

**Three Studies of**  
***September 11: Bearing Witness to History***

**An Exhibition at**  
**The National Museum of American History**

**Office of Policy and Analysis**  
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## INTRODUCTION

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, are widely regarded as a major catastrophe and turning point in our nation's history. For many, reality, as they knew it, changed forever. Museum professionals throughout the country grappled with ways in which to respond, especially those charged with the documentation and presentation of history. One year after the attacks, the National Museum of American History (NMAH), a museum that generally does not produce exhibitions dealing with current events, opened up a commemorative exhibition, *September 11: Bearing Witness to History*. Preceding the exhibition the museum collected objects and presented public programs about the event. The September 11 exhibition and related activities tested the museum's ability to deal with unresolved issues, to work with hope and fear, to go back to the moment and to move forward. In the public presentations the museum strove to further connect visitors to the loss of and to an appreciation of life.

Immediately after the exhibition opened, Secretary Lawrence Small asked the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to review the making of the exhibition and to solicit visitors' reactions to it. To explore the challenges and opportunities associated with addressing the museum's response to September 11, Zahava D. Doering prepared a case study based on personal interviews with almost 40 staff and a review of the documentation they provided. The case study emphasizes decision-making, coordination, responsibility, value and factual premises, and leadership both in the realm of collecting and exhibition making. In sum, it illustrates a series of developmental challenges as curators and exhibition makers moved through collecting, content development and implementation. While the efficacy and appropriateness of NMAH's collecting strategy cannot be assessed in the short term, the effectiveness of the exhibition is more amenable to immediate study. To better understand audience reactions to the exhibition

Andrew Pekarik and Zahava D. Doering conducted 27 in depth interviews with 38 visitors and Pekarik analyzed the resulting material. The interviewees highlighted personal associations and meanings. Two factors stand out: emotion and catharsis. In cooperation with NMAH staff, David Karns managed a quantitative assessment of 628 visitors' and non-visitors' reactions to the exhibition. Some findings indicate that visitors who viewed the exhibitions benefited from seeing actual objects and by reading messages left by previous visitors and expressing their own feelings in written form.

Collectively, the findings from the three separate approaches provide a useful perspective on why the collecting effort and exhibition posed major intellectual and practical challenges and how the exhibition affected visitors. At times, the three research approaches rest contentedly side by side; at still other times, they snap for their fair share of attention and do not agree. Yet, their basic objectives, to learn more about collecting and exhibition making and to build upon experience, are in full agreement. The messages are clear: The September 11 collecting activity can inform NMAH's review of the role and purpose of collections and suggest new ways of adding to them or decreasing them; and it can result in an assessment of the organizational structure in which collecting and exhibition making take place. Similarly, *September 11: Bearing Witness to History* suggests that experimentation with new types of exhibitions can benefit the public as well as museum staff simultaneously. It can encourage new ways of thinking about exhibitions and underscore the importance of including the public's voice in exhibition making.

I wish to acknowledge individuals who have made this research possible. In particular, the staff at the National Museum of American History, for both practical assistance and an openness in dealing with my staff. I also owe appreciation to OP&A staff members who continue to explore museum practices.

Carole M. P. Neves, Director  
Office of Policy and Analysis

## **Response to History: September 11 and the National Museum of American History**

*Everyone who worked on this felt it was their contribution.  
People were driven to work on this.*

### **Introduction**

Beginning in September 2001, and continuing into the present, staff at the National Museum of American History (NMAH) have engaged in a set of activities related to the September 11 terrorist attacks. As the then-acting director, Marc Pachter, stated one year later with respect to the collection activity, "The tragic events of last September challenged the NMAH and its staff to fulfill its responsibility to the American people in unprecedented ways to collect history literally as it happens." The museum's response went beyond collecting to include an exhibition, a Web site, and special public programming. All four of these activities are the subject of this case study:

- Staff at NMAH initiated a collecting effort within days of the event. The 150 objects and countless photographs collected to date have come from the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, Shanksville, PA and elsewhere in the United States.<sup>1</sup>
- One year after the attacks, the museum opened a commemorative exhibition, *September 11: Bearing Witness to History (Bearing Witness)*. Originally scheduled to close on January 12, 2003, it is now scheduled to remain open until July 6, 2003.
- In conjunction with the collecting effort and the exhibition,

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<sup>1</sup> Objects related to the aftermath of the attacks have come from other parts of the country.

NMAH launched a Web site that provides access to all the objects in the museum's September 11 collection, as well as stories associated with them as told by curatorial staff and donors. The Web site is updated as new material enters the collection.

[<http://americanhistory.si.edu/september11>]

- Preceding both the exhibition and the Web site, a series of public programs was held. The Crossroads program series, conducted monthly from November 2001 through May 2002, provided a public forum for the discussion of issues related to September 11 within a historical framework. Additional public programs, including films and workshops, were designed to complement *Bearing Witness*.

Professional assessment, both within and outside of the Smithsonian, indicates that these activities achieved NMAH's goals of service to the nation in the form of informing, collecting, and remembering. For example, the Society for History in the Federal Government awarded *Bearing Witness* its John Wesley Powell Prize for 2002. The Powell Prize, one of the few awarded for exhibitions, is given biennially for exemplary practice in historical display by Federal organizations. Data from a study of visitors to *Bearing Witness* shows that the level of visitor satisfaction with this exhibition is higher than for any NMAH exhibition previously measured. The Web site has generated more activity in both number of visits and time spent at the site than any previous NMAH Web offerings.

Each of these September 11 activities required NMAH staff to undertake new responsibilities, to rearrange priorities, and to identify new resources. As the museum moves forward under new leadership,<sup>2</sup> senior Smithsonian management has raised several retrospective questions:

- In executing these activities, did the museum rely on existing organizational arrangements and procedures, or did it use new processes?

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<sup>2</sup> Brent D. Glass became Director of the NMAH in December 2002. Glass succeeded Marc Pachter, Director of the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, who served as Acting Director at NMAH from November 2001. Spencer Crew, who served as Director for nine years, left the museum in November 2001.

- If new processes were used, were they specific to the circumstances and subject of the September 11 activities or can they be applied to future activities?
- What can be learned from the NMAH experience with the September 11 activities?

This case study was undertaken by the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to address these and related questions. It is based primarily on confidential, personal interviews with almost 40 staff, primarily inside the museum, and on the documentation they provided. Interviews were conducted between November 27, 2002 and February 12, 2003. In almost every case, two OP&A staff attended the interviews and reviewed the resultant notes. Basic facts and dates were verified with interviewees.

The four major NMAH responses to September 11—collections, exhibition, public programs, and the Web site—are treated separately and sequentially. In reality, the boundaries between them were quite fluid. A final section contains summary observations and conclusions. A timeline (Appendix A) showing key dates for each of the activities, and details about the public programs (Appendix B), are also provided.

## The September 11 Collecting Effort

*I think our proactive response was different. Usually we collect by specialist area, and in fact we don't have a "National history" collection. This time the Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs brought us together as a team.*

*Other organizations come and go, but the Smithsonian doesn't. The Smithsonian is charged with preserving and shaping the national memory. We use our collections to challenge, educate, and stimulate. People come here to see things.*

In 1996, the Smithsonian Institution (SI) Council met to discuss the care, use, growth, and national outreach of the Smithsonian collections.<sup>3</sup> In its summary letter to then Secretary Heyman, the Council wrote

... SI Collections help citizens of the United States define their nation, its history, culture, and natural resources. ... In the case of cultural artifacts, those that should receive high priority for future collecting include objects that: (a) are in danger of being irreparably lost; (b) represent and record important historical events; (c) have multiple meanings for different segments of U.S. society; (d) are judged to have unusually high quality; (e) fill important gaps in existing collections; and (f) illustrate important expressions of human creativity.

The Council also urged the museums to be more proactive in their collecting and to develop a broad strategy to guide collecting. The September 11 collecting activity underscores the points made by the Council.

**Initial Activities.** As staff came to NMAH on September 12, the day after the attacks, several "started to act like historians, wondering what a national museum

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<sup>3</sup> The SI Council is a group of distinguished museum and academic administrators, scholars and researchers who function as an independent review committee for the Secretary. The Council meets annually and focuses on a topic selected at the end of the previous meeting.

should be doing." And, "... so I started making a list [of what to collect]. I shared it with others who were also making lists." Some, however, felt that collecting was inappropriate because there were no guidelines about what to collect. They felt that the public does a good job of preserving material culture and that the museum should wait. With historical hindsight, staff could then decide what is critical. Several curators felt strongly that "We needed to act quickly and a lot of it was ephemeral." By the end of the day, it was clear that this was "a difficult and tricky business and we were uncertain."

On Thursday, September 13, the museum's Collections Committee reprogrammed a "Conversations about Collecting" meeting (a regular monthly event) into a general forum for collective discussion and debate. The museum staff divided into three camps. The first wanted to be proactive and to send a team to the sites immediately. The second wanted to wait and collect thoughtfully and from a distance. The third felt that NMAH shouldn't support an aggressive response to collecting unless it included considerable contextual materials, e.g., Muslim life. One person said, for example, that if it "were up to me I'd be on my way to New York" to start collecting. Others dismissed that as crude and insensitive; they would "get photos and diaries or wait until history tells us what is important." In the end, the *status quo* prevailed. "We decided we would do what we have always done, i.e., stay in our specialist areas along with our regular work. ... Everyone was to use their own discretion."

As time went on, it became clear that very little was being done and that it was haphazard. Perhaps, as one interviewee suggested, "The threshold to become involved was so high that no one was doing it." Nevertheless, in late September, one curator created an e-mail list to share information on September 11 collecting.

The Smithsonian, clearly, was not alone in groping for an appropriate response to September 11. Within days of the attack, the NMAH Collections Committee contacted the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Historical Society, and the New York Fire Museum to find out what they were doing. One

forum for discussing alternatives came in early October when The Museum of the City of New York and NMAH hosted a meeting in New York City. Approximately 70 people, representing 33 museums and organizations, attended. A consortium centered on collecting was created as an outcome of that meeting. Several NMAH interviewees felt that this collective initiative was not very effective. Group activity "isn't motivating in collecting or in creating exhibitions. Somebody has to be responsible. It's about being able to fail." Nevertheless, throughout the effort, the existence of the consortium facilitated communication and exchange of information. In the course of the collecting, the Smithsonian consulted and sought guidance from the consortium, but "not approval."

Individual collecting initiatives did take place at NMAH within some specialties. The curator who "was looking at how cell phones and PDAs were used" provided an example of individual collecting. "I wanted to collect some. Most phones and cell phones failed on September 11. I collected Mayor Giuliani's and four others' with interesting stories. ... For me, mobile communication was the new story." In mid-October, staff began work to save a flag recovered from the World Trade Center (WTC) from being "retired." This flag was eventually returned to the FBI and subsequently transferred to NMAH.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, by the end of October, staff in the Photography History Collection was planning to collect.<sup>5</sup>

There are also examples where collecting did not take place, as a result of the NMAH approach. For example, technically, military history staff would collect materials from a military response. The National Guard was the only military presence in New York, but the National Guard doesn't fall into military collecting. Thus, material related to the National Guard was not collected.

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<sup>4</sup> Initially intended for the *For Which It Stands* exhibition, this flag was used in the *Bearing Witness* exhibition when loans of Port Authority and FDNY flags could not be secured.

<sup>5</sup> It has 25 donations to date, and photographs from the exhibition *New York: September 11* by Magnum Photographers have been promised to NMAH.

**Changed Emphasis.** Around Thanksgiving, senior curatorial staff members were concerned at the seemingly slow pace of collecting and shifted gears from the routine. "People were doing things in niches of the story," rather than concentrating on the overall story. Senior management recognized that "[September 11] was an extraordinary act requiring an extraordinary response." Since "... [NMAH staff] are structured to collect within narrow areas, there was concern that "we'd miss the big picture. No one here does 'national history' per se."

In response, the Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs assembled a small interdepartmental team and tasked it to build a "foundation collection," one that would be a "lasting material record," rather than a representative or comprehensive collection. (As one person put it, "The 22 collecting units were overlaid with this 'Swat' team.")<sup>6</sup> The team made two major decisions: first, it decided on a geographic split, and, second, it decided to limit collecting to the event itself, the rescue, and the recovery. Initially, it focused almost exclusively on the event it, because it was the most ephemeral. "But we were often a day or a month late." One member of the team felt that "It was a missed opportunity. I was not consulted until December 20."

From the perspective of the collecting team, the late start made the work difficult. According to the collectors, they needed to go for the things that would be lost first, that would be buried or otherwise unrecoverable. So, attack and collapse "loss" was the first priority—they collected steel such as the stairway piece, perishable items, and signage they saw in photos. Then, efforts were made to find response items such as uniforms and other artifacts of firefighters, police, medical personnel, and food service workers. Finally, they collected public response items such as banners made by school children in Kansas and Alaska, to express support for the World Trade Center rescue workers; these were displayed at St. Paul's Chapel. The work required special skills, "part detec-

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<sup>6</sup> This common law enforcement acronym for "special weapons and tactics" is used as shorthand for a rapid response team.

tive and part diplomat," especially with organizations (such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)) that are "not accustomed to sharing."

One curator went to New York over the December holidays with his family and included six stops. His local (Washington area) police and fire departments put him in contact with New York law enforcement and firefighting units, including the Police Commissioner and the Canine Unit. Firefighters took him to the Fresh Kills Landfill where he got the fire truck door (now in the exhibition). The Canine Unit donated a dirty slack harness. The bulk of the collecting, however, occurred from January to May 2002, in part based on contacts established in December. Throughout this period, collectors were mindful of the fact that "Disaster collecting is different. We don't usually do that. We collect more as evidence, the way the FBI does." Another difference was the level of emotion involved in the project. In particular, it was hard for the collectors to approach families at a time of loss.

Although each member of the collecting team concentrated on a different geographical area, they continuously discussed items and sometimes traveled together. "Nobody makes good selections by themselves. It is good for two or three to go and argue about it. For example, [name] selected a big cantilever piece at the yard [Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island] and put our name on it. I argued strongly against it. ... I disliked it because it's 30 feet long and weighs 40 tons. You could display it only in the ceremonial court or outside." As a result of discussion, an alternative item, now in the exhibition, was selected.

There were political aspects of the collecting negotiations, as well. Public Law #107-117, authorizing appropriations for the Department of Defense for Fiscal Year 2002 and approved by the President on January 10, 2002, included a provision stating that the "Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution shall collect and preserve in the National Museum of American History artifacts relating to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon." It designated the artifacts to include pieces of the structures, still and video images, personal narratives and other recordings, testimonials, and artifacts deemed

significant. Five million dollars were authorized to be appropriated to SI for that purpose. SI and SI staff did not initiate or promote the bill. Senator Christopher (Kit) Bond (R-MO), whose staff approached SI and communicated his intent and the purpose of the legislation to the SI Government Affairs Office, introduced the legislation. The Senate adopted the amendment on December 7, 2001. (Public Law #108-7, approved February 20, 2003, making further continuing appropriations for FY 2003, included a \$750,000 earmark "for the National Museum of American History's September 11 initiative." (The museum has decided to use the funds to underwrite a traveling exhibition.)

The collecting curators had mixed feelings when they heard about the activity on the Hill, unsure of the reaction of museum colleagues and potential donors. "I had thought it [the Bond bill] would make us really visible and upset the people in New York. But it made it easy for government agencies to give us things. It was key."

Another aspect of collecting was dealing with the dozens of offers made to the museum. Typically they were declined, as they tended to be emotional and "memorial-esque," of marginal value but well-meant. The Chair of the Collections Committee responded to those offers that were declined, and individual curators followed up with those offers that were pursued.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Below is the language of the standard response, but most responses were tailored to fit specific inquiries. The basic reply incorporated the following sentiments:

Thank you for sending the information about the [name of object or memorial project]. It sounds like a determined and sensitive undertaking. As you might expect, we have been offered many objects related both to the tragic attacks of September 11 and to numerous responses from around the world. These objects express a wide range of emotions and reactions to this extraordinary series of historic events, and your [object/project] contributes to this international response.

[If commemorative artwork is offered]

The Smithsonian Institution cannot possibly hope to accommodate all the works of art created to commemorate these events, and at this time the National Museum of American History is not including commemorative art works in the September 11 collections. (continued)

Several individuals discussed the issue of "field collecting" collecting and noted that there are few examples where NMAH did any instantaneous field collecting. Curators were sent to the Philippines and Cuba to collect during the Spanish American War in 1895. There was no SI collecting in Vietnam or Korea.<sup>8</sup> However, the military service museums did some collecting.

**The Present.** Since the museum does not want to create a separate September 11 collection, the materials were dispersed across the established disciplinary collections. According to one respondent, "dispersing them too much makes them hard to use. A big chunk is in the Division of Cultural History. The rest is in History of Technology—some is in military history; the building pieces are in mechanical and civil engineering."

Now the emphasis has shifted to collecting other aspects of the September 11 attacks. For example, the curators "want the evidence related to the hijackers." They do not see the work ending in the near future but do not have a definite plan.

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We are working with a consortium of New York area museums to document and preserve a selection of objects and responses. We will discuss your offer with others in the working group. If there is any interest, you will hear from one of the member organizations. It is Smithsonian policy not to accept unsolicited donations, so please do not send any items at this time. Thank you for your interest in the National Collections.

