African American. But who knows with different people, like say my mom or my dad, I think it would be great for them to be able to put in their own input even if it's just for something that's just one night, International African Night, something like that. Really make everyone feel like they're involved in that, that this is their story. (5-not-AA)

Interesting content, relevant to me

The suggestion is that it be a dynamic place and not stagnant. That there is an opportunity for continuous learning; an opportunity to perhaps link to those HBCUs; an opportunity for audio-guided tours for the visually and hearing impaired. (2-diasporic member)

Different exhibits, innovative, creative things. Not the same things. (5-combin.)

Different, unique stories that haven't been told. So like maybe temporary exhibits that - about certain parts of Africa that we don't hear about that much or Caribbean countries and the connection – that would keep me coming back. Like newness and the museum researchers do research to keep bringing fresh stuff.
(7-not-AA)

Something new

That's the only reason I go to museums because there's something fresh, there's something new. (7-not-AA)

To bring friends. It also depends on how frequently they will be turning over the exhibitions. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

Um, visitors, to have friends in town. New exhibits. If programming was part of what they want to do, like going to some of those programs. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

Building community partnerships

Would it be easy or hard for the museum to build trust with black audiences who do not self-identify as African Americans?

I think that they are aligned to a very respectable institution, right? They're part of the Smithsonian. And so it's not as if people are coming here looking to point fingers at the museum. And it's going to draw a lot of attention just because there hasn't been something for African Americans, solely. This was just built on telling the story and yes, we want to include more, we all want, are faithful that we will be included in the conversation because we, too, feel connected. But in terms of the trust thing. They would lose trust if they don't continue to build partnerships with folks in order expand on that reputation and create something different within the museum community. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

Just adding on to that building partnerships, not just with individuals but also with our museums back home. (6-not-AA)

Other reasons to connect with the museum

Well, certainly programming. And somebody said something about researching – after you see certain things you want to research them more. Well we need to give visitors, what is it, a handout? Or something that says “here are some of the places you can go.” Cause I’m hoping the the museum will be almost like a clearinghouse, with research and repositories around the world. So that again: the connections. It has to help us make connections. And of course there are African American – there are slave museums in England and I went on a black history tour of Amsterdam, so if the museum here can make connections there as well as throughout the Caribbean and Brazil, I think that would be cool. (5-combin.)

And just, I guess when traffic dies down. I want to see it the first week but I’ll come back in a couple months or later to really process. Because I’m pretty sure it’s going to be hard to process on opening day or that weekend. But to really, really take everything in. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

So the thing that they’re recording at the end of every visit. Are they incorporating

it? Will they incorporate it back into the museum somehow? I think that would be interesting so it's kind of like you're infusing yourself into the museum.

(6-not-AA, Millennial)

I was going to add to that and say, I would hope it could be available online. So even if you don't go to the museum you can see the conversations, the videos from anybody. White people or not. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

C. Reactions to Exhibition Concepts

This section includes participants' ratings of exhibition gallery concepts presented in the preview (both during the discussion and a few weeks later). It also includes positive and negative feelings and comments that didn't correspond to any of the main themes outlined in previous sections.

- Ratings of the three exhibition previews presented during the focus group were moderately high. Members gave lower ratings than non-members; presumably members are very invested in this project, have high expectations, and may be harder to please.
- There were no differences in ratings based on heritage.
- Aside from the moderately high ratings (because this story is important), there were some negative reactions to the Slavery & Freedom exhibition, because it didn't feel powerful enough and people were comparing this experience to other museums.
- Aside from the moderate ratings, participants expressed mostly positive opinions about 'A Changing America.' They like the connection to current events, the empowering messages, and the opportunity to share their 'reflections.'
- Along with moderately high ratings, people liked the 'Cultural Expressions' gallery because it captures aspects of African American culture, it conveys the global connections, and the message about cultural adoption is appealing. The diasporic groups seemed especially happy with this gallery, because it feels inclusive.

C.1. Ratings of the exhibits

OVERVIEW: Immediately after seeing the visual preview of an exhibit area, and before discussing it, participants wrote down a rating. People gave moderately high ratings to “Slavery & Freedom” and “Cultural Expressions,” and somewhat lower ratings to “A Changing America” (two weeks later [see next page], the ratings for the history exhibits were higher). Ratings did not differ between people of different heritages. However, Museum members gave significantly lower ratings (shown in graphs) to “A Changing America” and “Cultural Expressions,” compared to non-members. It’s likely that members came in with very high expectations, and were harder to satisfy.

My opinions about the three exhibits presented: (ratings on a 1 to 10 scale)

	High (9-10)	Medium (7-8)	Low (1-6)
Slavery and Freedom	45%	28%	27%
A Changing America: Beyond 1968	34%	42%	24%
Cultural Expressions	45%	26%	29%

Analysis by heritage:

% High ratings

	Af-Am <u>high</u>	Combin. <u>high</u>	Not-AA <u>high</u>
Slavery and Freedom	50%	39%	46%
A Changing America: Beyond 1968	23%	39%	39%
Cultural Expressions	39%	44%	52%



Ratings of exhibits (continued)

OVERVIEW: Participants also completed a follow-up online survey 2-3 weeks after the focus group meetings (52 of 82 responded). They had been given handouts at the meeting with some more information about the nine galleries. When asked to rate their interest in each of the galleries, the top three were: 'Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom,' 'A Changing America,' and 'Slavery & Freedom.' Most participants expressed 'very high' interest in these three areas.

Why did people have higher opinions of 'A Changing America' in the follow-up survey compared to their ratings during the preview? There are several possible reasons: maybe the people who were most disappointed by the preview didn't respond to the follow-up survey; or maybe the supplemental written exhibit description sounded more appealing than the slides that were shown in the preview; and the rating scales were slightly different.

The two exhibition areas with lowest interest were: Double Victory (military experience) and Sports. Again there were no differences in ratings between participants of different heritages. Members gave significantly lower ratings than non-members to two galleries: "Visual Art" (25% vs. 52% 'very high') and "Taking the Stage" (25% vs. 48% 'very high').

***How interested will you be in these exhibit galleries? [2 WEEKS AFTER DISCUSSION]
(3 of these were presented in the preview ♦, the others you may have read about in the exhibit descriptions)***

(n=52)	VERY HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom: Era of Segregation	69%	14%	13%	4%
A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond ♦	61%	28%	8%	4%
Slavery & Freedom ♦	58%	21%	15%	6%
Cultural Expressions ♦	49%	31%	14%	6%
Visual Art and the American Experience	42%	33%	21%	4%
Taking the Stage (theater & entertainment)	38%	33%	25%	4%
Musical Crossroads	31%	39%	24%	6%
Double Victory: The African American Military Experience	27%	31%	23%	19%
Sports: Leveling the Playing Field	21%	27%	33%	19%

C.2. Reactions to “Slavery & Freedom”

This preview (visuals and verbal description) was presented to the focus groups. Previews were intended to represent an exhibit experience, but obviously could not present everything in the whole exhibition. (Reactions follow these slides.)

Focus on: Slavery and Freedom
one of 3 history exhibits

As seen through an African American lens

So now I’m going to show a preview of 3 specific exhibits. First: “Slavery & Freedom”

Slavery and Freedom – begins
with the story of Africa



This exhibit will begin with Africa as the root of the story.



Africa, Europe and the Atlantic World

Visitors will walk on a series of ramps, on a historical journey.



Transatlantic slave trade

Maps, objects, documents and media will tell the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.



Theme: **Profit and the Human Cost**

The exhibit will talk about the profit in human trafficking and the horrible human cost – as in slave ship cruelty and death.



Founding of America

As the story moves to the U.S., it will present the paradox of liberty, equality & slavery.



You'll see reference to slave labor and cotton plantations in the South.