We are also working with the media department at George Mason University, which has established an internet archive related to September 11, <http://www.911digitalarchive.org>. You might wish to contribute information to that project as well.

<sup>8</sup> It was mentioned that NMNH's anthropologists do contemporaneous collecting all the time; it is certainly not characteristic of NMAH. One exception is that staff associated with the Political History collection acquire contemporary election memorabilia by attending key events during presidential election seasons. They go to the key presidential primaries (New Hampshire, Iowa) when most of the candidates are still in the race and try to get something from each of them. Then they go to the two large conventions and get a sampling of how the campaigns are presenting themselves to the public.

## Internal Perspectives on Collecting

**Proprietary Collections.** The collecting activity raised questions among interviewees about the extent to which the Smithsonian should collect rather than leaving collecting to other organizations. Staff expressed strong feelings about these issues. "I'm against *Common Agenda*. I think we should collect the important artifacts that belong in the national museum and I know this creates problems locally. If you don't control the objects you don't control your destiny. Art museums work together only because the prices are too high and there is no other way."<sup>9</sup> None of the interviewees suggested that the Smithsonian should collaborate with other organizations to create a single collection.

**Approaches to Collecting.** The September 11 effort also surfaced questions about the ways in which the museum collected. Although the differences of opinion raised initially about the relative values of proactive and field collecting compared to less active collecting were not resolved by this effort, participants expressed satisfaction with what they had accomplished.

There was general agreement among interviewees that the cross-unit nature of the proactive collecting effort was a positive feature well-suited to this situation. One interviewee expressed an opinion regarding the broader implications of this method: "When individuals collect within their 'silos,' then there is a concern as to whether the collection adds up to the whole story, leaving open the possibility of omissions. Yet, museums can't collect just because of an event or for an exhibition. It's necessary to think in broader terms to determine the value of the collection ten, twenty, or fifty years onward."

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<sup>9</sup> Lon W. Taylor, ed., *A Common Agenda for History Museums: Conference Proceedings* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History Museums; Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 1987). The reference here is to recommendations related to collection sharing or distributed collections.

One curator summed up the opinion of all those involved in the September 11 collecting effort: "In collecting, I am not an advocate of passive collecting. You should have collecting plans and goals. If you don't have goals you can't evaluate what you're doing. Of course, you have to remain open to opportunities that turn up. Collecting is better when people have specialized topical knowledge and if you make connections across our artificial boundaries. Also, as we move to issues like immigration, we should have a [cross unit] team."

**Collection Planning.** In thinking about American History's role in future collecting, interviewees suggested the importance of determining "what is the big story that we are trying to tell" and proceeding accordingly. As one interviewee pointed out, "It will take commitment and reprioritization of staffing and time in conjunction with a need to reorganize." Staff questioned whether senior management would be willing to go through with the process and implement it, and noted that it may be very threatening to some staff members.

**Comprehensiveness.** Staff expressed a keen awareness of the limitations on collecting imposed by constrained resources and changing philosophies about how to collect. In this case, "We decided early on to be highly selective and to keep it small. We don't have the luxury anymore. We [for September 11] have a representative collection, not comprehensive. And we're not into gap filling. Certain collections were done in depth and are comprehensive. But we're at the point where history themes have changed and broadened to where we need to devote collecting resources to new or overlooked areas and that is where this kind of initiative comes into play."

**Photography Collections.** Everyone who discussed photography expressed some unease with the current process and the resultant decisions. At the core, in this case, were disagreements about whether photographs should be regarded as "objects" worthy of the same care and attention as other forms of material record.

## **The Exhibition: *September 11: Bearing Witness to History***

**Introduction.** The most visible of the museum's responses to September 11 has been the exhibition, *September 11: Bearing Witness to History*. The exhibition uses objects, images, photographs and personal accounts to tell the story of the attacks and their immediate impact. The title of the exhibition implies that all people, certainly all Americans, witnessed this history and have all, in some way, been affected by the terrorist attacks. Opened on September 11, 2002, at a time of worldwide commemoration, the exhibition was intended as "a place for the public to come together to remember and reflect, and it has offered individuals the opportunity to tell their own stories, to bear witness to history in their own words."

All staff interviewees acknowledge that the thrust of the exhibition differs from that of most exhibitions in the museum. While in most exhibitions at NMAH, and perhaps in most history museums, exhibitions are the platform for interpreting, explaining, analyzing, and educating the public about historical events and topics, this exhibition does not attempt to do that. Instead, it offers multiple stories of events on September 11, generally accompanied by objects or photographs, and provides visitors with the opportunity to remember and reflect on their own September 11 experiences, as well as to add them to the historical record.

**Description.** About a dozen large-format graphics (printed on Tyvek banners and anchored with aluminum and limestone bases) are the Introduction to the theme of the exhibition, bearing witness to history. Images of the attacks at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, Pa., are interspersed with images of people witnessing the events. The [Photo Gallery: Capturing History through the Lens](#) presents four stories of photographers who documented the events, including Bill Biggart, who was killed in the World Trade Center

collapse. The prints are hung much as they would be in an art exhibition. The Object Gallery includes about 50 objects from all three sites, accompanied by quotations and stories to give context. Visitors also have the opportunity to touch a piece of twisted steel from the World Trade Center.

A ten-minute Video, "A Front-Row Seat to History," produced for the exhibition by ABC News, tells the story of the television news media as a witness to the events of September 11 as they unfolded.<sup>10</sup> The video is shown on a television screen in a small theater, a setting intended to be reminiscent of the living rooms where many watched the events unfold. A second Video screen, "News Around the World," shows newspaper headlines, magazine covers, Web pages, and additional photographs of people receiving news of the September 11 events. The My Witness area includes five touch-screen multimedia stations; each station presents five different personal stories from September 11. The 25 stories include accounts of eyewitnesses, survivors, rescue workers, and victims' family members, as well as people who responded to the attacks through artwork, poetry, and other means.

Tell Us Your Story provides different formats for visitors to respond to the following questions: "How did you witness history on September 11, 2001?" and "Has your life changed because of that day?" Visitors can write or draw at one of three conference size tables, or record a message through one of two telephones. Selected responses are posted in the exhibition, and some are on the Web site. A Panel that dedicates the exhibition to the victims, survivors, and rescuers is located in front of the exit doors.

Independent of the exhibition, the large U.S. flag that was draped over the damaged side of the Pentagon on September 12, 2001, hangs in the center hall of the museum. It is labeled so visitors know what it is and do not mistake it for the Star-Spangled Banner that formerly hung there. Signs nearby direct visitors

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<sup>10</sup> A couple of interviewees mentioned the importance of ABC's *pro bono* contribution to the overall storyline of the exhibition.

to the exhibition. The exhibition is located on the museum's second floor across the hall from the *First Ladies: Political Role and Public Image* exhibition.

According to the exhibition team, in the design they aimed for a tone that was "appropriately respectful and reflective, yet not overly sentimental." The exhibition uses a quiet palette of monochromatic hues of blues and grays. The natural materials used in the exhibition—aluminum, wood, limestone, and glass—are meant to reference the buildings that were damaged or destroyed in the attacks. The cases have aluminum edges, are balanced on maple wood frames, and are anchored with the same limestone that was used to restore the Pentagon. In commenting on the appropriateness of the design decisions, one interviewee said, "Everyone who comes is bringing emotion to it. We are providing a quiet, contemplative space. Even with hundreds of people in it, the exhibition is so quiet you could hear a pin drop."

**Developing an Exhibition.** While some members of senior management assumed from the start that NMAH would develop a September 11 related exhibition, the discussion of an exhibition was muted until late November 2001, even though in October one curator emphasized that "we [NMAH] would be looked to on the first anniversary" to have some public display. The stimulus for an exhibition came from the outside, when ABC approached the museum about working with NMAH on an exhibition. A second meeting with ABC was held in early January. During January, senior management discussed possible staffing for such an exhibition. When the development actually started, it followed the general model of exhibition-making at NMAH, but in an abbreviated time frame and with an unusual emphasis on the audience.

**Exhibition Staff.** In very early February, the core team (two cultural historians and an educator) was assigned, as well as a Project Manager.<sup>11</sup> At the time, the same core team was working on the reinstallation of the museum's historic Star Spangled Banner (SSB) flag and the associated *For Which It Stands* exhibition.

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<sup>11</sup> The educator was away and did not start working with the team until later in the month.

The two historians were also engaged, at the time, with *July 1942: United We Stand (July 1942)*, an exhibition that displayed nearly 100 magazine covers featuring American flags on their covers. Both of these exhibitions dealt with issues of national identity, patriotism, loss of liberty, and other topics related to September 11.<sup>12</sup> All three core team members had come to NMAH to work on special projects, such as SSB. In the case of the historians, they had not come to the museum to be (or become) research curators with collection responsibilities. The roles they were hired for and assumed were those of exhibition curators or developers.

An internal designer was not selected when the core team was named; there was some talk of using an external design group. However, the urgent need to select an exhibition space led to the appointment of an in-house designer.

Within days, the two exhibition curators wrote the original concept statement and submitted it to the Exhibits and Programs Committee (EPC) on February 11, 2002. Within another two days, they made a presentation to the EPC and received approval. The Director's Council subsequently reviewed the proposal, and the exhibition was chartered on March 4.<sup>13</sup> The title on the concept statement, *September 11: Bearing Witness to History*, summarized the message of the exhibition. "The title really helped us. It was the story that kept us from being scholars of September 11."<sup>14</sup> In framing the exhibition, they wrote:

The National Museum of American History is a place to think about what it means to be a part of history, to contemplate how historic events affect our lives as individuals and as a nation. In presenting this exhibition, we invite the public to share in the responsibility of documenting and preserving this history for future generations.

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<sup>12</sup> The lead cultural historian had also been involved, from mid-October, in the effort to save the flag recovered from the WTC discussed earlier.

<sup>13</sup> The "charter" at NMAH is a memo circulated when an exhibition is approved and staffed. It identifies staff that have been assigned to key roles, as well as the space in which the exhibition will be located, and the estimated opening date.

<sup>14</sup> Emphasis by interviewee.

**The Exhibition's Audience.** From the start, the exhibition team knew that the exhibition would evoke "strong emotions and memories for many, especially those directly affected by the tragedy." Therefore, the needs and expectations of visitors were carefully considered in all decisions about the exhibition. Towards that goal, the team conducted a series of visitor studies, talked with September 11 survivors, rescuers, and the family members of victims, and met with mental health workers, including members of the Red Cross, and other museum professionals, including staff of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.<sup>15</sup>

The results from these studies and consultations had tangible impact on the exhibition. The exhibition excludes particularly graphic images (e.g., individuals leaping from buildings, corpses, etc.) and excludes mention of the perpetrators. The exhibition was designed with wide circulation paths and an open floor plan that allows visitors to easily find the parts of the exhibition they wish to see. The object-related text panels have several levels of information: a quotation from a person associated with the object, a contextual image (either a portrait or a scene), a short I.D. label, and a longer (yet still concise) story label. Visitors can comfortably and quickly identify an object or read extensively. The main circulation space, the theater, and the "Tell Us Your Story" sections contain seating. Visitors using the "My Witness" touch-screen kiosks can also sit down. The inclusion of material on the role of fire fighters and flags also resulted from the studies. Perhaps most important, contact with the public lessened the hesitancy of the core team to show some materials they considered sensitive, e.g., airplane parts and the Olson telephone.

In developing this exhibition, NMAH also made efforts to reach out to those directly affected by the attacks in order to gain their trust and support. In April 2002, a letter was sent to victims' families to inform them of NMAH's plans for the exhibition. A private preview was held on September 8, 2002 to allow victims' families, survivors, and rescue workers to view the exhibition before it

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<sup>15</sup> In response to concern on the part of the acting director, they tested the title to see if "to History" should be retained or dropped.

opened to the public. At the official opening ceremony on September 10 the exhibition was formally dedicated to the victims, survivors, and rescuers of September 11, 2001.

In talking about visitors, interviewees commented on how unusual this project was in that the exhibition team didn't have to address the relevance issue. "We didn't have to answer the 'so what' question. This is an exhibition where the visitor has something to contribute. Making the visitor central like this is something we can learn for future projects." Another staff member pointed out that the "experience aspect" is the one the museum can most apply in the future. "The very word 'exhibition' sounds passive. In this exhibition, 'visitor experience' is the most important aspect of the whole. What visitors bring is larger than anything else in the exhibition. The physical space is a place that allows for physical, emotional experiences."

**The Exhibition Collection.** In comparison to most history exhibitions, *Bearing Witness* contains relatively few objects. According to the team, "there are exhibitions about objects, but here the objects are there to connect you to stories."

With eight exceptions, the exhibition displays objects collected by the special collecting team.<sup>16</sup> Several meetings were held in which collected objects were reviewed, and the collecting curators made some recommendations for inclusion and shared their documentation with the exhibition curators.<sup>17</sup> Compared to other exhibitions, "There was very little involvement between the collecting group and the exhibition group." The collecting curators were a resource for,

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<sup>16</sup> There are eight loans in the exhibition: Bill Biggart's camera equipment; U.S. flag that was hung from the Pentagon after September 11; panel 26 of the Bellevue Wall of Prayer; three memorial items from the Flight 93 crash site in Somerset County, PA; bullhorn used by George W. Bush to address workers at Ground Zero; the Purple Heart medal awarded to Captain Robert E. Dolan; television recovered from the Pentagon after September 11; and helmet worn by FDNY Battalion Chief Joseph Pfeifer on September 11.

<sup>17</sup> The preliminary object list was presented by late March.

rather than an integral part of, the exhibition team.

Several interviewees mentioned that the possible contamination of objects from the attack sites by asbestos, lead, or other hazardous materials created some staff tensions. Objects were tested and treated to minimize risk to collections staff and to ensure public safety in the exhibition.

**The Interactives.** An extended team sub-group, consisting of a senior curator, an assistant "borrowed" from an NMAH unit, and the exhibition educator, developed the "My Witness" interactives. The curator, concerned with how the interactives "could enhance the visitor experience," stressed their variety, individuality, and interactivity as the three key principles. The stories in the five terminals were selected to provide a diversity of gender, place, ethnicity, etc. As for individuality, all are first person narratives, "my witness." Interactivity, by design, is limited to paging from one story to the next.

The interactives were done in a very short time. "We worked as efficiently as I can remember. We only met the contractors in person in the beginning and one other time and did everything electronically-sent images, received prototypes, made speaker-phone calls."

**Photography and Graphics.** In mid-March, the core team made a trip to view *The September 11 Photo Project* at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>18</sup> The visit was followed by a discussion of the role of photography in the exhibition. As the exhibition took shape, it became clear that photography was a critical element. Staff from the Photographic History Collection in the Division of Information Technology and

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<sup>18</sup> The *September 11 Photo Project* began as a New York community response to the tragic events. The Project grew out of a desire to preserve the culture of the outdoor, makeshift shrines that sprang up in public squares and in front of firehouses throughout New York. The project's philosophy is to display without exception every set of photos (up to three per person) and written statements that are submitted, and to welcome all those who wish to view them. Each participant, not the organizers, selects the pieces that are displayed, and all are included in the firm belief that no entry is better than any other.

Society was working at the time on bringing another exhibition, *New York: September 11 by Magnum Photographers*, to the Arts and Industries Building and thus was already involved in September 11 activities. They were asked to curate a section on photography in the NMAH exhibition, although the amount and character of that space were not well defined. The core team needed to have someone in charge of keeping track of photography and obtaining photo rights, but finding someone was very problematic. The staff from Photographic History Unit undertook this task as well, because funds were not available to hire a professional photo-researcher.

**Exhibition Design and Production.** As noted, an in-house designer was added to the team when decisions about a location for the exhibition had to be made. The designer saw himself playing a dual role, as he explained in a public NMAH forum.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, he functioned as part of the central team in a conceptual role, asking, "What is the experience?" "What will visitors see, hear, feel?" "What are we trying to do here?" "What should we do?" On the other hand, he was a "service provider" to the rest of the team, delivering the necessary details such as architecture, furniture, etc. This dual role put him in a difficult position at times: "Am I part of the committee? Am I answering to the committee?"

The decision to permit NMAH's Exhibits Service Group to produce *Bearing Witness* rather than to contract with an outside contractor was made on the basis of resources and schedules. As it happened, this decision put pressure on the shops involved, as several other exhibitions were being produced at the same time. The Exhibits Service Group had bargained to do *West Point in the Making of America, 1802-1918 (West Point)* in-house, after an internal reorganization about a year earlier. Production for *Within These Walls (Ipswich House)* had been a major shift in how work was done—from "silo" shops to an integrated unit. When *Bearing Witness* was started, the group was already working on *West Point* at the same time as *Julia Child's Kitchen* and *July 1942*. Before these recent exhibitions, the group had been feeling under-appreciated and "beat up

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<sup>19</sup> *Smithsonian Live*, Presidential Suite, NMAH, 2 October 2002.

with the process." This changed with the decision to make major changes to *July 1942* just before it opened. They were able to schedule the work so it was not a crisis, and the overtime cost was less than \$10,000 for all four projects. This was the first scheduled overtime since 1994, reflecting the lack of work in the shops. Several people commented that the quality and camaraderie were high, and the shop's staff "was even rewarded with a 'thank you' luncheon for work on September 11 (*Bearing Witness*)."

**Schedules.** Even if the exhibition development had started in September 2001, the goal of opening an exhibition one year later was ambitious by NMAH standards. Everyone involved felt the constraints of time. According to interviewees, there was no time to "blue sky." Also, "We couldn't be analytical. We decided that it was too fresh and too emotional to have an historical perspective. Our theme became: What does it mean to be a witness to history. We are letting people tell their stories."

Interviews with NMAH staff related to exhibition-making in other OP&A studies suggest that typically many exhibition issues are re-visited and re-considered in the course of the process.<sup>20</sup> While some review and revision may be advantageous, too much of it tends to hinder exhibitions and "divert them from their focus." In the case of *Bearing Witness*, "The time frame was in our favor. There was no time for endless review and revision." The team stuck to the original plan in a focused, consistent way.

**Project Management.** At the present time, at NMAH, supervisors assign project managers and assistants to exhibitions after determining if they have any conflicts with team members and philosophical differences with the project. An experienced project manager was assigned to this project together with an assistant project manager.

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<sup>20</sup> Office of Policy and Analysis, *The Making of Exhibitions: Purpose, Structure, Roles and Process*. (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, Office of Policy and Analysis, 2002). <http://www.si.edu/opanda/reports/htm>.

Several interviewees commented that project managers generally keep projects on budget, and on schedule, and work at building consensus among team members, but they also questioned what level of decision-making authority project managers have. In the case of this team, the project director (the Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs) intervened several times when the team could not reach consensus although the project manager tried to resolve issues.

**Funding.** As with other exhibitions, NMAH needed to secure funding for *Bearing Witness*. While the first discussion of funding and possible budgets took place in February, it was not until late March that fundraising staff began a serious effort, due to the press of other projects. In practical terms, there were about four months to raise the \$500,000 set as the initial budget. Later budget estimates went as high as \$800,000. In the end, \$590,000 was raised. (The final exhibition cost was approximately \$653,000. General museum funds made up the difference.)

Prospect research by development staff showed that the majority of Americans, corporations, foundations, and companies had already acted philanthropically in response to September 11 (mostly in donations to victims and families). In addition, an exhibition proved a "harder sell" to donors than other September 11 causes, and NMAH needed the money quickly. Further, some at the museum felt that there should not be a huge corporate presence—the project team was concerned about the subject matter and no one felt that publicity over corporate affiliation was desirable.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, NMAH asked friends of the museum and a few corporations who have established relations with the museum (The History Channel, the National Association of Realtors) to underwrite the exhibition. Other sources of money were the Special Exhibition Fund managed by the Office of the Under Secretary for American Museums and National Programs and discretionary internal

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<sup>21</sup> The negative publicity over the withdrawal of a \$38 million donation by Catherine Reynolds was just receding.

museum funds.

The donors are listed in the entry to the exhibition. There was intense internal discussion over the issue of whom to acknowledge, how to do this, etc. The exhibition team did not want to be listed. As one member said, "This was a contribution we wanted to make as a museum and not as individuals."

## **Internal Perspectives on the Exhibition Development Process**

Of the four activities related to September 11 in this paper, discussions with staff about the exhibition raised the most questions and showed the least consensus. Differences in opinion were expressed about the appropriateness of the exhibition, its interpretive approach, the composition of the core team, etc.

**Listening to Visitors.** While some participants felt that "we carried the importance of the visitor internally," others gained new respect for the value of listening to the audience and studying it both formally and informally. For example, "I wasn't sure that an exhibition was appropriate. Would people think we were exploiting it or trying to explain it? That was helped by the audience interviews. They wanted the story to be told, but in a commemorative way."

**Organization.** The way exhibition-making is organized in NMAH was a sensitive point in the discussions. Who serve as members of a core team? Who has a real voice and who is a supportive member? What is the role of an in-house designer? How much decision-making is appropriate the project managers, and who above them adjudicates disagreements? There was tacit acknowledgement that in the current environment, even when there is a "team process," the curatorial voice tends to be more decisive than others. Several interviewees suggested that more neutral decision-makers, who are better equipped to generate a true consensus among different viewpoints on the team, should lead exhibitions. The interviews also suggest that the role of in-house vs. contract designer is not well defined. As one interviewee explained, "Outside contractors provide options and are willing to re-work designs until compromises are reached. Staff designers have different expectations."

**Resolving Disagreements.** While differences of opinion are inevitable on any exhibition team, there was concern among some participants over how disagreements were resolved. Should resolution be based on seniority, authority, influence, or professional expertise? Should there always be careful exploration of

merit? Some felt that the rules for resolving difficulties and making final decisions (not subject to being revisited) need to be spelled out. One interviewee suggested that, in addition to the current exhibition charter, a document that articulated an agreed-upon process for decision-making should be drawn up.

**Decision Stability.** Interviewees applauded the fact that once decisions were made they were rarely re-visited. There was simply not enough time to do otherwise.

**Non-interpretive Exhibitions.** *Bearing Witness* employed a specific "non-interpretive" approach, one that relied on emotional experiences and individual meaning-making rather than on didactic communication of predetermined content. There was no historical context, no explanation of events, and no simple "message." Interviewees recognized that the interpretive strategy used in *Bearing Witness* was quite different from that used in most exhibitions at NMAH.

Some felt that this departure was justified because of the exhibition's unique subject matter, but should remain an exception. Some interviewees dismissed this approach as an exception: "The most striking thing is that it is only marginally a history exhibition and to extrapolate from it is misleading. There wasn't time to do it as a normal history exhibition." "This wasn't a show based on discipline-based knowledge. It was based on an event. The only unusual thing is [the three collecting curators] didn't want to do the exhibition. That's unusual." "September 11 was an unusual situation. It was appropriate to do it, and it was appropriate to the situation, but it was a unique situation and shouldn't be used as a paradigm."

Others felt that NMAH should consider using alternative approaches, like this one, more often. As one person commented, "We have gone farther in this exhibition toward experience. It is focused on giving and validating an experience."

"Another point is a willingness to reach a high emotional level. We need more of that." "We need to be relevant and need to use every tool possible to ring that bell. We have to work harder to make shows meaningful, emotional, and surprising."

## Public Programs

*"We were the audience, because it was so close to home."*

On September 13, 2001, Lemelson Center staff attended a previously scheduled, off-site retreat with a radically changed agenda. The retreat provided staff an opportunity to talk to each other about the terrorist attacks and to discuss a possible Lemelson Center contribution. Following the meeting, a small committee suggested that a Lemelson Center-sponsored public program series, designed to address public concerns, would be a valuable short-term goal.

In a proposal submitted to the Exhibits and Programs Committee within two weeks, the Center proposed a lunch-hour program. While the Center's contributions to the series would focus on the intersection of technology and culture, it proposed collaborating with the Office of Curatorial Affairs (OCA) on discussions of broader social and cultural issues and with the Public Programs Office. The programs would be promoted to visitors in the museum and to staff at nearby Federal agencies. The Lemelson Center offered to fund advertising, catering (drinks and dessert), honoraria, travel funds, and audiotaping. It asked that OCA contribute to the budget.<sup>22</sup>

In explaining the purpose of the *Crossroads* series, Lemelson Center staff wrote:

The purpose of this program series is to provide a public forum for the discussion of topics related to the terrorist attacks. While the museum certainly has a responsibility to collect artifacts related to this event, for our visitors the museum is first and foremost a public space where people come to learn about American history. We feel that the National Museum of American History is the most appropriate place for people to gather and reflect on the meaning of this

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<sup>22</sup> The Lemelson Center contributed about 70% of the costs, OCA the remainder.

tragic event in their lives. It is clear from our own personal experiences that people feel a need to talk with others about what happened on September 11, and what it means for their future. Our museum is in a unique position to provide the historical context for these discussions.

Planning for the *Crossroads* series proceeded rapidly. The first program took place on November 14 and a second on December 13, 2001. The core group in charge of the programs, from the Lemelson Center and the (then) Public Programs Office, were "like minded, dedicated people who know how to get things done." The core group also collaborated with subject specialists throughout the museum on individual programs. To assess the public's reaction to the programs, small informal questionnaires were distributed at the end of several programs. In addition to suggesting additional series topics for staff consideration, respondents expressed a very positive response to the lunch-hour format.

Several interviewees felt that the type of multi-office collaboration that took place in planning and executing these public programs was a good idea, "but it's very difficult because the people at NMAH are not used to it." It takes the commitment of senior staff to keep a collaboration going. This working group was initially formed out of goodwill, but as time went on, it was hard to keep it together.

The *Crossroads* series, as public programs frequently do, "allowed [the museum] to breathe in contemporary terms." In other words, "the public programs have always, not necessarily just in this particular sudden need, but in general, been a place where ideas did not have to be complete, where debate could happen."

In addition to the *Crossroads* series, staff in the Office of Education and Public Programs also planned programs. (In early 2002, the former Public Programs Office was integrated into this office.) Workshops, panel discussions, and films were offered.

Education and curatorial staff decided early in the planning not to develop children's programs (elementary school age) in association with the *Bearing Witness* exhibition. First, no one thought it was appropriate; second, there wasn't the money. To help inform the decision not to program for schools, staff solicited advice from schoolteachers and the Red Cross. Although a disclaimer about the age appropriateness of the exhibition was considered, the exhibition brochure does not include one, nor is there a sign outside the exhibition alerting visitors about potentially disturbing content.

According to interviewees, public program preparation for the September 11 exhibition differed in several ways from most previous public program series: preparation time was more limited, public programs staff were included in the planning, and the budget was dedicated. From the start, "public programs worked alongside of the exhibition team." This strategy applied what had worked well in other exhibitions. For example, a key factor is having an early public programs budget that remains unaltered. As one person noted, "When budgets are cut, education and public programs are the first cut." A budget for public programs was stable in *The American Presidency (TAP)* and also in *Bearing Witness*. Another factor, one that proved quite effective in attracting the public to *TAP*, were advertising budgets for public programs. However, a major difference between *TAP* and *Bearing Witness* was the absence of a dedicated advertising budget for public programs for *Bearing Witness*.

In discussing the limited time available, staff noted that this exhibition had "unusually linear decision making" and engaged in little revisiting of ideas. Once a programming decision was made, "there was no time and little incentive to go back and change it."

One interviewee implied that this meant more careful decision-making.

In planning public programs, staff indicated that they consulted more external expertise (*e.g.*, the Red Cross) than is generally the case.

## Internal Perspectives on Public Programs

The *Crossroads* series was more collaborative than is usually the case at NMAH. Interviewees felt that this collaboration clearly resulted in a richer mix of programs and cross-disciplinary participation. In the interviews, staff made observations in three main areas:

- **Value.** Public programming has a critical role in engaging the public in a discussion of contemporary and controversial issues.
- **Staff.** A public programmer should be assigned to each exhibition team, as was done here. This person should be named as part of the exhibition charter. If the project is small, one person could be both the educator and the public programmer. This will improve coordination between the exhibition and public programs.
- **Funding.** The program, interviewees felt, was successful in part because money for public programs was firmly committed in the budget from the beginning, as was the case with *The American Presidency* as well.

## Web Site

The Web Program at NMAH has been responsible for developing sites to accompany exhibitions since late 1999. As Web technology has advanced, the type of Web presentation associated with exhibitions has changed as well. According to interviewees, the site developed in connection with *Bearing Witness* is part of that evolution.

In the early discussions of the *Bearing Witness* exhibition, the exhibition team proposed a very limited Web site, one that would be informational in nature, but would not feature many photos or objects from the exhibition. The Web Program proposed a supplementary approach, one that would show "what we do in a museum." For years, Web Program staff wanted to develop a site that shows what happens behind the scenes at the Smithsonian. How does a museum put an exhibition together, and who are the players that no one gets to see? They explored some aspects of the idea on the *Julia Child's Kitchen's* Web site, built around a diary of the curators' collecting. The September 11 collecting effort provided an ideal opportunity to extend that idea.

Within that frame, the story would be "how are we documenting history?" The focus would be on a handful of collected objects as symbols of American history. It would "deconstruct the exhibition and allow visitors to construct their own meaning." The Web staff saw the challenge as doing something on the Web that can't be done in a physical exhibition. This is a goal for everything they put online.

The initial idea was expanded from showing a handful of objects to showing all the objects in the collection. The rationale for this decision was multi-faceted. First, having all the objects on the site would honor donors, both those with objects in the exhibition and those whose objects were not on display. There was staff consensus that donors to the museum generally, and specifically in this

case, have an expectation that their objects will be shown. This way, "When a cousin calls and something they donated is not in the exhibition, we tell them it's on the site." Second, it was partially a political decision. The Smithsonian wanted to be completely transparent, to other museums and agencies, in what it was collecting.

Second Story Interactive Studios was selected to do the work for the September 11 site. Since this firm was the runner-up bidder for a recent Lemelson Center project (*Invention at Play*), it could be brought on board quickly as a sole-source contractor.<sup>23</sup> Since there were limited resources for the site (\$30,000), Second Story agreed to do the work at a discounted price.

On June 11, the Web team presented the site concept in an open meeting of staff held in the *Information Age* Theater. There was general debate about how much the Web site should show and how long to maintain the site, but the general idea of a collection focus was accepted. Several individuals worried about how the Web Program could present the objects in a sensitive enough manner without providing context. To allay concerns, the Web team assured hesitant staff that the site could be done appropriately to the topic. This notion of "appropriateness" became the most compelling organizational principle.

Excerpts from interviews with collecting curators shown on the Web were unrehearsed. An effort was made to avoid a talk show of "me and my feelings," although Web Program staff wanted a little of that. They wanted the curators to talk about their collecting experiences and the mechanics of collecting, but also to provide some personal experiences. Donors were not interviewed specifically for the site, but many donor stories were in the curatorial files.<sup>24</sup> Staff also contacted people whom they knew had good stories and asked them to send

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<sup>23</sup> The museum had also worked with them before on the site for *A More Perfect Union*, which also has a strong collection focus.

<sup>24</sup> Donors were asked for permission to print the statements they sent to the curators, and many edited their statements (mostly for grammar and typos) when they knew they would be made public.

NMAH some text. The other information on the site came from the collecting curators' notes and files; it was edited to give the site a consistent voice.

The Web site was shown at the Family Preview event on September 8, 2002, the exhibition opening, and during a visit by the Fire Department of New York City. This was the first time at NMAH that a Web site was used at a public event besides an opening. At the family visit, the site was shown on a large projection screen, and donors were invited to review their items and their associated statements on a laptop separate from the team. Many donors were grateful for the opportunity to review the treatment of their objects. All seemed appreciative of the look and feel, and the inclusive nature of the site. Some donors were clearly balancing the somber mood of the event with pride that their objects were in the Smithsonian and their words (and sometimes pictures) were being shown on an enormous screen. Many took pictures of themselves standing in front of the screen. Many also lingered to tell other stories, and promised additional material.

The complete September 11 Web site consists of three portions. "View the Collection" is the core of the site. A viewer can browse through photographs of every object collected to date, and have access to several levels of information: a simple label, a brief description, an extended label providing context, and supporting documentation (such as photos), as well as curators' stories. Also included in the supporting documentation are stories from the donors, often quite lengthy. The data on the site includes the location from which the object was collected, some accession numbers, donor information, and a notation about whether or not the item is included in the exhibition. A brief introduction about the collection and instructions for Web-visitors wanting to donate objects are also available.

"Visit the Exhibition," provides a sample of *Bearing Witness* objects, images, and stories. It invites visitors to NMAH to view documentation of "this historic day and its impact on people's lives. It provides an opportunity to pause,

remember, and reflect-for each of us to bear witness to history." This section of the site is limited to five objects, two photographs, two audio stories, and a video clip (from the Peter Jennings' exhibition video).

"Tell Your Story" provides an opportunity for Web-visitors to have their stories permanently archived in the September 11 Digital Archive, a project of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University and the American Social History Project at the City University of New York Graduate Center. The September 11 Digital Archive Web site is not administered by the Smithsonian.

Web Program staff has been monitoring site usage with care. The data show that the site has a tremendous amount of traffic and most of it is directed toward the collections portion of the site. Web visit times last approximately 10 minutes, a long time for Web visits.

### **Internal Perspectives on the Web Site**

According to Web Programs staff, the processes and procedures used for the September 11 Web site were typical, not different in any way. Even the short time was not really a factor, as their time is always short. A six-month lead-time is typical; this time they had about four. The shortage of resources was also typical.

The difference here is that the Web site had a different development team because Web Programs worked more closely with the collecting curators than the exhibition curators.

As one interviewee noted, "This site does something important-it gives agency to the collecting curator." Most of the material was developed expressly for the site, not modified from an exhibition script. The Web site was essentially separated from the intellectual framework of the exhibition, and the staff was able to consider what kind of material to present and how to frame it, apart from the exhibition goals.

## Conclusions

The staff interviewed in the course of this study were in general agreement with the aims and outcomes of September 11 activities in nearly all respects. All of the staff members reflected not only a high degree of professionalism but a strong commitment to quality. It is significant that everyone cares and wants to do better.