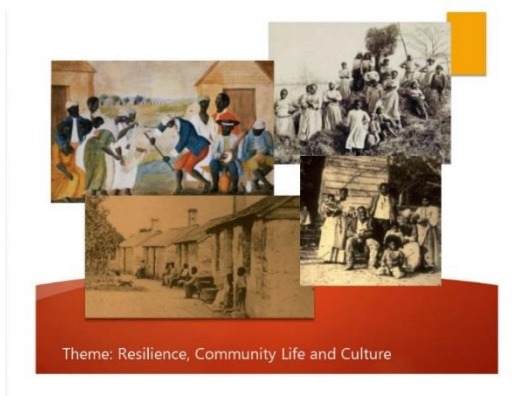
And documents from the U.S. domestic slave trade, where people were treated as property.



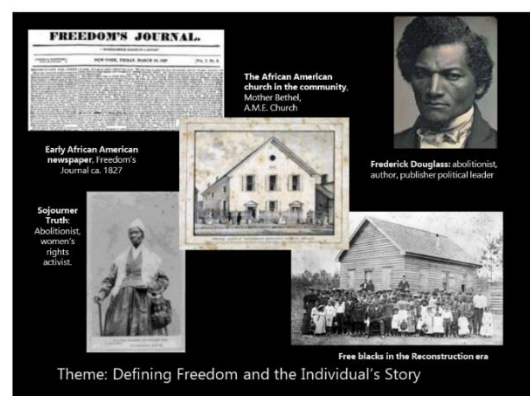
Priceless objects will support the exhibit story, including Harriet Tubman's shawl and a slave cabin from South Carolina.



Themes running through this exhibit story will include . . . resistance



...and resilience, as seen in examples of community life and culture.



And "Defining Freedom" will be explored with information about African American publications, iconic leaders and free blacks.



This history exhibit ends with the Civil War and Emancipation.



... and a section on the challenges and successes of genealogy.

Slavery and Freedom — themes

- ...a long history
- From the slave trade to U.S. slavery, and then Emancipation
- The story is told with images, narrative, and objects

- ◆ How will you feel?
- ◆ What does it say to visitors?

On your paper sheet, we would like to get your impression of this exhibit concept, on a scale of 1 to 10. And I also want to ask, "how do you think you'll feel going through this exhibit?"

Reactions to “Slavery & Freedom”

OVERVIEW: Participants expressed some positive and negative reactions to this preview that didn’t fit into the main themes in this report, but that may be useful to consider. Some people felt that this gallery would be a moving experience, and that it tells important stories. Other people said it didn’t feel powerful enough. They are comparing it to other museums (e.g., The Holocaust Museum) and are expecting something more emotional. Perhaps the slides and brief description didn’t convey the affective aspects of the experience so well – and a few people recognized this issue and wouldn’t give an opinion. Some people expressed other concerns and suggestions about topics that seemed to be missing or that they would like to see, such as life in Africa before slavery, examples of resistance to slavery, or the long-term impacts of slavery.

Emotional, moving

When you start at the point of slavery and you’re reading the stories about the slave ships, and how people were treated? It’s sort of like how you go to the Jewish museum and you see people crying at what Hitler did—you’re going to have people crying in the beginning part of slavery. (7-not-AA)

I agree with the emotional part. I saw something when I was in Haiti a couple of years ago in a museum and it very simply showed before and after, when they took the men from Taomay where they were going onto the ship and, you know, big strong men, and after the ship has docked in Haiti, and they’re deteriorated, they were just bones, just skin and bones and things like that, seeing it, that whole other emotional aspect of standing by yourself here imagining, feeling, reliving what your ancestors have gone through – that’s powerful. (5-combin.)

I grew up in D.C., but my roots are in the South. My grandfather picked cotton. I think probably some of my ancestors went through that. (3-AA Member)

So, the impact of the size of that cotton will be emotional even if we don’t get to touch it. (3-AA Member)

When I think about going through the museum and all the different aspects of the museum, I think this particular portion of it would make me feel the most uncomfortable. I know in the past, I’ve gone to other places, and—for instance, when Martin Luther King was assassinated or what not, I felt a discomfort when I thought about what people went through and how things were back in those days. After I thought about that feeling of discomfort, then I come to a feeling of betterment—and that although we may not be what we want to be, we’ve come a long way from that. It makes me feel a little bit stronger and gives me hope that we can continue to make the strides that we need to make. (3-AA Member)

For some of it I think it will hit a little close to home just because, ah, I'm also from the South and my great grandparents are children of slaves. You know, my grandmother picked cotton in the 40s, she was a sharecropper, and my great grandfather was a sharecropper. So it's not removed, you know, completely and she's still alive, so – it just hits close to home. (8-AA Millennial)

I will feel humbled. What I saw was a story of tragedy to triumph. I think we try so hard—not just here, but in general to say that we don't want to recognize slavery. That's kind of who we were. I think the beauty in it is how creative we were even in the struggle—and for those who came to be creative enough to make a way out of no way and to bring people along on the journey. I love the piece about the resilience because a lot of times—even in society now, we can't survive—and we complain with so much, but we get to see our ancestors and see all the things that they did. And how humble we are, you know, to be resilient when we go through things now. I felt kind of emotionally empowered and humbled by what I saw. (10-AA)

Important stories

It's an amazing story, especially to recall our identity, this is very important for us. (7-not-AA)

So I, I did notice that the black newspaper that was published in 1827 will be featured, or at least the people who published it will be featured, and I think that's important. I remember once I told some students about that and they were like "I thought black folks weren't allowed to read or write!" You know, so the more of the misinformation that can be corrected, the better. (5-combin.)

Disappointed, not powerful enough

It's just something about it that just wasn't as striking. When I compare it to when I went to the museum in Detroit where they had people go through the experience, you went through the continent and how people were living in Africa at that moment, and then it goes into total darkness and people had to tunnel through the exhibition in darkness. It really evoked a deep emotion. I thought this would kind of mirror a little bit of that. I would like to see something like that. I would probably like to feel like, "Wow! This is very powerful!" This doesn't come off as striking as much for me. (2-diasporic Member)

So, based on the images (inaudible) walking through it, it seems a little sterile. Like it doesn't seem—I've seen depictions of slavery, and it doesn't—you know, when you leave the Holocaust Museum, you see everybody's shoes. You know that

this was like horrific and it should never happen again. I don't get that from this, and I feel like I should. (2-combin. member)

Because of children, we want to sanitize the images of slavery. There's nothing nice about slavery. I was just moved when I saw the children's shackles. I know that we can't touch the artifacts, but more interactively, if there were something like that that somebody could touch and feel. Seeing something like that—especially if someone's not a history buff—they're going to walk through it. It's nice. They'll look at it, side eye it. But if you can get somebody to touch and feel—or even the sounds of the (inaudible) ship or something like—you know, I don't know how it is, but more of a 3D experience. I don't want it to be Disney, of course, but something that will allow people to have to stop and feel rather than just walk through it. (3-AA member)

So I would say that the disappointment and anger isn't just for the narrative, it's the fact that it looks pretty and pleasant. So the best museum I have ever been to in my life was the Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem. You cannot walk out of the museum without tears pouring down your face because you understand the horror of what it was that people lived through. And this is like textbook bland. This is not the history of slavery, slavery was a genocide. They kidnapped people, they destroyed kingdoms so they could build their economy on the backs of people that they thought were subhuman, and nothing about this shows that. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

Other negative comments / suggestions

When I looked at that, I thought, "School children," and school children come here, and I think that it needs to have more interactive exhibits. (2-diasporic member)

I'll probably be more interested in the Cultural Expressions piece because, I do know a lot about the slavery piece and the Changing America, so maybe the Cultural Expressions will bring something that I don't know quite as much about or an angle that isn't like a documentary so much. (4-not-AA)