At the same time, the study reveals fundamental questions of philosophy and organization that arose during the projects. Some felt that their work on this effort was not particularly unusual, and others felt that it was unusual. Some felt that it should not offer a model for future activities, and others felt that it should. The diversity of opinions expressed by staff, both with respect to collecting and exhibitions, is a clear sign of intellectual diversity and lively engagement in the life of the museum. In addition, no one thought that the activities were a mistake, misguided, or in any way inappropriate to the mission of the museum. Even those who indicated some disharmony with processes or outcomes did not question the validity of the overall effort.

The fact that the entire effort went relatively smoothly in a narrow time-frame is partially due to the exceptional nature of the events that initiated the activities described here. Many participants demonstrated in their remarks a deep emotional commitment to the topic and to their obligation to do well by it. It seemed apparent that this was not a project that any participant took lightly.

The efforts of the museum's most senior leadership clearly played a large role in the outcome. When interviewees discussed the roles of senior museum managers, it was usually in a positive light, and it is obvious that their interventions (in some cases, and their avoidance of intervention in others) and clear expressions of their perspectives were important to the progress of the effort as a whole.

Interviewees raised three issues that stand out as being of greatest significance:

- Should the museum collect proactively within and across units ?
- Should the museum produce exhibitions that are not didactic?
- Should the museum organize its activities differently?

We believe that the answers to these three key questions are the same: "sometimes." Ultimately, it would be as restrictive to answer any of these questions "yes" as to answer "no." A diversity of approaches is essential to serving a diversity of needs and visitors.

The challenge for NMAH's senior management and staff is to establish the proper balance between each of these alternatives and to pre-determine the situation that signals the need for one approach rather than another.

**Collecting.** With respect to collecting, NMAH is in the midst of a planning process that includes a review of the role and purpose of its collections, alternative ways of adding to them or decreasing them, and the organizational structure in which collecting should take place. The pending new collection plan can be expected to address the role of proactive and cross-unit initiatives. Such initiatives are likely to be especially valuable in topics that, as noted in the recent report of the Blue Ribbon Commission, are important but not well-represented in the museum. In implementing the new plan, the museum will need to reinforce the change from a culture that promotes individual fiefdoms to one that encourages collaboration while allowing for the wise use of individual initiative and knowledge.

The September 11 collecting experience should also help inform the question of how much to collect and how to deal with decision-making and storage.

The September 11 collecting activity demonstrated that the role of photography in contemporary history collections, an area at the interface between collections and exhibitions, needs serious attention. None of the interviewees provided any clear suggestions towards solving the issue at NMAH.

**Exhibition-making.** In the case of exhibitions, what emerges from the interviews is that while the procedures used for September 11 exhibition-making were normative, the topic, schedule, staffing and interpretative strategy were quite different.

*Bearing Witness* was not the outcome of curatorial research, and was of compelling interest to the public. This differs from most exhibition topics, which arise out of curatorial interest and which may or may not be relevant to the audience. If the museum were to adopt and enforce a philosophy of diversity in exhibition approaches, it could follow-up *Bearing Witness* with other exhibitions on topics of deep contemporary concern. It could also review and modify existing exhibitions so that they could be made more emotionally relevant to audiences.

The lessons of this project for exhibition-making may be more difficult to address, both because past approaches are so deeply embedded and because there does not appear to be an ongoing, formal process to revise internal procedures and plans at present. The success of the September 11 exhibition does not imply that all exhibitions have to follow this interpretive strategy. However, it suggests that non-didactic emotional exhibitions can and should have a legitimate place in a history museum. More generally, NMAH might benefit from a review of the various approaches, or models, used in creating exhibitions and the way they function for visitors. We assume that discussion and adoption of interpretive approaches that are different from the usual practice at NMAH would be valuable in shaping a more diverse mix of exhibitions with appeal to a wider range of audiences.

Unlike most previous exhibitions of importance, *Bearing Witness* was the responsibility of exhibition curators (as contrasted with research or collecting curators). The thrust, throughout, was on connecting with the audience, on being relevant, and on using story-telling as a method. This project suggests that there is merit in diversifying the types of individuals who have decision-making

authority in exhibition making. In the words of one interviewee, "My dream is a department of exhibition developers-some with content background, some with education background, some good writers-experts in exhibitions. You need content specialists to support them and others. I'd apply for that." This is not to imply that all exhibitions should be developed using the same process. Our previous work has shown that that no single exhibition-making model guarantees quality exhibitions. The likelihood of exhibitions that engage the public, however, increases if a true diversity of voices is involved in exhibition development. It would be more beneficial to stress innovation by promoting the individual, story-centered approach used in *Bearing Witness*, rather than to maintain the current overwhelming preference for didactic presentations.

Finally, the willingness of the *Bearing Witness* team to take its cues from the public about how to "connect" was exemplary. As discussed earlier, there was continual pulse-taking throughout the development process. Findings from surveys and conversations guided the development. The result was that when the exhibition opened, it served as a space for emotional release and as a "safe place" and now it serves as a place for remembering. The "Tell Us Your Story" section provided an active place for the public's voice in the exhibition. Even in a didactic exhibition on research, NMAH might find this approach useful to engage visitors more fully.

**The Web.** In the case of September 11, while there was general agreement that it was a good idea to show the collection on the Web, a few expressed discomfort with some aspects, such as the amount of time it entailed and the collecting curators' stories. The interface between exhibitions, collections, and the Web certainly may need to be clarified, but at the same time this project demonstrated the power of the Web as a means of sharing the museum's work in a transparent manner. This kind of sharing and openness is likely to sow the seeds of support for the museum's mission and role. It is evident that when the Web Program is empowered, it can be creative and innovative in non-traditional areas.

## **Appendix A**

### ***September 11: Bearing Witness to History* Chronology**

Note: Events which clearly relate to a specific section of the case study are marked, using the following abbreviations:

[C] = Collections

[E] = Exhibition

[P] = Public Programs

[W] = Web Program

#### **2001** September 11, 2001 (Tuesday) - the attacks

September 12, 2001: (a) Staff informally discusses NMAH response in a variety of "hallway" conversations, and (b) Individual curators begin to make list of what might be collected. [C]

September 12, 2001

Discussion in Director's office about keeping *Star-Spangled Banner* exhibition open. Decision to keep exhibition open, add extra security, and have conservation team members work in office, not in the SSB Lab.

September 13, 2001

Collections Committee reprograms a "Conversations about Collecting" meeting (a regular monthly event) into a forum for collective discussion and debate. [C]

September 13-14, 2001

Collections Committee Chair calls the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Historical Society, and the New York Fire Museum to find out what they are doing. [C]

September 13, 2001

*Crossroads* program results from a Lemelson Center meeting. [P]

September 18-19, 2001

Earliest discussion about an exhibition takes place with some staff "angst." [E]

September 21, 2001

Staff discussion in the West Conference room to consider what to do.

September 25, 2001

A curator creates an e-mail list to share information on 911 collecting. [C]

September 25, 2001

Meeting attended by 25-30 people. The discussion focused on collecting and controlling the image of the museum as it goes out to collect. They decide they need to meet with the NYC museums. [C]

September 28, 2001

Lemelson Center submits a proposal to the NMAH Exhibits and Programs Committee for a public program lunchtime discussion series (*Crossroads*) designed to respond to September 11. [P]

October, 2001

Assistant Director for Interdisciplinary Initiatives encourages staff throughout the museum that wanted to respond to meet to discuss the public programs. They first meet in October, with about twenty to twenty-five people in attendance.

October 4, 2001

A few members of the NMAH staff meet informally with *Washington Post* reporter Bob Thompson in the cafeteria and choose not to share a shopping list of objects being sought.

October 4, 2001

Museum of the City of New York and NMAH jointly sponsor a meeting to discuss the museum community reaction to the NY attacks. Out of the meeting a consortium of museums is formed, promising to work together. Approximately 70 people attend.

October 10, 2001

NMAH issues press release concerning the museum's collection strategy in response to the attacks.

October 12, 2001

*Washington Post* story on NMAH and Museum of the City of New York and efforts on how museums should document Sept. 11 attacks.

October 15, 2001

*New York Times* story on how NMAH and other museums will use the Internet to

discuss and coordinate collection efforts Sept. 11.

October 17, 2001

Staff begins work to save a flag recovered from World Trade Center (WTC) from being "retired." [Flag eventually returned to FBI and transferred to NMAH. Initially intended for *For Which It Stands* exhibition, this flag is used in September 11 exhibition when loans of Port Authority and FDNY flags could not be secured.]

October 18, 2001

Public programming discussion. [P]

Late October, 2001

By the end of October, Photographic History Collection is planning to collect. [C]

October 31, 2001

*Crossroads* program discussions about meaning of the flag after the September 11 attacks. [P]

November, 2001

George Mason University (GMU) approaches Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs about collaborative projects. GMU is working on a digital archive of current experiences. [E]

November 14, 2001

First program in series in *Crossroads: Historical Perspectives on Topics Related to September 11* [Epidemics-The People's Role in Biodefense] [P]

November 28-30, 2001

Curator in negotiations with FBI about possibility of collecting WTC flag for *For Which It Stands*, the exhibition related to the Star-Spangled Banner.

November 28, 2001

Meeting with ABC News-first discussion of NMAH undertaking exhibition. [E]

December 5, 2001

AP story and Newark Star-Ledger stories appear on FBI flag/American Legion. NMAH asks to examine flag, maybe for inclusion in upcoming exhibition. [C]

December 5, 2001

Curators meet with Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs to discuss Sept. 11

collecting. [C]

December, 2001

Curator begins conversations with Pentagon staff related to collecting. [C]

December 6, 2001

SI Material Culture Forum on September 11. [P]

December 11, 2001

Sen. Kit Bond, MO releases information that he will introduce legislation authorizing the Smithsonian as the central, national conservator for artifacts and evidence related to September 11. SI Government Affairs Director communicates with NMAH about discussions with Sen. Bond and purpose of the amendment. [C]

December 13, 2001

AP story on museums vying for Sept. 11 artifacts; Sen. Bond legislation. [C]

December 13, 2001

*Crossroads* program on Islamic nations and the U.S. [Islam in the Global Community] [P]

December 13, 2001

Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs recruits curator help in a proactive collecting initiative. [C]

December 14, 2001

Review of objects already collected or in negotiation. [C]

E-mail to NMAH staff listing what has been collected so far. [C]

December 19, 2001

Sen. Kit Bond, MO officially introduces legislation authorizing the Smithsonian as the central, national conservator for artifacts and evidence related to September 11. It directs NMAH to collect and preserve artifacts from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. [C]

December 20, 2001

Special collecting group meets with Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs to discuss goals. [C]

December 26-28, 2001

Member of special collecting team in New York to collect specific materials

from individuals and explore scrap yard. [C]

**2002** January, 2002

Curators and staff from the Office of Capital Campaign, External Relations and Board Liaison go to Ground Zero. [C]

January 3, 2002

Special Exhibition Fund proposal submitted. [E]

January 8, 2002

Letter sent from Undersecretary Sheila Burke to FBI regarding the possible acquisition of the flag for the museum's collections. [C]

January 9, 2002

Staff group meets with ABC to discuss possible September 11 exhibition. [E]

January 10, 2002

President signs a bill by Kitt Bond. [C]

January -February 2002

George Mason University (GMU) initiates detailed discussions with Director, Web Programs. They have the idea of using kiosks in the exhibition, talks of actual interviews and video kiosks. [E]

January 11, 2002

*Crossroads* public program on the American flag as a cultural symbol focuses on the flag found at the WTC and American Legion attempts to retire it by burning the flag. [The American Flag: Symbolism and Conflict] [P]

January 11, 2002

The exhibition was first publicly mentioned at a *Crossroads* meeting on the flag. [E]

January 14, 2002

Office of the Solicitor General Ted Olson agrees to give NMAH the telephone through which he received calls from his wife Barbara who was on the flight that crashed into the Pentagon. [C]

January 20-22, 2002

Media stories appear about window washer Jan Demczur and fact that his squeegee (helped him and several men escape from a WTC elevator) is coming to the NMAH. Demczur is honored by the International Window Cleaning Association at their convention in Nevada. [C]

January 22-25, 2002

Collecting trip to New York, including Ground Zero and Fresh Kills recovery site. Acquisition of the melted filing cabinet, firefighting axe head, etc. Collecting curator meets with *New York Times* reporter on the collecting process on January 23. [C]

January 24, 2002

Meeting to discuss the WTC flag.

January 29, 2002

Collecting curators meet with soldiers from recovery operations at the Pentagon to identify and collect objects from the impact area at the Pentagon. [C]

February 1, 2002

Agreement to work with George Mason University [E]

February 7, 2002

Two cultural historians agree to be lead exhibition curators [E]

February 8, 2002

Collecting trip to New York [Hugo Neu scrap yard and Fresh Kills]. [C]  
Discussion of location possibilities for September 11 exhibition (end of Info Age and use of Info Age theater) [E]

February 9-10, 2002

Cultural historians work on EPC proposal [E]

February 11, 2002

*Crossroads* lecture [Every Picture Tells a Story] [P]

February 11, 2002

September 11 exhibition proposal goes to museum's Exhibits and Programs Committee (EPC). [E]

February 12, 2002

Exhibits and Programs Committee (EPC) review of exhibition proposal; official letter of support received February 13. E]

February 12, 2002

Collecting trips: Staff select Fire Department of New York (FDNY) door to collect, *New York Times* reporter accompanies the curators-issue of museums

competing for objects. [C]

February 13, 2002

Deed of Gift to FDNY for crushed fire door and 4 other objects. Documents issue of museum having marked the door for SI on January 25. [C]

February 13, 2002

NMAH has meetings with ABC representatives regarding the possibility of collaboration for September 11 exhibition. Initial meeting included possibility of opening film for the show. [E]

February 14, 2002

Exhibition team gets update from collecting group. [E]

February 19, 2002

Director's Council review of exhibition proposal. [E]  
Discussions about September 11 fundraising, design, and Web site.  
About this time the core team is in place. [E]

February 21, 2002

Discussion of exhibition location (CCN empty space); PowerPoint presentation to the NMAH Board. [E]

February 22, 2002

9/11 object conservation (textile lab). [C]

February 23, 2002

*New York Times* story about museum collecting includes the FDNY fire truck door going to NMAH. [C]

February 23, 2002

Educator joins core exhibition team after returning from *The American Presidency (TAP)* opening in Chicago. Official "kick off" meeting held with core team, Project Manager and designer. [E]

February 25, 2002

Solicitor General Ted Olson's telephone is picked up. [C]

February 25, 2002

Notification of Special Exhibition Fund award [E]

March, 2002

As part of exhibition development, staff conducts an early study, about 60 or 70 people. [E]

March 1, 2002

Under Secretary briefed on progress of September 11 collecting at one of her breakfast meetings. [C]

Conceptual design meeting. [E]

March 4, 2002

Exhibition charter distributed. [E]

March 3 and 26, 2002

Draft object lists created. [E]

March 5, 2002

Exhibition meetings for extended team on 3/5/02, 4/2/02, and every other week until May 2002, at which point they were held weekly. [E]

March 6, 7 and 8, 2002

Visitor survey and testing on subject matter, appropriateness of objects, title and what other elements should be included in the exhibition. [E]

March 8, 2002

Exhibition team gets update from collecting group. [E]

March 12, 2002

Planning charter issued for exhibition; estimated budget \$500,000. [E]

March 12, 2002

*Crossroads* program on women in the Middle East. [Beyond the Veil: Women's Minds and Politics in the Middle East]. [P]

March 13, 2002

Meeting to discuss budget and status of fundraising. [E]

March 15, 2002

Discussion of History Channel role in the exhibition, financial contribution offered. [E]

March 18, 2002

Meeting with FBI representative. [C]

March 18, 2002

Exhibition presentation to Directors' Council. [E]

March 21-22, 2002

Materials collected in New York from Hugo Neu scrap yard, PANYNJ, Nino, etc. [C]

March 25, 2002

Updated collecting report from March 21-22 trip to New York, includes information on collecting from Nino's Restaurant (apron with patches from rescue units) and update on pieces of steel that NMAH is interested in. [C]

April 1, 2002

Project update presented to NMAH Director's Council including budget, concept design. [E]

April 1, 2002

Red Cross meeting re exhibition. [E]

April 2, 2002

Office of Public Affairs meets with core team regarding public relations strategies for the exhibition. [E]

April 3, 2002

NBC Nightly News calls regarding Jan Demczur donation; other media begin calls. Turns out donor is notifying media. Event changes from donation ceremony to press opportunity. [C]

April 4, 2002

Media advisory on squeegee donation issued over U.S. Newswire. [C]

April 4, 2002

Video concept document prepared by core team for presentation to ABC News. [E]

April 5, 2002

Donation ceremony for squeegee/Jan Demczur. Turns into full blown media event with NBC News, People Magazine, Scripps Howard, etc. [C]

April 11, 2002

Historian Ed Linenthal speaks to exhibition group and collecting team-also gives *Crossroads* talk [Preserving Memory].

April 12, 2002

Public program brainstorming session. [P]

List of objects for exhibition refined. [E]

April 13, 2002

United Airlines notifies NMAH of plans to send letter, exhibition synopsis and museum contact information to the families of the passengers and crew killed on Flights 93 and 175. Letters to be sent after mid-April. [E]

April 15, 2002

Collecting curator visits Flight 93 site and meets with Somerset County parties. [C]

April 17, 2002

Team assembled for Witness Stories section. [E]

April 22, 2002

Exhibition production meeting. [E]

April 23, 2002

September 11 Web meeting with curators, others. [W]

April 25-26, 2002

Collecting trip to New York with visits to the FBI, the Naudet brothers (the French filmmakers), NYPD, Fresh Kills site, etc. [C]

April 30, 2002

Meeting with ABC representatives including Central Office of Public Affairs representative, acting director of NMAH, and staff from NMAH's Office of External Affairs. [E]

April 30, 2002

Meeting with Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs re decontamination, where we stand with collections, what we should collect. [C]

May 1, 2002

*Washington Post* reporter begins working on September 11 story, meets with associate director for curatorial affairs.

May 2, 2002

Meeting re September 11 on the Web. [W]

May 3, 2002

Reporter from the *Washington Post* interviews staff members.

May 5-6, 2002

Collecting curators visit Hugo Neu scrap yard. [C]

May 10, 2002

Preliminary object list document prepared by curatorial team. [E]

May 14, 2002

Meeting of NMAH Office of Public Affairs with September 11 collecting and exhibition teams on public relations strategies

May 16, 2002

Meeting with Holocaust Museum staff. [E]

May 17-18, 2002

Collecting curator in NY to supervise the pick-up and delivery of the large steel beam to NMAH. [C]

May 20-22, 2002

Arguments among staff over whether steel is contaminating building. [C]

May 20, 2002

Media advisory issued for briefing on September 11 exhibition and donation ceremony. [E] [C]

May 22, 2002

NMAH announces exhibition; PowerPoint presentation to national media showing exhibition design and selected objects; participation of Peter Jennings and ABC News announced. [E]

May 24, 2002

Exhibition object list almost finalized. [E]

May 30, 2002

Collecting curators visit FBI. [C]

June 7, 2002

Memo sent to Director's Council outlining recommendations for preview events for Sept. 11 exhibition including a private preview for families and rescue workers and a formal dedication ceremony and press event. [E]

June 11, 2002

Web concept design review (Information Age Theater) [W]

June 12, 2002

Exhibition team gets update from collecting group. [E]

June 20, 2002

WTC steel treatment. [C]

June 26-28, 2002

Interviews of team members for Web site[W]

June 12, 2002

Meeting on the Web [W]

July 11, 2002

Request from September 11 exhibition team for funding of additional items, including brochures and exterior signage (banners). [E]

July 11, 2002

Justification to Director's Office for advertising in Sept. 11 memorial issues of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* [E]

July, 2002

Intense work on collection descriptions for Web site by curators [W]

July 10, 2002

History Channel taping [E]

July 2, 2002

Meeting with Smithsonian Business Ventures (SBV) to talk about sensitivity around September 11th-related merchandise.

July 11, 2002

September 11 exhibition asbestos meeting (EDS room)[C]

July 18, 2002

Peter Jennings signs off on ABC video. [E]

July 24, 2002

Meeting with Strauss Radio Strategies group regarding radio news release and other radio outreach for September 11 exhibition. [E]

July 25, 2002

E-mail letters begin to go out to object donors and family groups/rescue workers. [E]

July 29-30, 2002

September 11 invitation letters for preview continue to go out. [E]

August 1, 2002

New Jersey *Bergen-Record* reporter and photographer come to do story on steel beam installed in exhibition area (only object in at this time, no wall graphics, etc. in yet). Story about beam to be embargoed until Sept. 8-11 week. [E]

August 3, 2002

OPA provides information to Pentagon Office of the Navy regarding the family preview day and distribution of information to employees. [E]

August 5, 2002

Request for additional budget to cover special events, public relations, advertising and marketing costs for the exhibition. Original allocation was \$45,000. Additional would be \$37,000 (not including ads in special memorial issues of *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*). [E]

August 5, 2002

Initial letters to families of September 11 victims inform them that we are doing exhibition and will be hosting some type of preview before the public opening; this goes out through various means in the spring. [E]

August 5, 2002

Daily exhibition team meetings begin; meeting to resolve how financial donors to the exhibition would be acknowledged. [E]

August 7, 2002

Discussions about donor recognition in exhibition and in program books. [E]  
Review of September 11 credits on Web site. [W]

August 8, 2002

Photos of curators for Web site. [W]

August 12-16, 2002

Overnight letters of invitation to Fairfax and Arlington firefighters to participate in the September 10 dedication ceremony; tracking US Army personnel to invite to ceremony. [E]

August 22, 2002

Meeting with Gen. Brown regarding the Pentagon Garrison Flag. In jeopardy of not being available by the Sept. 10 event or hanging by Sept. 11. [E]

August 22, 2002

Information to NYPD on private preview days for families and rescue workers. [E]

August 28 -September 9, 2002

Web site press release (coordination with contractor Second Story). [W]

September 3, 2002

Blue Bulletin publication on special September 11 hours for staff. [E]

Walk through for senior SI management: Larry Small, Sheila Burke, and Carol Neves. [E]

September 6-10, 2002

Coordination with Hillary Clinton's press secretary on her participation and expectations for media access. [E]

September 8 -9, 2002

Family Preview Day and early morning hours for first 2 weeks. Approximately 2,000 people attend on Sunday. [E]

September 9, 2002

National Press Club Newsmaker program with lead exhibition curator. [E]

September 9, 2002

Tour of *Bearing Witness* by First Lady and friends. [E]

September 10, 2002

Dedication Ceremony: [E]

Speakers: First Lady Laura Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Under Secretary, Acting Director of NMAH, Sen. Hillary Clinton, Chief Joseph Pfeifer.

The Pentagon flag is presented by the men who unfurled it from the roof of the Pentagon on Sept. 12, 2001.

September 10, 2002

Closed circuit broadcast into Carmichael Auditorium for staff to view the dedication ceremony. [E]

September 11, 2002

Live coverage in September 11 exhibition by ABC News. Additional coverage by reporters interested in seeing the public's response to the 1st anniversary. [E]

September 11, 2002

*Bearing Witness* exhibition opens to the public. [E]

September 11, 2002

Special State Department tour of Sept. 11 exhibition by 24 journalists from around the world through the department's International Visitors program. OPA worked to coordinate visit details with State. [E]

September 13-14, 2002

*Bearing Witness* public programs, tour and workshop [Commemorative Quilts: Piecing Together the Story of September 11]  
Public programs discussion about photojournalism, cosponsored by the Newseum [Running Toward Danger] [P]

September 17, 2002

Public programs, film and documentaries. ["Can I Get a Witness?" The Changing Face of News] [P]

September 21, 2002

Public programs discussion. [Public Catastrophe, Personal Change] [P]

September 23, 2002

Breakfast and walk-thru with SI Regents. [E]

October 1, 2002

*Crossroads* program [The Psychology of Terrorism] [P]

October 2, 2002

Smithsonian Live! program examining the making of the exhibition. [P]

October 3, 2002  
FBI visits NMAH [C]

October 4-5, 2002  
Weekend program for Fire Department of New York. [P]

October 17, 2002  
SI National Board and NMAH walk-thru and dinner. [E]

November 16, 2002  
Public programs discussion and performance. ["God Bless America"- Patriotic Music in American Life] [P]

## Appendix B.

### Appendix B: Public Programs associated with September 11\*

These programs were designed to provide visitors with a wide range of opportunities to delve more deeply into aspects of September 11th events, consequences, reactions, outcomes, and changes. The programs were free and open to the public.

#### *Crossroads*

This series of noontime conversations with the public was scheduled monthly [fall 2001-spring 2002]. It featured scholars and other specialists on topics related to September 11. An additional program was held in fall 2002 and a closing program in March 2003.

#### **2001 Wednesday, November 14, 2001**

##### ***Crossroads. Epidemics-The People's Role in Biodefense***

Victoria Harden, historian, National Institutes of Health and director, De Witt Stetten Jr. Museum of Medical Research, and Monica Schoch-Spana, senior fellow, Johns Hopkins Center for Civilian Biodefense Studies, were part of a conversation with the audience about biodefense.

12 Noon, Reception Suite.

#### **Thursday, December 13, 2001**

##### ***Crossroads. Islam in the Global Community***

A conversation with Benjamin Barber, author of *Jihad vs. McWorld*, and Sulayman Nyang, author of *Islam in the United States of America*.

Noon-1:30 p.m., Taylor Gallery.

**2002 Friday, January 11, 2002**

***Crossroads. The American Flag: Symbolism and Conflict***

A discussion on issues and questions about the flag, its use, its symbolism, and how the meaning of the flag has changed since September 11. National Museum of American History (NMAH) curator Marilyn Zoidis and Lynne Ranier from the Millburn-Short Hills Historical Society, New Jersey, discussed these questions.

12 noon. Palm Court.

**Friday, February 11, 2002**

***Crossroads. Every Picture Tells a Story***

A lunchtime conversation with Pete Souza, former presidential photographer covering the war in Afghanistan for the *Chicago Tribune*, and Tom Beck, curator of photography, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

Noon-1:30 p.m., Reception Suite.

**Tuesday, March 12, 2002**

***Crossroads. Beyond the Veil: Women's Minds and Politics in the Middle East***

Valentine Moghadam, director of the Women's Studies Program at Illinois State University, and Elaine Sciolino, senior writer in the Washington bureau of *The New York Times*, examined how women in the Middle East think about themselves; how they view American conceptions of feminism, human, and civil rights; and what they believe they share, can borrow, and need to change to make those conceptions fit their lives and goals. Haleh Esfandiari, consulting director of the Middle East Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center, moderates. Sponsors were NMAH (Lemelson Center and Office of Curatorial Affairs) and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (History and Public Policy Project and Middle East Project).

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Auditorium, 6th floor, Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

**Friday, May 5, 2002**

***Crossroads. Preserving Memory***

Historian Ed Linenthal, author of *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory*, and Carol Anderson-Austra, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project manager for the Pentagon Memorial project, discussed with the audience questions and issues about plans to memorialize the victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and the ways Americans choose to create memorials.

12 noon. Reception Suite.

**Friday and Saturday, September 13 and 14, 2002**

**Tour and Workshop. Commemorative Quilts: Piecing Together the Story of September 11**

Americans have a long tradition of making textiles to commemorate events. Visitors could take a tours of patriotic quilts in the Museum's collections and view an 80 x 5-foot stripe from the September 11 Quilt Project, a walk-through display of a 120 x 60-foot American flag with over 3,800 patches created by people from around the nation. The Project was on view September 11-14 near the Capitol. Children and adults could create and donate an individual square for the Project and talk with its directors.

12 noon-4 p.m. Textiles Hall, third floor west.

**Saturday, September 14, 2002**

**Discussion: Running Toward Danger**

Photojournalists Aris Economopoulos (*The Star-Ledger*, Newark) and Susan Watts (*New York Daily News*) recorded the events at Ground Zero. They discussed their experiences with photo historian Mary Panzer and with Cathy Trost, coauthor of the Newseum's new book, *Running Toward Danger*, which features the stories of 100 print and broadcast journalists on that day. Question-and-answer opportunity and book signing followed. Cosponsored by the Newseum.

2 p.m. Carmichael Auditorium.

**Tuesday, September 17, 2002**

**Reel Americans. "Can I Get a Witness?" The Changing Face of News**

*7 Days in September* uses footage from twenty-seven amateur and professional filmmakers to take viewers into the first week of a changed Manhattan; it includes extraordinary footage from Ground Zero. Steven Rosenbaum, the film's director and founder of CameraPlanet, and NMAH technology curator David Allison spoke after the film; audience participation was encouraged. 6:30 p.m. Four short documentaries about September 11 were shown: *Site* (by Jason Kliot); *The First 24 Hours* (Etienne Sauret); *The Voice of the Prophet* (Robert Edwards); and *A Shared Experience 04.19.95-09.11.01*, from the Oklahoma City National Memorial. 12:30 p.m., 2:30 p.m., and 5:30 p.m. Carmichael Auditorium.

**Saturday, September 21, 2002**

**Discussion: Public Catastrophe, Personal Change**

Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta and freelance photographer Stanley Honda explore the transformative power of significant events, from concentration camps to September 11, on their lives and work. The conversation was moderated by actor and civic leader George Takei. Cosponsored by the Japanese American National Museum.  
2 p.m. Carmichael Auditorium.

**Tuesday, October 1, 2002**

**Crossroads. The Psychology of Terrorism**

Jerrold Post, director of the Political Psychology Program at George Washington University, addressed the likelihood of future terrorist threats and identified groups most likely to perpetrate acts of violence and by what means. Carol Giacomo, correspondent for Reuters News Agency at the U.S. Department of State, moderated the discussion.  
12 noon. Reception Suite.

**Saturday, November 16, 2002**

**Discussion and Performance: "God Bless America"-Patriotic Music in American Life**

Irving Berlin's song has been the unofficial national anthem since Kate Smith first sang it during a Veteran's Day radio broadcast in 1938. Songs with similar sentiments have promoted comfort and unity among Americans in troubled times, and have helped define what it means to be American. NYPD Officer Daniel Rodríguez, who has sung "God Bless America" on many occasions since September 11, 2001, joined 30 area Girl Scouts in a patriotic sing-along prior to the official opening ceremony and the singing of "God Bless America." He then joined Jody Rosen (author of the just released book, *White Christmas*, about Irving Berlin's other seminal tune), and James Weaver, director of the National Music Center, on stage with NMAH cultural historian Dwight Blocker Bowers in a conversation about the power of patriotic music. The afternoon closed with film clips featuring "God Bless America" and a book signing.

Noon. Carmichael Auditorium.

**2003 Sunday, March 9, 2003**

**Discussion: What's Next? After September 11.** RoperASW research director Paul Leinberger, Yale futurist Wendell Bell and Tom Scheinfeld from the September 11 Digital Archive Project debated the past, present, and future of September 11, with an emphasis on questions of patriotism, travel and transportation, and communications. This program was sponsored in part by the Lemelson Center.

Carmichael Auditorium.

**INTERVIEWS WITH VISITORS TO THE  
*SEPTEMBER 11, 2001: BEARING WITNESS TO HISTORY* AT  
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY:  
A QUALITATIVE, ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Background**

This report presents one of two studies exploring the experience of visitors in the *September 11, 2001: Bearing Witness to History* exhibition at the National Museum of American History (NMAH). It was conducted by the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Policy and Analysis and consisted of open-ended interviews with visitors. The other study of visitors was a survey and used a handout questionnaire.

This interview study was not begun until a separate survey study of the exhibition was finished and a case study of the exhibition-making process was near completion; those two studies provided some basis for the initial interview protocol. The initial themes explored with visitors were their expectations, responses to the exhibition, information needs, and comparison of the exhibition to others in NMAH. Interviewee observations quickly expanded the scope of the interviews to include additional themes as listed in the final version of the Interview Guide (Appendix A).

## Method

For most of these interviews, interviewers intercepted visitors in the area between the exhibition<sup>1</sup> and the museum's Mall exit. Some interviews were also conducted near the Information Desk on the museum's first floor at the Constitution Avenue exit. Only visitors who were coming from elsewhere in the museum, were already sitting on hallway benches, or were clearly leaving the museum were approached. Visitors directly leaving the exhibition were not intercepted. Altogether, 27 interviews were conducted with a total of 38 interviewees during the latter half of February 2003.<sup>2</sup> The interview phase of the study was terminated when the two interviewers, who worked independently, agreed that the most recent interviews were providing comments very similar to those of earlier interviews. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis.

## Context

Although the museum was not crowded during the period of the study and most people did not appear to be in a hurry, a number of visitors who admitted that they had seen the exhibition refused to be interviewed. The refusal rate was much higher than is typical for a study of this kind. Other visitors who were seen exiting the exhibition earlier falsely denied having seen the exhibition in order to avoid an interview. This response was understandable, as the exhibition is not easy to talk about. Many interviewees cried at some point during their interview or had to stop talking for a few moments to recover their voices. It is thus possible that the study may have missed responses or opinions that were unique to those who were unwilling to be interviewed. At the same time, for those who agreed to be interviewed the discussion with the interviewers was frequently a cathartic experience. Several indicated that the interview would make it easier for them to continue their visit.

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<sup>1</sup> The exhibition is located on the museum's second floor (Mall Level) across the hall from the *First Ladies: Political Role and Public Image* exhibition.

<sup>2</sup> For a listing of the demographic characteristics of interviewees, see Appendix B.

## FINDINGS

### An Emotional Response

Interviewer: <i>What did you think of the exhibition?</i> Visitor: <i>Extremely moving. Very, very depressing. Very moving.</i>
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Nearly all interviewed visitors had strong emotional responses to the exhibition, even those who had seen it days before their interview. They described their feelings using words such as "devastating," "awesome," "disturbing," "mind-blowing," "scary," "hard to put into words," "I couldn't breathe for a second," "an emotional shock," and "I had tears in my eyes."

Interviewees were also aware, especially from the quiet inside the exhibition, that this was a moving experience for other visitors. As one college student said, "What I actually saw was a lot of emotion in there. Silence. There's so much emotion. You can tell about [it from the] silence on people's faces." A middle-aged visitor from Ireland noted, "I noticed that people are very quiet in there. People are positively hushed in there. I would describe it as emotional and disturbing to see the images again."