Honestly I think I'm going to be a little disappointed. Because I lived in New York for 5 years and I went to the American Museum of Natural History and the Met and saw what they did with African American history and stories. And this is kind of like the same thing, it starts with slavery. It starts with our relationship to white people; it's always been a history of oppression. [researchers' comment: actually the preview didn't start with slavery, so this represents a projection or worry, rather than an accurate statement] I think the Met actually did a much better job than the American Museum of Natural History which started with – they went back to Africa, and, but they started off with colonialism. So it's like even when you go back to the mother continent it's just, I just don't like that narrative story, right, it's beginning and ending of oppression and fighting and sorrow and - I think that's an

important part of our history but I just don't like that to be the beginning, cause it's not. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

Sadness I guess. And part of it is that we move from "Slavery and Freedom" to "A Changing America" to "Cultural Expressions" and I think what's missing is the fact that the oppression that Africans in this space had felt is still happening today. It has this connotation as if we've moved beyond slavery and freedom and I would argue that it's sad because I don't think we have. (8-AA Millennial)

I think somewhat disappointment. I think I would like to see more of the resistance to slavery. I think there are a lot more stories of our ancestors who resisted so it doesn't come across as though we just sort of accepted that. I think—and I'm going back to the young people who are going to walk into this museum, and they're going to probably think we're better off today, of course, and that slavery is not a part of anything that I want to be a part of. I think it's a denial. So, I think disappointment would be—I need to see more of the resistance movement exhibited. (9-diasporic)

What we need folks to understand is that we're the only people in America who didn't choose to come here. We were brought here as hostages. We've been treated less than for as long as we've been here. I didn't get that from that exhibit. What I want from the exhibit is for folks who come to understand that the thought processes that have passed through our ancestors is shaped by slavery. That exhibit has to be able to show us why we're so different. Why other groups can come here and intermingle and be successful because they don't have that history. You can have a culture—my culture was stripped from me, and I have to make due with whatever I was allowed to have. It just has to be drawn out somehow at the end where we're not just getting into segregation. We have to show that the mindset—resilience is a great word for us. Resilience wasn't a good word for them. That was survival. That, I think, is what needs to come through in this exhibit. (10-AA)

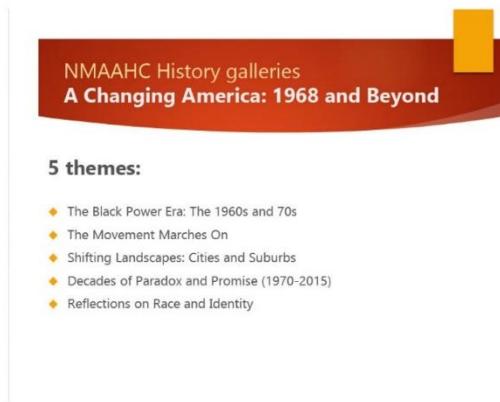
Recognition that slides can't convey the full experience

So for me the feeling part is challenging because I didn't see a lot of the content? You know, we saw the themes and saw what it would be about, but I didn't really see the content that would inform it. So in lieu of the reaction of someone who is going through and would see the content, I'm stuck with an overall feeling that I did not see that, it's hopefulness that is trying to hold back the potential frustration. Because a lot of those things that we've seen we've seen before. (8-AA Millennial)

The disadvantage where we are at here is that - like when you are in Ghana and at the slave castles, you feel it. I need to feel it. I can't feel it on slides. When you're there it's a completely different experience than reading it on a board. (8-AA)

C.3. Reactions to “A Changing America: 1968 and Beyond”

This is the second exhibit preview. The strategy was to introduce the topic, but not to show every part of each exhibition. Some of the Diaspora content may have been left out of the previews, but the point was to see what people were thinking, what they expected, and whether the general spirit of each exhibition resonated with them.



Here's the 2nd exhibit that we'll preview – it's the 3rd history exhibit. This path has 5 themes, featuring the late 1960's to the present.



Just to clarify, we just skipped the history exhibit about segregation and the Civil Rights Movement.



So this exhibit path begins with the Black Power era.



And throughout, real objects will help tell the stories.



You'll witness how the Black Power Movement was changing America – impacting the arts and many aspects of popular culture. Re sea



The movement, of course, was not just one thing – here a mural references the Poor People's Campaign.



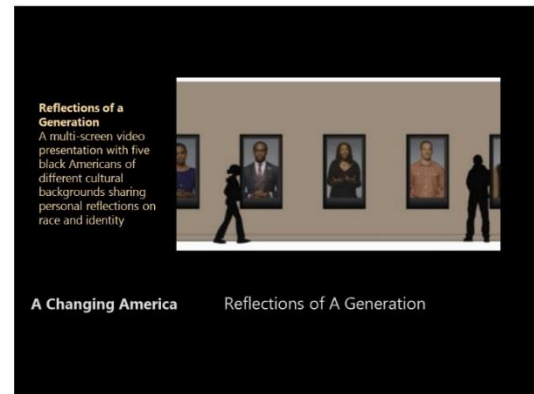
Black Power inspired other cultural movements, and took root in education & museums.



You'll get to review the decades of paradox and promise.



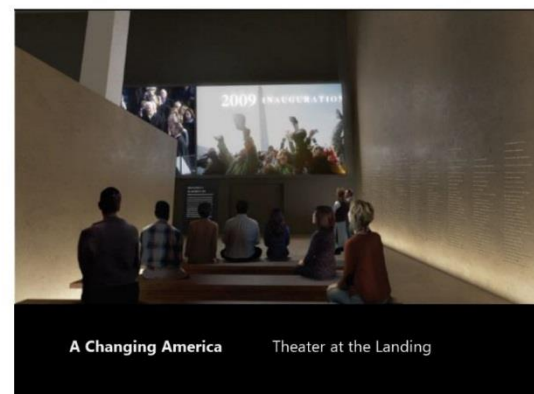
With real objects such as a placard "Justice 4 Trayvon Martin" and a door with rescue markings from Hurricane Katrina.



An innovative video wall will feature 5 people reflecting on race and identity.



And while asking questions such as "does race really matter?" there will be a Story Booth for visitors to record their own comments.



This sequence of history exhibits will end with a short video about a changing America.



[instructions to participants]

On your paper sheets, I'd like you to use the 10-point scale to express your impressions of this exhibit.

And who wants to start a conversation about what this contemporary history exhibit will say to visitors?

Reactions to “A Changing America”

OVERVIEW: Most participants expressed positive reactions to the preview of this gallery, because it’s empowering, it connects to current events, and it conveys the message that our struggles are not over. People liked the room where visitors will have an opportunity to record their reflections. A few people gave negative comments, including: it’s too digital, or doesn’t deal enough with current problems in the black community.

Positive: empowering

I think everything that’s happening right now I think lots of people will be drawn to this era and this exhibit. I think that connecting with changes that were made because people believe that they can change something, but the battle’s not over. I am a little uplifted I think, Barack Obama’s inauguration being the last thing that we see I think that may be a little tricky. Because all have a high from that date and then what has happened from 2009 and on, some people might feel like they need a little bit more. But I think that this Changing America feeling – I guess empowered to go on and fight more for some of the things that’s happened since 2009. (1-combin.)

We’re still living with the legacy of Jim Crow. And when we learn about it in school it feels like it was like so long ago, I mean the 60s and 70s, and we can’t really fathom the connection, um, in terms of, you know, we told you all the progress that has been made and we don’t have that anymore but, you know, it lives with us so deeply. And to see those images, to see a Black Power vest, and to see things like that, it really shows that this was not long ago at all, this is still very relevant modern history. (5-combin. millennial)

I saw this video of this Caucasian woman in an audience of Caucasian people, and she asked them, how many of them, if you stand up, would like to bring reparations to African American people. And nobody stood up, of course they’re not going to stand up. And let’s not be fooled, a great majority of people who are going to go into that museum are going to be people who don’t look like us. And it’s going to be powerful for them to realize that we weren’t just slaves. Even black people, I mean – I work with children in the District of Columbia, and there’s children in this District who ain’t never been down to the Mall much less go into a museum, you know, so they would be “wow, really? Like black people did more than just smoke crack?” I mean it’s real. (5-not -AA)

What I did think from what I saw was that you could be a part of a change as an American. Even though there’s still so much to do. Seeing artifacts from the Black Lives Matter and all these things that started within the last ten years—the Rescue

Door for Hurricane Katrina. All these current events, I mean, that you could be a part of the change even though we have a lot of work to do. (10-AA)

Positive: connecting with current events

My connection is to the Obamas, and I know a lot of Africans felt really connected to that story, because we could have a child who could say "oh I have roots here, and roots here" and rise to that. I think he represents that for a lot of us. So that was an empowering moment. (1-combin.)

I see the personal connection for the 2009 inauguration. I was there. (7-not-AA)

I guess I'm the hold out. I loved it. I thought it was smart. I thought it was well represented. I thought it was contemporary. I liked the screens. I just thought it was up-to-the-moment and current issues. (3-AA member)

I guess you're going to learn about the last 15-20 years. I guess living through that, like I remember the night when President Obama was elected. I remember what I was doing on this day and the excitement. And living through all the recent cases of police brutality because a lot of it is being played out now, like I'd love to see a piece about Black Lives Matter which is still relatively new. So just wanting to see how these things we live through will be represented. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

Important to convey that our struggles persist

There was the billboard with the guy's face that says "Does Race Really Matter?" and you can see from his face, he's just kind of like "c'mon do you really have to ask this question?" and to me that resonates because to hear a lot of young people say nowadays especially younger people, people that – you know, I go to a predominantly white school, you have to sort of like prove that race is an issue. I would hope that a visitor who would walk in with the idea that, like, "well, race is a think of the past, racism is a thing of the past" and things like that will walk out with a sense of like "ok I was wrong and this is why and this what I learned from it". (5-not-AA)

I think that a lot of people today still think that what happened in those marches and Black Power, etc., and the initiation of Affirmative Action, that everything's been taken care of. When in fact, there were more black mayors elected during that period and now there's real resistance to that. So I think that this could say to some visitors that, "well we did all that so we don't have to worry about it anymore". (4-not-AA, member)

So they are saying that it started in struggle and we're still in struggle. And I'm

glad that hangs, that era hangs, to feature Black Lives Matter and Trayvon Martin poster because it is still a struggle. (4-Not-AA)

That there is change, but there's not really change. Like a whole pretense of what change was supposed to look like and what was supposed to be given to us. But it was not really given to us. We had people at the beginning fighting for rights and marching. It's still happening at the end, and there's actually no change. (10-AA)

I really like this one. I like this theme. I heard you say paradox twice, so I'm hoping that this changing America will show the paradox and how we're supposed to be advancing as a nation, but we're actually not. What's being pushed is that there is a changing America when there's actually not. I feel like that point would be conveyed. I do hope that the truth is conveyed about the full story at a Black Panther Party. How did it decompose? I hope that's incorporated as well. (10-AA)

Yeah, it's just, not connecting the dots. I was really hoping this museum was going to help bridge that gap that we have in communication because a lot of people that aren't living black experience are really having trouble understanding what it is and I was hoping this would be some sort of intermediary to get there but it's just kind of repeating the same thing that they already feel about the black experience, like "Trayvon Martin" and "Oh, we have a black president!" and it's very, it's just a little too cliché. I think we should be talking about more of the things that aren't really talked about or aren't really well received, like the systemic oppression that we're still experiencing; those really dark topics that evoke a lot of strong feelings in people that just aren't really well received by those who haven't been affected. (6-Not-AA, Millennial)

So it is saying to the visitor that America is changing and African Americans are integrating into it and moving more towards being American. And I think that might be problematic because it doesn't explore along the other themes of the people on the ground which was still freedom, up until this point. (8-AA)

I like the "reflections"

I really like the component of having the visitors share their reflections. I'd just be curious as to what the museum would do with that. Is this some kind of innovative creative way to not just have all this data stored but to inform future exhibits going forward? I mean, obviously that's the intent of this focus group that hopefully they'll really take that to heart to inform some of the things. Just from hearing some of the population. I'm curious, how much will it inform, just like you said, post-inauguration - so much has changed - will they incorporate Black Lives Matter movement and all these other things that are really burgeoning. I just wonder how much an emphasis will that be? Because though it is uplifting to see this one, significantly better than the first, it's also it's like we don't have a true sense of what is reflected in our climate and right now our climate is divisive. And I

wonder if the museum will touch on that or just gloss over the way that American history tends to. (1-combin., Millennial)

I loved the thing where people can go in and relate their own histories. (3-AA member)

I connected with the room where people had opportunity to tell their story. That's the thing that touched me the most about this. That to give people—one person—several people as a group somehow a way to express in a constructive way the frustrations of being African American in this country. So, that's what I picked up on. (9-diasporic)

I think it would be nice to have the voices of the African-American people speaking. At the end when you said people could record their reactions to it, I'd like to see world history from historic people that are currently living, you know, what they have to say about this experience. I mean, these people aren't going to be here forever. We're going to lose their voices at some point. An oral history is a great way to record that. And then, you know, maybe have a project where you're actively going out and seeking these stories. (2-diasporic member)

Too digital, geared to younger audience

I see that it's kind of geared toward a millennial sense and beyond. I don't know if a person that's from generation X or baby boomers can relate to that.

There's something with the glare with the lighting and that video kind of thing—I think that people who are of a certain age, they might have a problem with that. That's just my perspective. You know, I personally don't want to keep seeing a bunch of video. I do want to see an actual object. (2-diasporic member)

I guess myself—I'll be honest. I might pass over portions of this. It's so current. We really have this information on CNN on a daily basis for us, like the Treyvon Martin portion of it. I couldn't really see myself spending a lot of time on portions of that. It's interesting, I guess, interactively. The aspect of visitors being able to have the reflections. That might be interesting for maybe younger people. (3-AA member)

Other negatives

I don't see a personal connection. I see lots of intellectual connections. I presume that, you know, visually, when I get there I will see personal connections but currently I don't. (5-combin., GenX)

There's still a little bit of disappointment because it seems so nice on the surface. I feel what is not there. But I'm seeing a nice white (inaudible). You know, I'm not being negative or critical, but I've felt some of the things that people are talking about. That is like going into a small restaurant, and everything is nice. When a person down in southeast still doesn't have anything to eat. (9-diasporic)

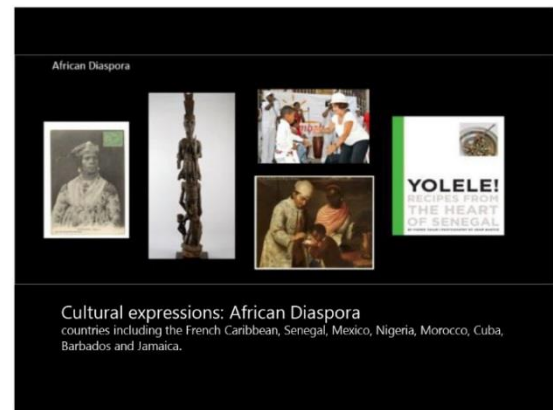
I think what's there is history. It actually happened. But I would like to see more contemporary issues. Personally, I would like to see a wall with all of the victims of police violence. I would like to see that because that's a real issue today. It almost seems like we have gone back to the Jim Crow era in a sense. We don't have the black and white signs, but instead of the hoods, we have police uniforms. I'm not painting a stroke that all policemen are bad, but there are enough where black—not only black men—black children and black women are being victimized by policemen. That is a real—that's an up to date part of what's going on. A contemporary issue. (9-diasporic)

C.4. Reactions to “Cultural Expressions”

These are the slides that participants saw, accompanied by what the facilitator said.