Interviewees who articulated their feelings more specifically spoke mostly of sadness. A few mentioned a combination of sadness and anger, "I'm just angry that it happened to us. That this happened to our country. It's a sad[ness]-and-anger-mixed feeling." One visitor admitted being angrier now than he had been at the time of the events.

Although the experience is a strong one, a few interviewees noted that the exhibition was restrained in its approach. A teacher visiting with her class said, "It's a very emotional kind of thing, but [the exhibition] is done in such a way that it doesn't try to overload your emotions. It's an emotional thing, but not just morbid emotional."

One interviewee, a college student from Michigan, did not have an emotional response to the exhibition, and felt that he needed time to understand how he felt about what he had seen.

### **Making It Real**

*I felt like [the exhibition] made it real. We watched it on TV of course, but to see the artifacts there in person made it seem real.*

Many interviewees noted that the exhibition made the events of September 11 feel real to them. They often used the same word, "real," or a variant. Their remarks suggested that this response was particularly strong because the reports on the day of the event seemed "unreal" and because the media coverage was so intense, yet somehow distant. In the words of a young woman from Illinois, "With all the media that was going on, I think everybody should know anyway what happened and this is just bringing it to you more realistically, because you get to see things that were actually at the site and read different things that happened that you didn't see on the media." Several interviewees noted that it was very important for them to be able to touch the steel beam.

### **Object Connections**

Interviewer: *What did you like best?*  
Visitor: *Probably the actual artifacts that were retrieved from the sites. I think those give you the closest connection.*

Many interviewees spoke of the impact of seeing the objects in the exhibition, especially the twisted steel. A middle-aged Air Force officer said, "The one thing of all the things that struck me was a huge piece of metal there just twisted like a pretzel and the sheer force." Interviewees were also moved by the airplane parts, the fire-truck door, the flag, the cameras, the personal items, and the telephone. One interviewee, a teacher leading a group of students, said, "The impact for young people is the personal testimony and you can't overplay that. For them to see artifacts from the Pentagon, from the World Trade Center site and ... silly things like the telephone that the husband received a call from his wife. That made an impact on our students."

## Photographs

Interviewer: *What affected you the most?*

Visitor: *Just the photographs.*

Photographs left the deepest impressions on a number of interviewees. The photograph most often discussed was the one of President Bush, "One [photograph] was very good actually; it was the photograph of when [the President] was told. I think that's probably one of the best images he could have picked." For one interviewee this photograph provided a direct link to *The American Presidency* exhibition, which he saw later.

## The Peter Jennings Video

*I think that was a powerful video, because I remember seeing that video on television when it first happened.*

Reactions to the video were more varied than for other elements in the exhibition. There was an access problem, since at times it was hard to get into the room, "That [room] was pretty well packed when I went there, so I didn't [see the video]. We stood at the doorway for a little while, but that was about it. I didn't actually go in there and hear it." When interviewees, seeking to understand the survey results, asked whether there was enough seating, the complaints about seating all addressed the availability of seats in the video room, not in the rest of the exhibition. In fact, several interviewees maintained that this is not an exhibition for sitting. A college-age visitor said, "I don't think there should be seats. I don't think this is something you should sit down and take lightly."

Some interviewees, especially teenagers, noted that they had not expected to see the video in the exhibition, but found it especially compelling. The video was effective for them because it reminded them of their first reactions, and it was a powerful experience for others who had not been watching television during the events themselves. For some the very immediacy of the video made it too strong to watch.

A young man from New York City noted that video coverage like this has changed how history is recorded, and he noted the impact that this is likely to have on exhibitions in the future, which will be "more walking into [the event] versus trying to tell you what happened. More trying to make you feel like you were there."

### **Personal Stories**

*This is something big and catastrophic that happened to the country, and personal stories give a different feel, a different flavor to it. It's within our memory.*

Interviewees attributed their emotional response in part to their vivid familiarity with the events of September 11 and to the way that the exhibition made them feel connected to what had happened. A number of interviewees described these connections as being primarily based on stories. "If I'm going to read something, the personal things are what I like to read. It makes you feel like you actually put yourself in those people's shoes, compared to just reading a fact of what happened." A college student from South Dakota reflected on the thoroughness with which stories were used in the exhibition: "Every exhibit had something personal and then you could continue on into the room where they had the computer screens in which you could listen to the messages people left on answering machines. It was like that. Very personalized. Makes it closer to home." The recording from an answering machine was noted by a number of interviewees.

### **Witness Stories**

*I liked the feedback from the people where it asked how you feel and it was posted on the wall. I liked that. I feel in touch with those people. Everybody has a feeling to share.*

Although this section of the exhibition was important for some interviewees, others did not read the statements. None of the interviewees reported leaving a comment of their own, although a few said that they might do so later or on a subsequent visit. One interviewee reported that "I had a hard time reading the

letters. They were emotionally disturbing to me. I could not read 50 of them. I managed four or five." Another noted that "having the writing tablets and things lets [visitors] express what's on their mind. It's very helpful, very healing."

### **Altered Perspectives**

*It just makes you realize how lucky you are to have the freedom you have. How lucky we are not to have been there. I hate to say it like that. It puts a new perspective on everything else you see.*

Most interviewees were asked what kind of impact the exhibition had on them and whether they thought it had changed how they felt. A few reported that they were changed by the way that the exhibition led them to think about things they had not considered before. One regarded the increased sense of the reality of the September 11 events as a change. Many interviewees felt that they had not been changed by the exhibition, although one pointed out that, "It has consolidated the feelings I've had all along."

When interviewees spoke of what they had learned in the exhibition, they mentioned information they had picked up from the personal stories, some of the artifacts, and the video. One teenager just wanted to know what happened, "I want to know more about it. I want to know really what happened on the news. I didn't get a chance to watch most of it because I was in school."

### **Return Visits**

Interviewer: *Why do you say that you'd visit again?*  
Visitor: *We didn't get to do every little aspect of it.*

A few interviewees said that they would not visit the exhibition again because it was too disturbing, "One time is enough. It's very real." Most interviewees expressed an interest in returning, whether to show it to someone else, to notice more on a subsequent visit, to note what changes had been made, or just to "stay reminded" of the September 11 events. One interviewee who works in the vicinity said that he had been in the exhibition a number of times and had seen everything in it.

## History

*It's a good exhibit. It captures a lot about what happened, and it's American history, so it's here. It's a good thing, I think, because people forget easily.*

At some point in nearly every interview, an interviewee would characterize the exhibition in a general way. Overlapping classifications can be derived from these descriptions: "history," "what happened," "what others felt," "a reminder," and "a memorial."

Interviewees who described the exhibition as history were referring to the importance of its subject, "This is something big and catastrophic that happened to the country and, like I said, personal stories give it a different feel, a different flavor....everything we see here [in this museum] is a bit of our history. This is our history too and it needs to be preserved." A few disagreed that the exhibition could be called history, "Everything here is more history, and to me [the 9/11 exhibition] is more of a tragedy. I guess it will be history, but for me it's a little too new yet to be history; it's tragedy."

When talking about this exhibition, interviewees related September 11 to current events, such as terrorism and the pending Iraq War, as well as to prominent tragedies of the recent past, such as the Holocaust and Pearl Harbor.

Describing the exhibition as "what happened" or "what others felt" drew attention to its immediacy and impact. "[The exhibition] was—awesome isn't the word, but you really felt what had happened."

Seeing the exhibition as a "reminder" referred to its social function: "It's a good thing to have so that people won't forget." Along this same line, a number of interviewees called the exhibition a "memorial" when describing how it worked for them: "I think that a memorial is what it is. It's not as much of a deterrent, but, yes, a memorial, and I think it's very effective. I know it will last with me."

Calling the exhibition a memorial emphasized its emotional effect: "I think a memorial is more what we're looking for—just like a memory of what happened.

I think everyone knows what happened. I think everyone in the future will know what happened. A memorial hits your feelings more than an explanation does. I think that what matters the most is the feeling." Several interviewees compared the impact of the exhibition to their experience of the Holocaust Museum and the Vietnam War Memorial.

### Uniqueness

*When it comes to most exhibits in the museum we weren't around to see [the events they present], we weren't around to experience them, and when it comes to something like [this exhibition] we were all around to experience it.*

A few interviewees said that the exhibition was not different from others in the museum, but most interviewees felt otherwise. Three points were cited as salient differences: the topic is recent, the effect is emotional, and the presentation is not interpretive. Temporal and emotional distance were sometimes linked, as in this remark by a visitor who is very fond of the museum and history, "I think that everything else [in this museum, such as] George Washington—I've never met him. I never saw him on TV. —but this, I was really living it and experiencing it."

### Not Interpretive

*I think [the exhibition] is the impact of people's experience, and what happened, and what it was like.*

Interviewees were asked how they felt about the fact that the exhibition is not interpretive. A few wanted to know more about what led to the attack and what took place as a result of the attack. A teenager from Oklahoma said, "I was looking for what they thought the terrorists were doing with the planes. How they got everything and what was their motive for doing this and how they were going to stop anything like this from happening again."

One interviewee, a college student from Michigan, was fundamentally opposed to the exhibition's non-interpretive approach: "In and of itself it's one event, but it also sparks a lot of following events. .... I see this as the beginning of something, but not in and of itself worth an entire exhibit. We've all been there, we've all seen it, we all saw it as a pretty horrible thing, but I didn't need to go

back and re-live that day again and that's kind of what this was all about. I would want it to be the beginning of a larger exhibit."

Some interviewees felt that more information and context could be added later, "evolving" the exhibition over time. As the college student from Michigan said, "There's just not enough yet to support it." In the opinion of several other interviewees more information will be required as the event grows more distant. Another college student from out of town said, "Maybe 30 years from now you might need to put some explanation."

A number of interviewees felt that interpretation and context were simply not necessary in this case. They seemed to view contextual information as distancing and superfluous. As one visiting teacher said, "I enjoyed it the way it was. I don't need a walk through the history of it. As you walk through, it does that itself." Another interviewee felt that issues such as what motivated the perpetrators should be handled in "another forum," and that the exhibition was about "human suffering." Others pointed out that background information can easily be obtained elsewhere.

Some interviewees were directly opposed to the idea of interpretation and explanation in history exhibitions. Collectively they provided two reasons. First, people have different values and perspectives and legitimately see things differently: "I don't think we necessarily have to have somebody telling us 'this is what this signifies, this is why it's important.' It may not be important to that person. Their value systems may be totally different." Second, a history museum should be objective and should not favor one viewpoint over another: "I'm a real history buff and I hate people who want to interpret history for me." Along with both of these reasons was the belief that a history museum should just "show it [to the point] where you can get the feeling. You don't want to be told what to feel. I think you can experience through the pictures, or just by looking at the stuff. You can put yourself there."

A few interviewees spoke directly about personal interpretation and meaning-

making in this exhibition. A middle-aged woman from England said, "I would say [the exhibition] is reflective. To a degree that's the nature of reflection—by its nature it is interpretation as well, because we all walk away with something different from somebody else. I came away with a very different impression than somebody else."

### **Include More**

*I would like see more things that hold your attention, so that you would stay in the exhibit longer than what you would probably stay in there now.*

In addition to the interviewees who wanted more information regarding the context of September 11, as noted above, there were those who wanted more artifacts, more stories, more photographs, more video, and more for children. In a few cases interviewees articulated specific reasons for wanting more. A woman from Wisconsin said, "There are just a few exhibits of the firefighters and the policemen, but I almost think that they need to be honored more. When you think of what they did in going into those buildings to save people and how many of them didn't come out, I think that there are more stories there to be told."

The one visitor who wanted more for children, an elderly man from California visiting with his grandson, felt that they needed more background, "For the younger people, who weren't really paying much attention to it and just heard what their parents had to say a couple of days afterward, there could be more in there for them to gain retrospect of what was going on."

Some interviewees specifically stated that the exhibition should not be changed, and one interpreted the exhibition's relatively spare approach as restraint: "I felt that the exhibit did that in a very understated way. I think that sometimes you see very powerful images and they can be overplayed, and when you overplay something, it loses its impact. So I often find, especially with students, that if you underplay something, it has a much greater significance, and that's certainly been their experience in the museum."

## Don't Close It

*You shouldn't take [the exhibition] out or nothing, if that is what this [interview] is about.*

Whether or not they wanted it to be expanded or changed in some fashion, all but one interviewee felt that the exhibition should not be closed in the near future. Most were strongly insistent on that point, and a number of interviewees observed how glad they were that the exhibition had continued past the posted closing date and that they had been able to see it. "When I saw that this exhibit was open on your website, I was just like, 'oh my gosh, we've got to get our students in here to see this.'"

Most of the interviewees felt that the events of September 11 were too important not to be in the museum. "I think it should definitely stay because it's forever going to be like a changing point in American history. It would be kind of weird to have a museum about American history without including it." "I think it should be permanent. I think September 11th unalterably changed the soul of America. I think it's probably one of the most important things you have in this museum."

To support their case for keeping the exhibition open, some interviewees also referred to the responses of other visitors, as evidenced by the number of people entering the exhibition, the depth of attention they demonstrate, and the exhibition's impact on younger visitors. A man from Vermont said, "Look at the people that go in and out. It's obvious that people do go and see it. It's worth having, and it's a good reminder, and [the museum] should have more of them."

## CONCLUSIONS

For nearly all of the interviewees in this study of *September 11, 2001: Bearing Witness to History*, the exhibition was a powerful, compelling experience. Although each person's response was distinct, patterns were apparent, and sometimes those patterns conflicted. No exhibition can please everyone. Since this study is not based on a representative sample, it cannot rank one position above or below another on the basis of the number of people who expressed a position. Moreover, the composition of the audience at the National Museum of American History changes over the year, and opinions and attitudes change with events. Realizing how many current events can be traced back to September 11, 2001, might the exhibition not seem even more important to visitors a month from now than it did to visitors in February?

Many interviewees noted that the exhibition is different from the rest of the museum - emotional and current - and valued that difference. This suggests that there is an unmet demand for exhibitions that are distinctive not just in subject matter, but also in the way they are presented and the type of experiences that they target.

From the composite opinions of interviewees across all the interviews, it might be inferred how visitors collectively envision the ideal history museum: a place of remembering and connecting to events, people, and things. Contents would be chosen on the basis of what is important, what marks a turning point, what expresses a shared value, what tells a compelling story, and what makes a meaningful connection. Personal stories are clearly important, but so, too, apparently, are positive and negative emotions, dramatic images, and links to experiences. In this ideal history museum, it would seem that text needs to be used carefully. Some feel that words are required to make a connection, while others prefer to experience the past directly through objects or images. Some require interpretation or explanation, and some dislike it. From the perspective of inter-

viewees the ideal history museum can be trusted because it is the place that reveals "what happened" in an objective, non-evaluative way.

Museum professionals might consider such views naïve, since they fail to take into account the problems of what to represent and what to ignore, and, in presenting what is selected, whose experience preferences should be given prominence and whose should not. Such questions are not easily resolved, but listening to the range of visitor viewpoints in exhibitions of different types should help to encourage diverse, imaginative answers.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **Bearing Witness Visitor Interview Study**

#### **Interview Guide, Version 3**

#### **Themes and possible questions**

#### **March 5, 2003**

##### **Expectation**

How did you learn about the exhibition? What were you told about it?  
What kind of exhibition did you expect it to be?

##### **Response**

What did you like least about the exhibition? Most?  
Does the exhibition have a message?

##### **Information needs**

Did the exhibition have too little, enough, or too much information for you?  
What kind of information would you have liked to see added?

##### **Different**

Is this exhibition different from what you expected it to be?  
Is this exhibition different from others in the museum?

##### **Interpretation vs. Memorial**

Some people feel that history exhibitions should be interpretive and should explain what happened and why. Others think that exhibitions like September 11, which just shows you what happened, are fine. What do you think?

### **Impact**

Do you feel different about anything since you saw September 11?  
Some people have told me they left feeling more angry, some that they left feeling less angry? What about you?

### **Closing**

There's been some discussion in the museum about whether or not to close the exhibition. It was put up for the first anniversary and the anniversary is over. What do you think?

### **Effect on visit**

Did you see any exhibitions after you saw September 11? What did you think about them? Was your experience of them affected by seeing September 11? Would you have felt differently about your visit to the museum today, if September 11 hadn't been here?

### **Re-visit**

Would you go back to the exhibition again? If so, why?

### **Seating**

Some have said the exhibition needs more seats. Do you agree? What did they mean?

**APPENDIX B**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES**

<b>Gender</b>	Male 21
	Female 17
<b>Ages</b>	Teens: 7
	20s: 8
	30s: 9
	40s: 7
	50s: 3
	60s: 2
	80s: 1
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Caucasian: 36
	African American: 1
	Asian: 1
<b>Visits to Smithsonian</b>	First Visit: 7
	Return Visit: 8
	Unknown: 23
<b>Residence</b>	Local: 2
	Non-local US: 33
	International: 3

Note: Gender, age and ethnicity were estimated by interviewers in most cases, and not all visitors were asked about prior visits to the Smithsonian.