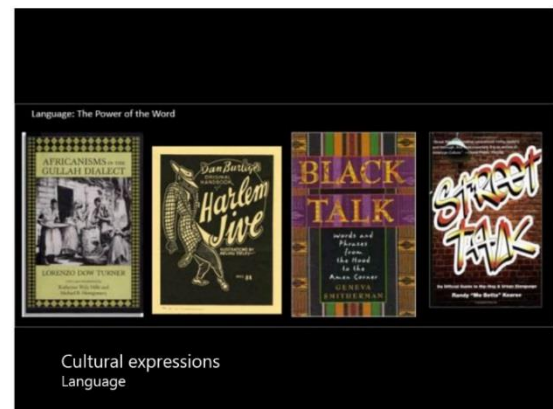
The 3rd exhibit that we’ll preview – Cultural Expressions – will explore artistry, style, foodways and other topics.



One aspect will feature the diaspora in terms of cultural style & creativity in many countries.



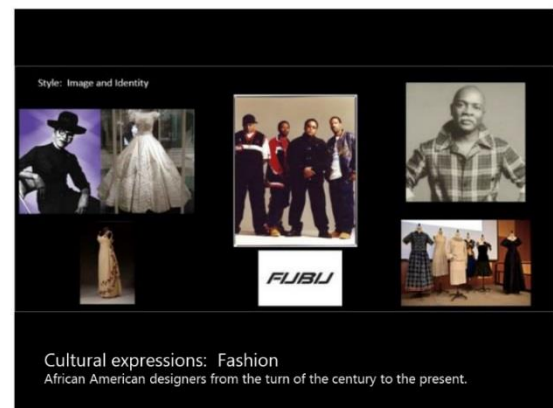
These are some of the images and objects about artistry.



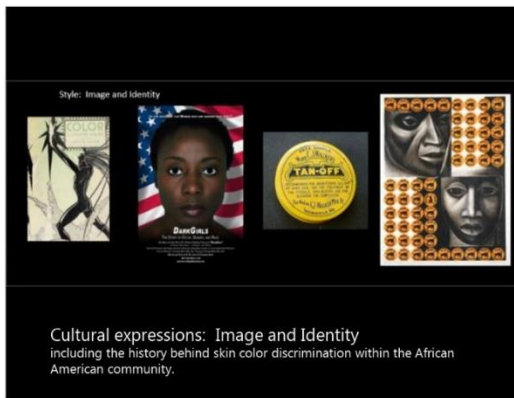
Another cultural expression is language.



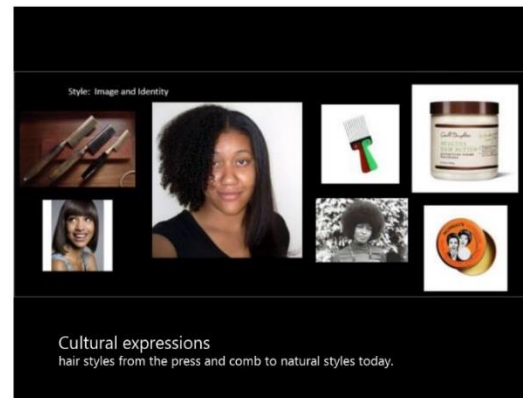
And the exhibit will use examples from preachers, DJ’s, writers, poets and others.



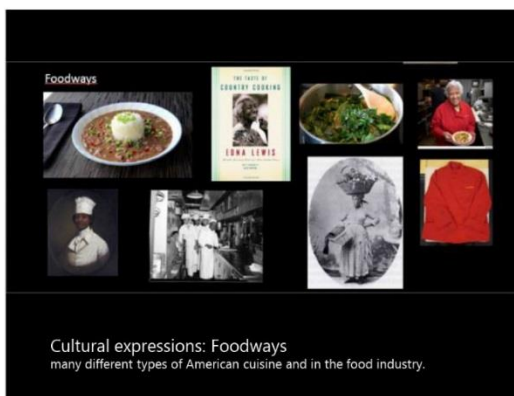
Fashion will be represented.



And issues of image and identity such as skin color.



and hair styles.



And foodways.



Movement and gestures.



And social dance.



Reactions to “Cultural Expressions”

OVERVIEW: Most participants expressed positive reactions to the preview of this area because it’s fun, it really captures aspects of African American culture, it conveys the global connections, it feels like less work for viewers to imagine the spirit of the gallery, and the message is appealing: African American culture has impacted society, and unique features have been adopted by other cultures. The diasporic groups seemed especially happy with this gallery, because it feels inclusive of a variety of non-US cultures. The content of this gallery is new and different, not something that visitors might have seen at another history museum, so there are no expectations and comparisons as with the Slavery & Freedom section. A few people reacted negatively to the gestures exhibit.

Positive: conveys our culture, fun

Oh I love it. Well the fashion is one, because we do have our own sense of style. The dance, because we have our reggae music and we dance, too. And of course the food. So those are my three things that really get me, myself. (1-not-AA)

I like the way they focused on oral tradition, with songs and poems. Because those things transcend (inaudible) a lot of different things in the United States. (1-not-AA)

The whole thing just sounds really fun to me. Especially since, I can’t really dance, but hearing about the different gestures and dance, and using food—I like to eat and cook—so that definitely sounds like (inaudible) just really important. (7-not-AA)

I’m a single dad. I have a daughter. It’s interesting finding—looking for hairstyles and places to get her hair done. That’s the first thing I thought about when I saw the portion about hair. (3-AA member)

I like this particular category because I think everyone should be able to connect with something here in a more tangible way. Teenagers for example may be turned off by history but might be able to connect somewhere here and learn and experience and take something away. And I think that there’s a lot of opportunity to really learn something new for people who do know a lot. I think it goes back to the details. That they can actually discover people and experiences that maybe they didn’t know before, so I am drawn to this one. (4-not-AA)

So one thing I did like is, and this is a very hard issue for black people in general to talk about, is the skin color and the hair issue. And I appreciate that and I think this museum – if there’s any place to have this type of conversation – I think is a healthy place to have it versus, you know, maybe on social media. If you are a visitor who is not a person of color or black, I think that this is a great way to at least touch the surface on just how complicated and how important this issue is to black people.

And so I commend them for kind of airing our own dirty laundry in a way. (6-not-AA, Millennial)

The gestures thing caught me and I thought it would lend itself to people being intrigued or maybe people understanding something that it contributes, something that I think is very different than food, very different than the other things that I have seen in other places. So that's what I enjoyed about it. And the other thing that I thought was interesting was language and how it was being used. (8-AA Millennial)

I think this is actually the one exhibit so far I've had some excitement about maybe because of the different opportunities, but I had a very negative reaction to when it came to the gestures. I'm very sensitive to white people walking out of there saying, "Yeah, girl let's do this!" You know, like we're part of the culture now, and to me that will be a very, very sad and negative thing that now becomes—our culture has already been appropriated in so many different ways, and to add gestures into it seems a little cliché and very condescending. (2-diasporic member)

I think it will give the visitors a great perspective of our culture in terms of how we express ourselves through food. We have poets, DJs, and all those different types of people that will be represented. I think that if it was someone that is not African American descent, they would be able to identify and have appreciation for our culture in terms of how we express ourselves through those mechanisms. I think most people know that African Americans are great cooks and that they dance well. I think it will carry over well. (3-AA member)

Global connections, inclusive

I think some of the concern I had concerning late-arriving blacks is addressed in this exhibit, it talks about the cultural expressions of other regions of the

world. (7-not-AA)

I just thought "oh wow, all this history that was based in Africa is so American now and it's such a part of everyone's way and gesture." Like the fist bump is universal. And certain dances are, you know, so many people like to watch them and learn. I thought that it was really cool to see. (7-not-AA)

The world will connect to this. All the people that come from across the world will connect with because they can make the connection back to their country. (4-not-AA)

Contributions, adoption, acceptance

Well, as I looked at it, it's nice. Really what it made me think of is that the talent has always been there. The skills have always been there. They are designers.

Jewelry makers. You know, the hair. The creativity. It's always been there. But now, it's accepted. It's accepted in the United States. It's other people just acknowledging the skills and giving people an opportunity to show what they can do. Then, other cultures wanting to participate from white's getting their hair braided, you know. I mean, it's not like it wasn't there before. I hadn't thought of that before, but that's what it said to me is that these things aren't new. But it said it's now accepted. (9-diasporic)

I think it showcases how extremely gifted, creative, and talented African Americans are. I think coming out of that slavery experience, it also showcases the fact that Africa is still within us even as we integrated in these various types of cultural activities. But I think one of the things that will be helpful to also showcase is not just the connection between the diaspora, but also showcasing the tremendous impact that African American culture has had globally everywhere. Japan. I mean, you name the continent. African Americans' footprints are everywhere. (9-diasporic)

It says to visitors that the importance of African American culture and not just American culture but the impact it had worldwide. I mean, because the culture and the history is so rich that it was able to transcend class, race, color. You get a sense of the African American culture, it's very unique on a world stage, and how much impact it had and how much influence on the genres of other cultures. (4-not-AA)

There was like this huge incredible enrichment of American culture and such – it was jazz, all this stuff, and it was coming out of African American culture, it was so huge! Everything you do that gets the word out about how big this is, and it could be ten times this size and it still wouldn't be big enough. You've got to have this, you've got to have this. (4-not-AA)

A few negatives

There's not a lot of color. It sounds like a weird nit-picky thing, but so much of black and African expression, culture, style, everything: We Are Color. Like, color, expression, vibrancy. And

looking through the previews, it looked strangely dull and it seemed almost removed, whereas I would almost want to see something like "yes, the cultural expression of blackness is vibrancy and brightness and color and excitement!" (6-not-AA, Millennial)

I just have a quick question. There was a section about movement and gesture. I didn't really understand that one. That can be any culture. Fist pumping and your hand up. I think that's not just an African American thing. I wasn't quite sure with just those few clips how it related to African Americans. (10-AA)

I feel like this whole section is missing a lot of things—maybe because we’re just getting a surface of things, but I’m missing the why. Why is this here? Why is this even a section—Cultural Expression. What will this tell you about African American culture? I’m just a little bit confused about this part. (10-AA)

It’s kind of like this thing that this is something all black people do when it’s not, like the gestures thing, you know. Like me, some people might go for that, me? I don’t know what that means. So it’s kind of like, the diaspora, the collectiveness, that word, it’s kind of like, “this is something that African Americans do” when it may not be, so be careful with it. (8-AA Millennial)

But I had a very negative reaction to when it came to the gestures. I’m very sensitive to white people walking out of there saying, “Yeah, girl let’s do this!” You know, like we’re part of the culture now, and to me that will be a very, very sad and negative thing that now becomes—our culture has already been appropriated in so many different ways, and to add gestures into it seems a little cliché and very condescending. (2-diasporic member)

I’m going to be totally non-PC. To me, that piece said: “Don’t worry white people, they’re happy.” That’s what it said to me. I like the language part but I don’t think I saw anything about Negro spirituals or anything, how we use culture to express our pain in this country. I feel like there may be some other parts of our history and our culture that white people aren’t going to be comfortable with and they don’t have to be. (8-AA Millennial)

D: Seeking Descriptors about Visitor Experience

One of the objectives for this diasporic audience research project was to lay some groundwork for understanding visitor experiences in the actual Museum. The idea of a Visitor Experience Framework is speculative considering that visitors have not seen the actual exhibits yet, but this was requested in the original RFP, so it's worth exploring to see whether a contribution can be made to audience studies that may be initiated after the Museum opens.

The key findings about visitor experience descriptors are:

- Using their own words, focus group participants tended toward broad positive feelings, ranging from inspiring-uplifting to emotional and grateful.
- Rating a pre-selected list of descriptors, pride and emotional were two of the top three selected. However, those seemingly-basic supportive words were less likely to be chosen by African Americans or members.
- In both the open-ended format and the list of terms, it's clear that some participants wanted to criticize the experience as being superficial, disappointing in its conventional history, and not sufficiently deep.
- Some words do not seem to be capturing the expected experience, suggesting the need to keep evolving this list in Phase 3 of the research, a study of general public households in the DMV area.

D.1. Participants' open-ended descriptors about the experience

OVERVIEW: After seeing the three exhibit previews, participants were asked to come up with words or phrases to characterize their expected experience of the Museum. This was an 'open-ended question' allowing people to offer any descriptors that occurred to them. From this open-ended question, the top two descriptors that people used were:

- inspiring/ uplifting/ affirming / exciting (categorized together because of their similar meanings), and
- informational/ educational (which tends to be a mildly complimentary general term with little or no personal meaning).

The third most common theme that arose was a negative:

- the concern that the content would be too mainstream or sanitized.

After this open-ended opportunity to frame their perceptions in any way they wanted, the participants were asked to turn over their sheets to the reverse side, where they were presented with a pre-defined list of suggested descriptors (see section D.2).

Three or four words or phrases to describe the experience of this Museum: (after seeing 3 short exhibit previews)

		<u>Categories derived from participants' open-ended answers</u>
<u>positives</u>		
	35%	inspiring, uplifting, affirming, exciting
	33%	informational, educational
	16%	moving, emotional
	13%	engaging, relevant, thought-provoking
	10%	positive about design: colorful, interactive
	9%	inclusive, comprehensive
	9%	proud
	6%	grateful, humbled
	6%	connections, belonging, family
	4%	important, overdue
	2%	authentic
<u>negatives</u>		
	26%	sanitized, mainstream, uninspiring, disappointing
	17%	superficial, basic, elementary
	13%	lacking a specific aspect of AA history or culture
<u>other</u>		
	12%	painful, angry, sad, solemn
	20%	other / unclear

Sample of answers: EXCITING/UPLIFTING

Excited
Uplifting
Transformative, motivational
Inspirational
Affirming
Celebratory
Empowering

Sample of answers: MOVING/EMOTIONAL

Powerful exhibits
Emotional
Moving
Powerful, emotional, authentic, joy
Rage, peace
Sadness, anger, excitement

Sample of answers: ENGAGING/RELEVANT

Intrigued
Colorful, sensory, engaging
Relevant, interesting
Enlightening
Entertaining, engaging
Food for thought, mind blowing experience, insightful
Modern and relevant (to me)
Stimulating, thought-provoking

Sample of answers: MAINSTREAM/SANITIZED/DISAPPOINTING

Sanitized, lacking context
Lukewarm, confused, disappointed, hope things improve
Sterile / doesn't evoke emotions, status quo / doesn't challenge preconceived notions, safe
/ tells the "neat" story...linear, missed opportunity to showcase diversity and
contributions of black people
The Museum does not reflect true history of African Americans, a repetition of main-
stream perceptions on African-Americans
Stereotypical, stagnant
Censored
May not go far enough, politically correct
Disappointing, not profound or moving, not provoking strong emotions
Hopeful yet skeptical if a true comprehensive story will be told
Safe, assimilationist narrative
*Shallow, misleading, short-sighted, stereotypical *as presented this evening*

Sample of answers: SUPERFICIAL/BASIC

No new knowledge

Surface, elementary, lacking

Redundant, superficial

Nothing new, nothing thought-provoking

Surface-level, a primer

Somewhat superficial, basic knowledge

Factual, expected, typical

Sample of answers: LACKING SPECIFIC ASPECT OF AA HISTORY

Lacking a focus on systemic impact of slavery, needed

Include more successes / inventions,

Missing religion; education section outreach; contributions to society

Disappointed about lack of resistance movement towards slavery by enslaved Africa

D.2. Reactions to descriptive phrases, provided in a list

OVERVIEW: In order to further explore the descriptors that people might use to communicate their experience of this Museum, participants were also asked to react to a list of seven words or phrases. The top three descriptors were: pride, standard/conventional history, and emotional. However, only 40%-50% said any of these words were likely to describe their experience 'a lot.' Members were less likely to choose 'a lot' likely for any of those top three words to describe their experience (two out of three of their lower ratings were statistically significant). This seems to reinforce the point made earlier about members having higher expectations and wanting more emotional impact.