**A QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF  
SEPTEMBER 11: BEARING WITNESS TO HISTORY**

**BACKGROUND**

*September 11: Bearing Witness to History (Bearing Witness)* opened on September 11, 2002, the one-year anniversary of the tragic attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the crash of a fourth hijacked airliner at Shanksville, PA.

The Office of Policy and Analysis was asked to conduct a case study of the exhibition's development; a qualitative, ethnographic investigation of visitors' experiences in the exhibition; and a quantitative assessment of visitors' reaction to the exhibition. This section of the report presents the findings of the quantitative assessment.

This assessment was based on a survey of visitors exiting the museum. That location was chosen because both NMAH and OP&A study teams<sup>1</sup> anticipated that visitors might be emotionally upset when exiting the exhibition. Talking with people at the museum exit would be less intrusive due to the passage of time between leaving the exhibition and exiting the museum. In addition, surveying NMAH visitors as they left the building made it possible to include

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<sup>1</sup> Key NMAH team members included Jim Gardner, Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs, Nancy McCoy, Director of Education, and Julia Forbes, Senior Educator. OP&A team members included David Karns, project manager, Kerry DiGacomo, field research manager, and Ioana Munteanu, data preparation supervisor. In addition, several other OP&A staff members, including Carole M. P. Neves, Director, contributed time and expertise to the design of the survey instrument. Interviewing was conducted by Olchak Market Research.

persons who did not spend time in the exhibition.

— 78 —

The survey results are presented in Appendix A. Survey methodology is discussed in Appendix B and the questionnaire is presented in Appendix C.

## ATTENDING *BEARING WITNESS*

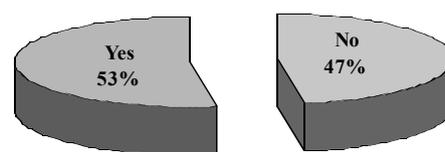
More visitors planned to see *Bearing Witness* than other exhibitions.

Upon leaving the museum, slightly more than half of visitors who responded to the survey reported that they visited the museum with the intention of seeing a particular exhibition or doing something specific such as shopping or eating (see Figure 1).

Visitors making their first visit to the Smithsonian and NMAH were significantly less likely (41%) to mention a specific destination than repeat visitors (59%). Local visitors were more likely (62%) to have a specific destination than other visitors (48%). Women (59%) were more destination-oriented than men (47%). Similarly, the most educated visitors were more destination-oriented (61% of visitors with a graduate degree compared to 37% of those without a college degree).

**Figure 1**

**Visitor Wanted to See or Do Something in Particular**

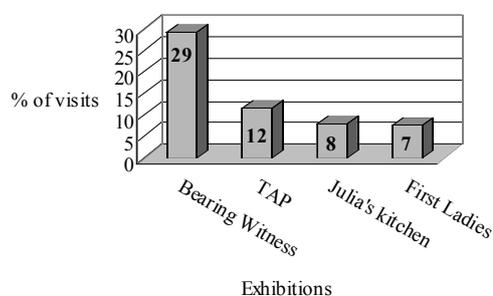


Source: Appendix A: Table 1

At the time of the survey, *Bearing Witness* was the most frequently

**Figure 2**

**Destination Exhibitions**



Source: Appendix A: Table 2

mentioned exhibition destination (see Figure 2).

More than one-fourth of visitors who specified a particular NMAH exhibition or activity said that they wanted to see *Bearing Witness*. Mentioned less frequently as destination exhibitions were *The American Presidency (TAP)* (12% of visitors with a destination in mind) and *First Ladies* (7%), two historically popular NMAH exhibition. *Bearing Witness* attracted more younger visitors (under 45), women, local visitors and recent, repeat

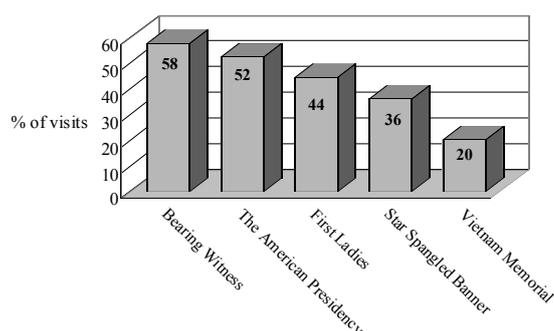
visitors compared with *TAP* and *First Ladies*.

*Bearing Witness* was the most frequently visited NMAH exhibition in December 2002.

More visitors said they visited *Bearing Witness* (58%) than three other major, iconic exhibitions or another similarly commemorative exhibition at NMAH (see Figure 3). This is consistent with the previous finding that more visitors, interviewed as they left the museum, said that they had arrived with an intention of visiting *Bearing Witness*. *The American Presidency* drew fewer, but not significantly fewer, visits (52%). *First*

**Figure 3**

Selected NMAH Exhibitions Visited on This Visit



Source: Appendix A: Table 3

*Ladies* appears to have been less visited; however, this may be a result of the significant gender bias in visits to *First Ladies* (52 percent of women spent time in the exhibition compared with 39 percent of men). The attraction of *First Ladies* was even stronger for first-time, female visitors (69%) (see Appendix A: Table 4). None of the other four exhibitions, including *Bearing Witness*, showed significant differences in visiting percentages between males and females.

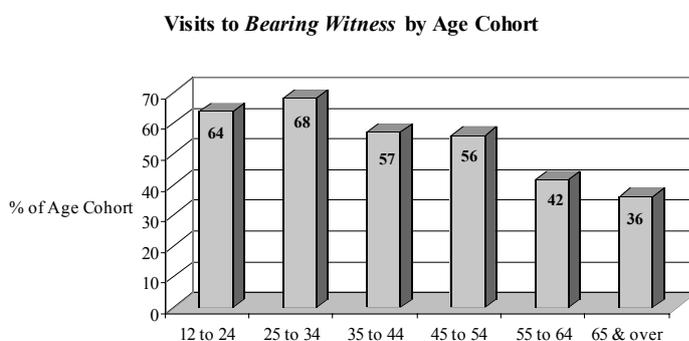
*Bearing Witness* visitation was significantly correlated with the ages of NMAH visitors (see Figure 4). Roughly two-thirds of younger visitors (under 35 years old) visited the exhibition compared with fewer than two-fifths of visitors 55 years old and older.

The exhibition also captured the attention of a smaller share of visitors who had been to NMAH within the past five years (51%) than of other visitors (65%).

Given that nearly three out of five NMAH visitors reported visiting

*Bearing Witness*, what reasons did the remaining two-fifths give as reasons for not seeing it? The most frequently cited reason for not visiting *Bearing Witness* was “Didn’t know that it was there” (10% of all visitors or 25% of those visitors who did not see the exhibition) even though it was located near the Mall entrance and directly across the corridor from *First Ladies* (see Figure 5).

**Figure 4**

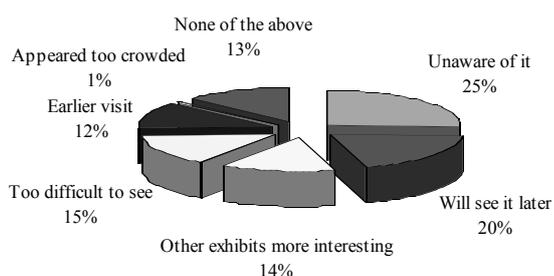


Source: Appendix A: Table 5

Awareness and visiting of *Bearing Witness* appeared to be related to visitors’ movements within the building. Visitors exiting NMAH through

**Figure 5**

**Stated Reasons for Not Visiting *Bearing Witness***  
Percentages based on *Bearing Witness* non-visitors



Source: Appendix A: Table 6

the Constitution Avenue exit were less likely to see *Bearing Witness* (49%) compared to those exiting through the Mall exit (66%). In addition, visitors exiting to Constitution Avenue were less aware of *Bearing Witness* (16% of all exiting visitors and 33% of non-visitors to *Bearing Witness*) than those exiting the Mall door (5% of all exiting visitors and 15% of non-visitors to *Bearing Witness*) Likewise, *First Ladies*’ visitors showed greater awareness of *Bearing Witness*

compared with other NMAH visitors. Among persons who did not visit *Bearing Witness* and also did not visit *First Ladies*, visitors exiting through the Constitution Avenue exit were 28 percent more likely to report lack of awareness of *Bearing Witness* (42% of those who did not

see *Bearing Witness*) than those leaving to the Mall (13%). There were no significant differences among *First Ladies* visitors exiting through the two NMAH exits.

One-fifth of visitors who did not see *Bearing Witness* said that they would see it later (20%). Fourteen percent said that other exhibitions were more interesting. One out of eight visitors mentioned having seen the exhibition on an earlier visit (12%). Since the exhibition only opened four months before the survey, prior visitation was confined to recent NMAH visitors. One-third of those persons who visited NMAH during the last year said that they had visited *Bearing Witness* (31%) on an earlier NMAH visit.

An appearance of crowding was a minimal factor in visitors' decisions to visit the exhibition even though some visitors had to wait in line to enter the exhibition (1%).

One out of seven non-visitors to the exhibition chose "too difficult to see," as their reason for not visiting. Visitors interpreted this as meaning emotionally too difficult during the survey pretesting. Nearly one-quarter for visitors who visited *First Ladies* found *Bearing Witness* content potentially "difficult to see" (24% of non-visitors if previous *Bearing Witness* visitors are excluded). Statistical analysis showed that this response was related to gender and to visiting *First Ladies*. Women who visited *First Ladies* were most likely to say that *Bearing Witness* would be too difficult to see (32%), while men and women who did not visit *First Ladies* were much less likely to choose this reason (approximately 12%).



### EVALUATING *BEARING WITNESS*

*Bearing Witness* visitors encountered interesting objects and activities in the exhibition.

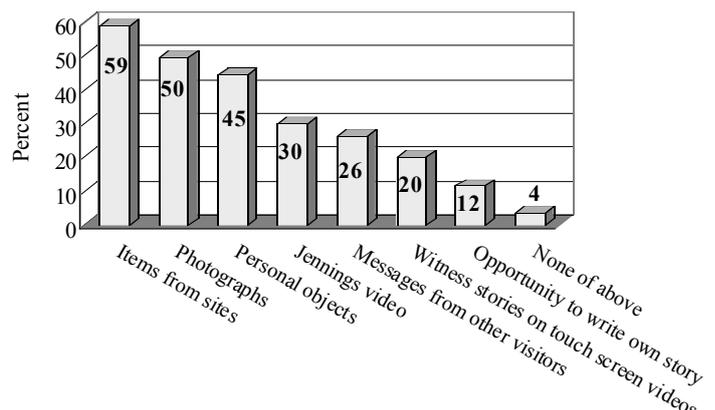
A large majority of exhibition visitors encountered something in the exhibition that they found interesting (70%) as reported in Appendix A: Table 7. Women (77%) were more likely to report something interesting than men (64%).

Visitors who said that “one thing was especially interesting” were asked what that “one thing” was. In their open-ended answers, they were most taken with the artifacts: building beams from the World Trade Center; objects from the Pentagon, first responder artifacts such as a fire truck door, and so forth (39%) and the video narrated by Peter Jennings (17%) (see Appendix A: Table 8).

In addition to the open-ended answers, *all* visitors were asked whether certain, specific exhibition aspects enhanced their visit experience<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 6). Items from the September 11 sites (59%) and photographs (50%) were identified by a

**Figure 6**

**Exhibition Aspects that Enhanced Visit Satisfaction**



Source: Appendix A: Table 9

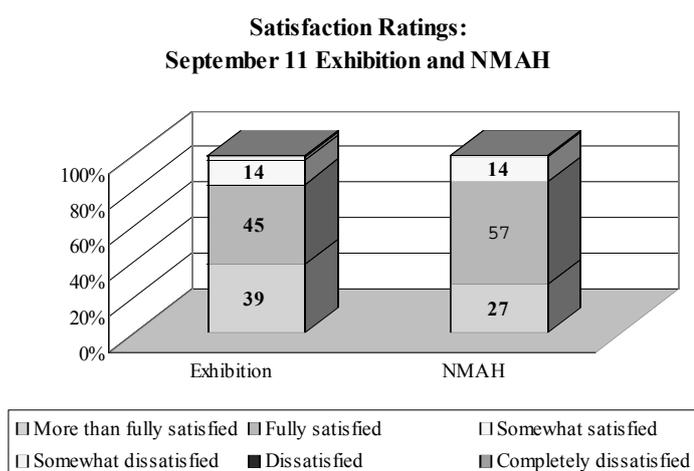
<sup>2</sup> Visitors were *not* asked whether any of these aspects detracted from their experience.

majority of visitors as aspects of the exhibition that enhanced their visits. Slightly fewer visitors identified personal objects (45%) from a list of factors.

*Bearing Witness* visitors were satisfied with their experiences in the exhibition and were more satisfied with their NMAH experiences than NMAH visitors who did not visit the exhibition.

Nearly four out of ten (39%) *Bearing Witness* visitors indicated that they were “more than fully satisfied,” the top category on the six-point scale used to measure satisfaction (see Figure 7). Using the same scale, slightly more than a quarter of all visitors exiting NMAH gave the same high rating to their overall museum experience (27%). *Bearing Witness* differs from a more typical satisfaction pattern in which visitors state that the museum is more satisfying than a particular exhibition. For example, in a previous study of *The American Presidency*, 33 percent rated the exhibition as either a nine or ten (on a ten-point scale), compared to 46 percent giving NMAH a nine or ten in the same survey. One-fifth of *Explore The Universe* visitors (20%) rated their satisfaction with the exhibition as “outstanding” (6 on a scale from 1 to 6) and one-third rated NASM as outstanding (33%).

**Figure 7**



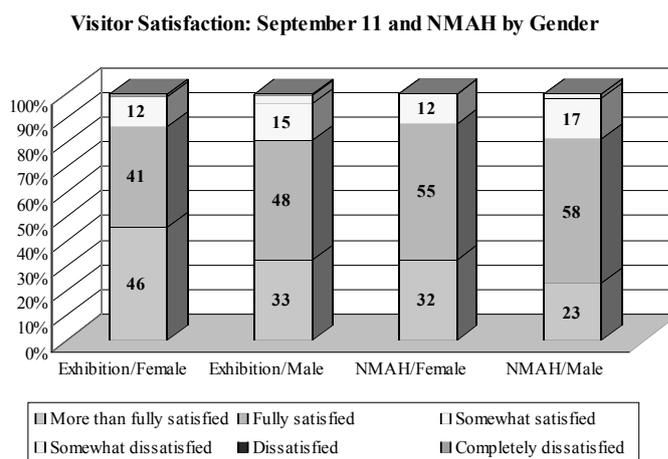
Source: Appendix A, Tables 19-20

A possible hypothesis for the museum being more satisfying than an exhibition is that visitors rate the museum on the basis of their most satisfying experiences, and those experiences may occur in other exhibitions as well as in the exhibition being evaluated. In fact, *Bearing Witness* visitors gave significantly higher ratings to their NMAH experience than other visitors (31% of *Bearing Witness* visitors were

more than fully satisfied compared to 23% of those who did not visit the exhibition).

Gender was significantly linked to satisfaction, both in the exhibition and NMAH. Women were consistently more satisfied than men (see Figure 8). In the case of the exhibition, there was a 13 percent difference between women and men who were “more than fully satisfied,” with a slightly smaller difference for the museum overall (9%).

**Figure 8**



Source: Appendix A, Table 21

Visitor surveys frequently show that visitors feel that the number of objects in Smithsonian exhibitions is “about right.” For example, ten percent of visitors in OP&A’s survey of the *The American Presidency* (TAP) audience<sup>3</sup> said that there were too many objects compared to five percent saying too few. Similarly, five percent of *Explore the Universe* (ETU) visitors at NASM said that the exhibition had too many objects and nine percent said too few. Slightly more ETU visitors felt that there was too much information (12%) than too little information (10%).

Twenty-two percent of visitors to *Bearing Witness* would have liked to have more information and 36 percent of visitors would have preferred more objects in the exhibition (see Figure 9). Desiring more information and wanting more objects are correlated. That is, most visitors who said

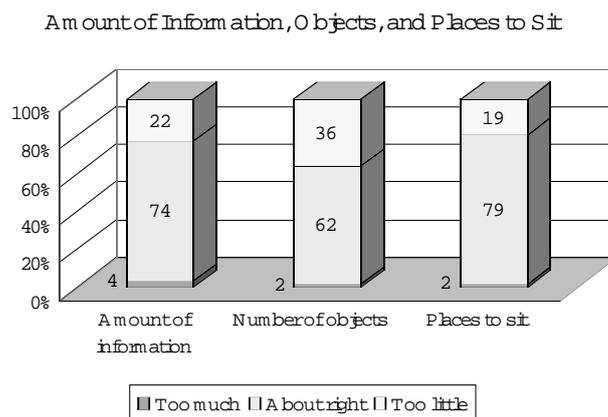
<sup>3</sup> Office of Policy and Analysis, *Studies of Visitors at The American Presidency* (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 2001) and *Three Studies of Explore the Universe* (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 2002). These studies are available on the Office of Policy and Analysis web site ([www.si.edu/opanda/reports/](http://www.si.edu/opanda/reports/))

that there was too little information also said that there were too few objects (70%).