Do these words seem likely to describe your experience of this Museum?

	<u>0-No</u>	<u>1-A little</u>	<u>2-Some</u>	<u>3-A lot</u>
Pride	2%	20%	26%	52%
Standard history /Conventional	3%	15%	38%	44%
Emotional	6%	23%	31%	40%
Being an American	12%	21%	38%	29%
Connects to / reflects my identity	5%	29%	40%	26%
Sufficiently deep	22%	23%	42%	13%
Awareness of global/international connections	18%	46%	22%	13%

Analysis by membership

	<u>% who said 'A lot'</u>	
	<u>Member</u>	<u>Non-mem</u>
Pride	43%	** 59%
Standard history /Conventional	37%	47%
Emotional	15%	** 51%
Being an American	21%	34%
Connects to / reflects my identity	29%	24%
Sufficiently deep	4%	17%
Awareness of global/international connections	4%	19%

Analysis by heritage:

	<i>% who said 'A lot'</i>		
	<u>Af-Am</u>	<u>combin.</u>	<u>not-AA</u>
Pride	39%	61%	58%
Standard history /Conventional	42%	44%	44%
Emotional	23%	48%	47%
Being an American	27%	35%	27%
Connects to / reflects my identity	27%	35%	18%
Sufficiently deep	12%	7%	17%
Awareness of global/international connections	8%	17%	15%

Note: Bolded figures show significant differences only if combin. and not-AA's are combined

Appendix: Other Results

(from participants' "green sheets" during the focus groups, and a post-session questionnaire)

This section includes some results from the individual questionnaires that participants completed during the discussion groups, and from the post-discussion follow-up survey. These findings didn't necessarily fit with the major themes that have been presented, but they may be of interest.

REFLECTIONS AT THE END OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

A question on participants' "green sheets" that accompanied the focus group discussions:

[Please offer] **A suggestion about what the Museum could do to make the experience more engaging for me:**

32%	Present specific aspect of AA history or culture
28%	Include diasporic/African history/context
22%	Interpretive media: interactives, film, music, lively
16%	Unknown people/accomplishments, not the stories we already know
15%	Show complexity, not linear story
12%	Include current issues/racism in the U.S.
12%	Make experience engaging/emotional
10%	Programs
9%	Use museum as community rallying point
4%	Include women's contributions, special challenges
12%	Other
1%	blank

List of written answers by category, all groups combined

Present specific aspect of AA history or culture

A section that opens the question of what an "African-American" is - probably in the post-1968 level

The entire theme needs to be the journey; hostages - marginalized - minimal opportunity

How can someone from a poor neighborhood in SE, DC identify; need more showcase of resistance movement towards slavery; more stories in story booth; more opportunities to address healing from the [illegible] from slavery

Black inventors; look at other museums and try to fill the gaps

Black inventors; events w/community organizations i.e. Anacostia Arts Center

Make connections to the marginalized groups within the AA story (rural, LGBT, women, etc.)

Genealogy exhibits, exhibit on Gullah/Ogeechee culture in S.C.

An exhibit about black midwives and the history of childbirth in black communities; story about experimentation on black people in history

Movement on including more demographics on census. A section on what the term African American means.

HBCUs & their contributions to America, more oral history

Promote cultural competence, contributions; linked to HBCUs; oral history; genealogy; church

I'd love to see exhibit on slave rebellion. What's there is excellent; much is missing such as science, engineering, medicine, technology, communication.

Special exhibits that explore specific topics, e.g. Black church, legal developments through history, inventions by African Americans, etc.

*I hope that there is an exhibition featuring Washington DC and its special place of African American history
Make sure the slaves that fought in the civil war is included, the colored infantry
Emphasize role of slavery in economic development of U.S.*

Include Diasporic context

*The museum should dig deep into Africa.
Needs a story of royalty. Capture Egypt, King Tut, Cleopatra
Also include events that include African culture throughout the world.
An emphasis on the immense diversity of cultures & customs in the African American diaspora is essential.
Bridge more connections with other African descendant communities that live in the United States and its territory.
Engage and document diaspora outside the U.S.
Incorporate global impact of African & African American culture, e.g., Picasso's work is based on African art; Alexander Pushkin had Cameroonian background; Alexander Dumas was from Haiti
Emphasize the connectedness of people around the world.
Even if they can't go in too deeply about the African diaspora I would love to hear more about the regional difference with African Americans
Celebrate AA history outside of slavery, we are kings & queens; connect back to Africa but don't lump all into Africa
Include a portion of exhibit to document black immigration in the 20th century
There has to be an involvement of the African continent and other places on the American continent
A history of Africans must include the African aspect, there must always be the tie-in to the continent of Africa, the living relationship
Ensure that the necessary steps are taken to connect everything from Africa to present-day
More discussion of African American connection to Africans around the world at different points in time*

Interpretive media

*As often as possible, make the exhibits more interactive. Hire actors, present skits, use technology & presentations, etc.
Interactivity. I want to be totally engaged in an exhibit, to feel like I'm there.
More actual artifacts on display
Live performers re-enacting history; interactive exhibits to make/try/leave with something
Make the exhibits interactive to the point of being able to touch or "operate" replicas of the various forms
More hands on exhibits, role playing opportunities
Interactive activities for kids and adults.
Make a connection to Africanisms i.e. rhythm, drums, libations, hair, etc.
Should be dynamic; audio tours; live exhibits; performances
Less to just look at on a wall and more to feel in a full experience*

POST-DISCUSSION FOLLOW-UP

OVERVIEW: The top three “best things” about imagining the experience of the new museum are: pride and happiness, the beautiful building /architecture, and the ability to see stories about our perseverance and contributions.

As you imagine visiting the new Museum, what’s the best thing you’re likely to say about it?

31%	happy and proud that it exists
25%	beautiful building and architecture
19%	good to see our perseverance & contributions
12%	seeing artifacts and memorabilia
10%	interactive, engaging
10%	specific feature: slavery exhibit, genealogy
10%	variety of exhibits, comprehensive scope
8%	inclusive, diaspora, global connections
8%	authenticity, accuracy
8%	to learn new things
2%	emotional, moving
2%	it represents me, the people look like me
23%	other / general (exhibits, design, history)

Happy & Proud

I'd like to say that I would be so proud to see African American history told as fully, accurately, and correctly as possible in this magnificent presentation.

The fact the museum exists on the mall

These are stories that needed to be told.

There's a space specifically dedicated to African American culture and contribution on the National Mall

It exists.

About time to have a museum on African Americans

I'll just be glad that it came into existence. As time moves, the exhibits will transition with some being better than others, but I'll always be proud simply that the museum is there telling a piece of the African-American story.

Having a good new museum

I want to leave feeling proud.

To finally lay eyes on this dream

It's a long time coming.....

My first and best impression will be that the museum actually exists! Regardless of any personal thoughts or feelings, it is a grand accomplishment; a magnificent monument.

It's in a physical form. Thank you.

That it exists at all is great.

Having the Black/African American experience captured in one place.

This is the culmination of a long-needed exposition of the African American experience for the entire public.

Perseverance & contributions

It highlights tremendous accomplishments by African American and our ability to overcome obstacles of enormous magnitude. It is truly an inspiring story.

Black inventors

Its ability to highlight the struggles and triumphs of Black America

African American history can be interpreted in a positive and empowering manner.

Inclusive, global connections

The museum will show connectedness among people of African descent in the Americas and in the world. (combin.)

Its ability to show the diversity of Black America (combin.)

The inclusion of the diaspora (post-civil rights era) in exhibits. (not-AA)

I want to see black people in all their varieties. (not-AA)

Learning new things

I'm reasonably well-versed in many aspects of the African-American story, so I'll be very excited the museum teaches me something new.

I want to be impressed by the details of history I didn't know.

Learning about individuals at all levels of contribution that I did not know about before.

POST-DISCUSSION

OVERVIEW: A few weeks after the discussion groups, people expressed some of the same worries that they had during the discussion: concerns about lack of depth, too whitewashed, focus on stereotypical contributions such as music and sports instead of science and inventions, and not enough connection with Africa.

Is there something you're concerned or worried about, regarding the Museum?

21%	lack of depth, too basic, nothing new
13%	depiction of slavery too whitewashed, not brutal enough
13%	focus on stereotypical stories & content
13%	not enough connection with Africa
10%	to go beyond facts, need to inspire and heal
8%	missing science professions/technology/inventions
8%	accuracy of information
6%	worry about public (non-black) perceptions
6%	safety and security
6%	how museum will serve community, programs, research
4%	missing current issues, continuing struggle
13%	other
21%	no worries

Lack of depth

I worry that this museum, like so many, will trade depth of content for easy audience-pleasing.

I feel like the museum won't give us things we've seen/heard before. I'm also concerned that it is very ""safe"" and does not challenge people to think about the current state of African Americans in Society

Information that's being provided can be found in a text book

I'm worried that the content seems shallow and isn't teaching anything new.

Concerned that the exhibits only cover a slightly expanded version of African-American history and culture than we already know.

Not enough new content that hasn't already been presented to the average American

I am concerned that the exhibits will be more of what I have already seen in other museums.

I have a quiet hope that the NMAAHC will be more than a standard Smithsonian museum.

I hope it will encourage people to not just read facts, but to also reflect deeply on meaning and impact. The treatment we African-Americans have received in the US and the impact of it needs to be better understood by all. I hope the content in this museum is presented in such a way that it forces people to think. Please go beyond presenting facts!!!

The missing context around a lot of the displays and little/no mention of resilience or HBCUs

Depiction of slavery too whitewashed

The way the slavery is portrayed - little focus on the horrors but makes it seem 'ok'

Receiving a watered down version of black history

I hope certain unpleasant aspects will not be toned down, whitewashed in order to appease certain members of the community

I hope it does not 'mute' the discomfort that should be felt when sharing the story of African-Americans in the U.S.

The exhibits of slavery and freedom as it relates to the African culture as was discussed during the panel and how that will actually display.

I'm worried that the 'good' portion of the story of African Americans will be displayed by the 'bad and the ugly' will be glossed over so that it isn't shocking to the masses

The ability to convey the raw brutality of slavery in way that is emotionally impactful for visitors with clear linkages to the legacy industries that were founded upon free labor in America.

Stereotypical stories

I am concerned that some of the exhibits, particularly the one on hand gestures will show this museum as being geared towards white audiences and in so doing demean African American culture.

Stick to stereotypical ideas: slavery, city rights and entertainment

Recognizing the difficulties of capturing attention quickly and integrating the wealth of the black experience, I am worried that the museum will focus on the splashy money makers (sports, artists) and not spend enough time recounting the smaller but very important contributions and milestones of many whose faces don't hit the headlines. For too long, the value of our community has been defined by media outside of the community. The museum offers an opportunity to help the community define itself. If the museum offers no more than what we got out of the school books and media, it will have minimized its own potential to reach new audiences and existing audiences in a new way, and to develop an accurate narrative.

Not enough connection with Africa

That the connection between the African continent and diaspora will not be properly represented.

Regarding the period of ""Slavery"". Since I am unclear from when this period begins as part of the exhibit, this can be extremely dangerous to African Americans who do not have an understanding of African history and culture. For example, if the period in question does not, at the least, include some aspects of the 14th century when Africa was in its last glorious days and possibly include Timbuktu and University of Sankore where Europeans came and studied at the feet of African scholars, then it leaves visitors thinking that nothing of significance came out of Africa. Since this museum is not focused on African history and its contributions to civilization, then the least the museum should offer is a glimpse into our contributions to the world before slavery because it is the truth. If African Americans walk away thinking that even though their ancestors were kidnapped, trafficked, shipped, raped, tortured and many killed along the way, that they are better off going through slavery and being here than in Africa, then this is EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. And I can safely say that there will be

protest by many. So I think it is extremely important how this period is presented. While the museum may not tell the story perfect 100% of the time, the key aspects that will impact generations must be thought out carefully. We should also show how African Americans and Africans in the Diaspora is finding ways to address the pain and shame of enslavement and are healing and restoring themselves through remembrance and commemoration activities. (not-AA) B6

I hope that there will be discussions between all segments of Afro-Americans.

It is important that the museums include the stories of people of African heritage who immigrated directly, or are descendants of immigrants, whose stories are intertwined in the African- American story, but a little bit different. (Not-AA) B6

I am concerned that this museum will disconnect African Americans from Africa and African history in the visitors mind

The exhibits don't have much link of the African Continent. Some authentic exhibits must be brought from Africa to patch that gap left.

It doesn't document our people pre-slave trade. I think it's important to document life in Africa.

That it really does capture the African diasporic experience as well as the African American experience

Beyond facts, will it inspire /empower / heal?

I fear missing the opportunity to inform and shape imagination, not just confirm what people already think

I am concerned that the exhibits might not evoke thought and will be safe in its presentation.

I'm concerned that in telling our story, we skim the surface and not get to some of ""raw"" issues and real conversations. For example, when the museum talks about the civil rights movement, I'd like to see an older person having a conversation with a brother from the ""hood"" comparing notes on civil rights and black lives matter, and the issue of racism in America and what advise the elder can offer to the next generation to address the issue. I believe there should always be an opportunity to provide practical ways on how we address our challenges. This type of conversation can be in the form of a embedded video and in addition to the video booths the museum plans to include for public statements. Many countries learn from our experience. They study the civil rights and black lives movement and try to replicate it. We inspire many around the world.

I am concerned that the previews I saw of the new museum didn't capture me emotionally like I had hoped.

Missing science contributions

Too much emphasis on the social sciences, history, poetry, literature, art, and music and not enough on science, math, technology, and finance.

The apparent omission of science, technology, communication, engineering, and other technical accomplishments.

I'm worried that stories of black excellence aren't being told. Where is Black Wall Street? Black inventors/innovations?

Worry about accuracy

I'm concerned about how thorough and honest the museum will be or not.

Ensuring all information is accurate

Not a true representation of black history

POST-DISCUSSION

OVERVIEW: Participants were mostly positive about the focus group experience: happy for the opportunity, positive about the process, and enjoyed hearing the perspectives of others in their groups. Some people made suggestions about the exhibits, and a few were disappointed that the preview didn't show more, e.g., they may have been expecting to see actual exhibits.

Is there anything you want to say about the preview session itself?

29%	happy for the opportunity to participate, positive experience
17%	positive about facilitator or process
12%	negative about exhibits, suggestions for improvement
10%	enjoyed hearing perspectives of others in group
10%	wondering how our feedback will be used
8%	disappointed: expected / wanted to see more about the exhibits
4%	negative about preview / process
10%	other
21%	no, blank