Almost invariably, visitor surveys indicate a desire for more places to sit in exhibitions. The NMAH design staff purposely planned more seating in *Bearing Witness* than in a typical exhibition. Nineteen percent of visitors to *Bearing Witness* felt that more seating would be desirable (compared with 2% who said too much). *Bearing Witness* visitors perceived less of a need for additional seating than *TAP* visitors (30%) or *ETU* visitors (49%).

Visitors were significantly less likely to say “too little” during less crowded periods. The interest in more seating appears to have been primarily influenced by a feeling that there were too few seats and too little space in the room dedicated to the Peter Jennings video.

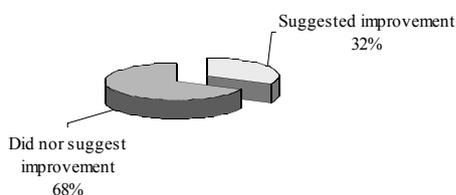
**Figure 9**



Source: Appendix A: Tables 10-12

**Figure 10**

Visitors Who Suggested Improvements to *Bearing Witness*



Source: Appendix A: Table 13

When visitors were specifically asked what changes would improve the exhibition, one-third of the visitors suggested improvements primarily in size, quantity of information and artifacts, and exhibition layout (see Figure 10). In comparison, fewer than half of *ETU* visitors (47%) said that the exhibition could be improved.

As might be expected from the previous discussion of number of objects and amount

of information, the most commonly mentioned improvement was to increase the number of artifacts (25%) even though a majority of visitors felt that the number was about right (see Appendix A: Table 14). In addition, visitors suggested:

- A larger exhibition space (18%),
- Adding more information about the historical, social, and political context in which the attacks occurred (11%),
- Improving aspects of the exhibition design to facilitate moving around (11%), and
- Improving the design of the room where the video played (10%).

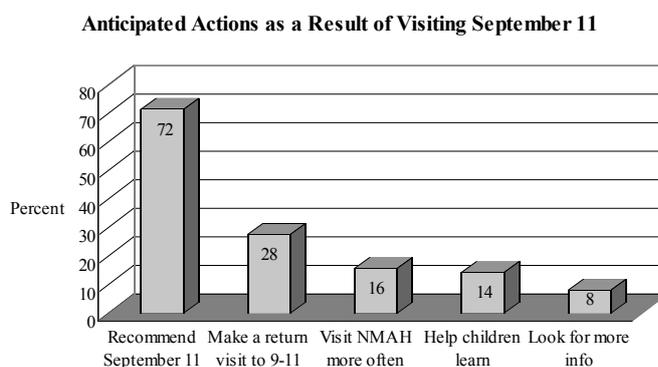
## REACTING TO *BEARING WITNESS*

*September 11: Bearing Witness to History* visitors expect to recommend the exhibition to other persons.

Nearly three-quarters of *Bearing Witness* visitors said that they would recommend the exhibition to a friend (72%), almost double the percentage for *Explore The Universe* visitors (39%) (see Figure 11). One-quarter (28%) said that they would make a return visit to the exhibition, lower than the 40 percent for *ETU*.

Fewer than 20 percent of visitors said that *Bearing Witness* was likely to make them visit NMAH more often (16%). Even smaller percentages indicated that the exhibition will result in helping children learn about September 11 events (14%), or visitors, themselves, looking for more information (8%).

**Figure 11**



Source: Appendix A, Table 15

*Bearing Witness* is appropriate for children 12 years old and younger, as well as for adults.

A mere one percent of NMAH visitors felt that *Bearing Witness* was not appropriate for youth of any age. Four out of five (80%) felt that the exhibition was appropriate for youth of any age, while another fifth (19%) said that it was appropriate for teenagers although not for younger children (see Appendix A: Table 16).

Many *Bearing Witness* visitors either live near a September 11 crash site or have visited a September 11 site; however, site visits and nearby residence are not related to decisions to visit the exhibition.

One quarter of all *Bearing Witness* visitors (26%) said that they lived near a September 11 crash site (see Appendix A: Table 17). One third of all visitors (33%) indicated that they had visited a crash site, with local visitors more likely to have made such a visit (41%) than other visitors (29%). Neither having visited a September 11 site, nor living near a site, was significantly associated with a greater propensity to visit the exhibition.

While most *Bearing Witness* visitors felt that the amount of information presented in the exhibition was adequate, expressing interest in additional information, being able to read messages from earlier visitors, seeing the Peter Jennings video, and expressing interest in additional items from the September 11 sites were the most important aspects of the exhibition affecting visitor satisfaction in the exhibition.

The NMAH team designed several elements of *Bearing Witness* to enhance visitors' experiences, and to help them connect emotionally with the September 11 events. The OP&A team attempted to determine what aspects of the exhibition experience had the most significant impact on visitor satisfaction beyond the relative number of visitors in the museum. The analysis excluded demographic variables such as age, education, residence, and so forth, to emphasize factors that are under the control of museum exhibition teams<sup>4</sup> (see Appendix B for a discussion of the analysis methodology).

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<sup>4</sup> Excluding demographic variables did not affect the data analysis since only gender appeared in any data analyses among all possible demographic variables.

The statistically most important factor correlated with differences in satisfaction ratings—even though the ratings are high across all visitors—was whether the visitor expressed an interest in more information in the exhibition (see Appendix A: Table 28).

The second most significant factor was whether visitors said that messages and comments left by earlier visitors enhanced their visits, a positive response to the exhibition.

In general, when a visitor: (1) felt that the amount of information was at least adequate; (2) appreciated messages left by other visitors; (3) felt that the number of artifacts was at least adequate; and (4) appreciated the Peter Jennings newscast, visitor satisfaction was greater than fully satisfied (63%).

## SUMMARY

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY (NMAH) VISITORS WERE ATTRACTED TO *BEARING WITNESS*, AN EXHIBITION ABOUT A SALIENT CONTEMPORARY EVENT, WITHOUT HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION, AND THEY WERE SATISFIED WITH THEIR EXPERIENCE .

*September 11: Bearing Witness to History* drew a greater share of NMAH visitors during December 2002 than the most traditionally popular NMAH exhibitions such as *First Ladies: Political Role and Public Image (First Ladies)*, *The Star Spangled Banner (SSB)*, and *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden (TAP)*. In addition, a number of visitors said that they came to the museum to see *Bearing Witness* in particular, rather than other permanent or temporary NMAH exhibitions. Visitors surveyed while exiting the museum were satisfied. *Bearing Witness* visitors rated their overall NMAH experiences more favorably than non-visitors.

ALTHOUGH MOST VISITORS FELT THAT THE EXHIBITION PRESENTED ADEQUATE INFORMATION AND OBJECTS, SOME VISITORS PREFERRED MORE OBJECTS AND INFORMATION THAN THE EXHIBITION DEVELOPERS FELT WERE APPROPRIATE.

Previous studies of NMAH visitors have consistently demonstrated that most visitors enter the museum with the expectation that their most satisfying experience is likely to be a learning experience. A majority of *Bearing Witness* visitors felt that the amount of information in the exhibition was adequate. However, a minority believed that there was too little information in the exhibition. This negative comment about the exhibition, was the single most important opinion in the survey separating higher satisfaction from lower satisfaction. Even though a majority of visitors felt that the amount of information was adequate, overall satisfaction might have been increased if there had been more information for

visitors who wanted it. The survey did not, however, reveal exactly what visitors meant by "more information." As discussed in the section describing the one-on-one, in-depth interviews with visitors, many visitors who wanted more information were seeking information to place the tragic events in a larger context. It also did not address whether more information or objects would have reduced the satisfaction of the majority of visitors.

#### EXHIBITION COMPONENTS THAT ACTIVELY INVOLVED VISITORS WITH OTHER VISITORS ENHANCED VISITOR EXPERIENCES.

*Bearing Witness*, included an area where visitors could write messages expressing their feelings about the events of September 11, 2001, and another area where they could read messages left by previous visitors. The opportunity to read and write personal messages enhanced visitor experiences. Being able to read messages written by other visitors was the most important positive factor in the survey separating higher satisfaction from lower satisfaction, although the negative comment about too little information was more significant. Contemporary event and commemorative exhibitions, as contrasted with exhibitions that are primarily designed to present information or exhibit artifacts, may benefit from providing an opportunity for visitors to exchange views, even though not all visitors will take advantage of the opportunity.

#### SOME NMAH VISITORS CHOSE NOT TO VISIT *BEARING WITNESS* EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY HAVE VISITED *FIRST LADIES* DIRECTLY ACROSS THE CORRIDOR.

NMAH visitors spend varying amounts of time in the building. Half, particularly local visitors, enter with a plan to see specific exhibitions or to perform certain activities, such as shopping or eating. Some visitors with a limited amount of time to spend in NMAH, on the day that they participated in the survey, went to exhibitions that they believed to be more interesting to them than *Bearing Witness*. A small number said that the subject matter made the exhibition too difficult to see. Finally, a small

number of visitors indicated that they were unaware of the exhibition, although they visited *First Ladies* which is located across the corridor and likely saw *Bearing Witness* visitors waiting in line to enter the exhibition during some of the data collection. More than a quarter of local visitors said that they had already seen *Bearing Witness* on an earlier visit, and, therefore, skipped it on the survey day.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Survey Results

Table 1  
Visitor Wanted to See Something in Particular on This Visit

Response	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
No	47	53	43
Yes	53	47	57
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Difference between visitors and non-visitors is statistically significant.

Table 2  
Principal Exhibition, Type of Object, or Activity Wanted to See or Do on  
This Visit

Exhibition	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
<i>Bearing Witness</i>	29	1	46
<i>The American Presidency</i>	12	12	12
<i>Julia Child's Kitchen</i>	8	12	6
<i>First Ladies</i>	7	9	7
Transportation/Trains/ Maritime	7	8	7
Culture/Pop culture exhibition/artifact	5	8	4
Museum shop restaurant	5	7	4
Military artifacts	4	7	2
<i>West Point</i>	2	8	0
Science related exhibitions	3	4	2
<i>Star Spangled Banner</i>	2	2	2
<i>Information Age</i>	2	4	1
<i>Within These Walls</i>	2	2	1
<i>Vietnam Memorial</i>	1	3	0
<i>Invention and Play</i>	1	2	0
Other	8	11	6
Total Percentage	99	100	100

Note: Difference between visitors and non-visitors is statistically significant.

Table 3  
Selected NMAH Exhibitions Visited on This Visit

Exhibition	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
<i>Bearing Witness</i>	58	*	100
<i>The American Presidency</i>	52	45	57
<i>First Ladies</i>	44	32	54
<i>Star Spangled Banner</i>	36	29	40
<i>Vietnam Memorial</i>	20	15	24

Table 4  
Visits to Selected NMAH Exhibitions: All Visitors and by Gender  
(Percentage of visitor demographic groups)

Demographic group	<i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	<i>The American Presidency</i> (%)	<i>First Ladies</i> * (%)	<i>Star Spangled Banner</i> (%)	<i>Vietnam Memorial</i> (%)
All visitors	58	52	44	36	20
Female	56	50	51	35	18
Male	59	54	39	37	22

\* Statistically significant difference between male and female visitors.

Table 5  
Visits to *September 11: Bearing Witness to History* by Age of Visitor

Visited	Age of visitor					
	12 to 24 (%)	25 to 34 (%)	35 to 44 (%)	45 to 54 (%)	55 to 64 (%)	65 & over (%)
Yes	64	68	57	56	42	36
No	36	32	43	44	58	64
Total percentage	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 6  
Stated Reason for Not Visiting *Bearing Witness* on  
This Visit

Reason for not visiting	Percent of Visitors (%)
Unaware of it	25
Will see it later	20
Other exhibits more interesting	14
Too difficult to see	15
Earlier visit	12
Appeared too crowded	1
None of the above	13
Total percentage	100

Table 7  
Found Something Especially Interesting in *Bearing  
Witness*

Found interesting thing	Percent of Visitors (%)
Yes	70
No	30
Total percentage	100

Table 8  
Aspects of *Bearing Witness* that were Identified by  
Visitors Who Found Something Especially  
Interesting\*

Exciting thing	Percent of Visitors (%)
Artifacts	39
Newscast	17
Personal stories	11
Photographs	10
Personal artifacts	8
Comment cards/messages	8
Exhibition design/presentation	7
Total percentage	100

Note: Responses limited to visitors who said that they found something interesting or exciting.

Table 9  
Aspects of *Bearing Witness* That Enhanced Visit Satisfaction

Aspect	Percent of Visitors (%)
Items from sites	59
Photographs	50
Personal objects	45
Jennings video	30
Messages from other visitors	26
Witness stories on touch screen v	20
Opportunity to write own story	12
None of above	4

Table 10  
Amount of Information in *Bearing Witness* :  
Too Much; Too Little; or About Right

Response	Percent of Visitors (%)
Too much	4
About right	74
Too little	22
Total Percentage	100

Table 11  
Number of Objects in *Bearing Witness* :  
Too Many, Too Few, or About Right

Response	Percent of Visitors (%)
Too many	2
About right	62
Too few	36
Total Percentage	100

Table 12  
 Number of Places to Sit in *Bearing Witness* :  
 Too Many, Too Few, or About Right

Response	Percent of Visitors (%)
Too many	2
About right	79
Too few	19
Total Percentage	100

Table 13  
 Visitors Suggesting and Not Suggesting Improvements  
 to *Bearing Witness*

Response	Percent of Visitors (%)
Suggested improvement	32
Did not suggest improvement	68
Total percentage	100

Table 14  
 Suggested Improvements to *Bearing Witness*

Suggested improvement	Percent of Visitors (%)
More artifacts	25
Bigger	18
Social context (historical, social, international)	11
Improve wayfinding/design	11
Improve video room	10
More personal aspects (artifacts/stories)	9
More photographs/pictures	8
Fewer personal things	5
More information	5
Improve labels	4
Make permanent	3
Other	7

Table 15  
Anticipated Actions as a Result of This Visit to  
*Bearing Witness*

Anticipated actions	Percent of Visitors (%)
Recommend <i>Bearing Witness</i>	72
Make a return visit to 9-11	28
Visit NMAH more often	16
Help children learn	14
Look for more info	8
None of the above	10

Note: Percentages total to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one response.

Table 16  
Appropriateness of *Bearing Witness* for Children Under 12 and Teenagers

Appropriate for age group	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
Children Under 12 & teens	80	78	84
Teenagers only	19	21	15
Neither	1	1	1
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Differences between visitors and non visitors are not statistically significant.

Table 17  
Lives near *Bearing Witness* Crash Site

Response	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
Yes	26	30	24
No	74	70	76
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Difference between visitors and non-visitors is not statistically significant.

Table 18  
Visited a *Bearing Witness* Crash Site

Response	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
Yes	33	34	32
No	67	66	68
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Difference between visitors and non-visitors is not statistically significant.

Table 19  
Level of Satisfaction with This Visit to *Bearing  
Witness*

Satisfaction	Percent of Visitors (%)
More than fully satisfied	39
Fully satisfied	45
Somewhat satisfied	14
Somewhat dissatisfied	2
Dissatisfied	0
Completely dissatisfied	1
	100

Table 20  
Level of Satisfaction with This Visit to NMAH

Satisfaction with NMAH	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
More than fully satisfied	27	23	31
Fully satisfied	57	58	56
Somewhat satisfied	14	18	12
Somewhat dissatisfied	1	1	1
Dissatisfied	0	0	0
Completely dissatisfied	0	0	0
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Difference between visitors and non-visitors is statistically significant.

Table 21  
Satisfaction with *Bearing Witness* and NMAH by Gender

	<i>Bearing Witness</i> *		NMAH**	
	Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)
Visited				
More than fully satisfied	46	33	32	23
Fully satisfied	41	48	55	58
Somewhat satisfied	12	15	12	17
Somewhat dissatisfied	0	3	0	1
Dissatisfied	0	0	0	0
Completely dissatisfied	1	1	0	0
Total percentage	100	100	100	100

\* Significantly different between genders.

\*\* Not significantly different between genders.

Table 22  
History of Visits to the Smithsonian and NMAH

Visit history	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit	Visited
		<i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	<i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
First Smithsonian visit	35	27	41
First NMAH visit	2	2	2
Within past year	28	37	22
1 to 5 years	23	22	23
More than 5 years	12	12	12
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Differences between visitors and non-visitors are not statistically significant.

Table 23  
Composition of Visiting Group

Group composition	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
Alone	26	28	25
One other adult	45	48	43
Group of adults	13	11	15
Adults with children	13	12	15
Group of teens	1	0	2
Tour/school group	1	0	1
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Differences between visitors and non-visitors are not statistically significant.

Table 24  
Visitor's Age

Age	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
12 to 18	6	5	7
19 to 24	12	11	13
25 to 34	23	17	27
35 to 44	21	21	21
45 to 54	22	23	21
55 to 64	10	14	8
65 & older	6	9	4
	100	100	100

Note: Differences between visitors and non-visitors are not statistically significant.

Table 25  
Visitor's Education: Visitors 25 Years Old and Over

Education	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
High school or less	9	8	10
Technical school	2	2	3
Some college	10	11	10
Bachelor degree	34	30	37
Some graduate study	3	4	2
Graduate degree	42	46	38
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Differences between visitors and non-visitors are not statistically significant.

Table 26  
Visitor's Racial and/or Ethnic Identity: United States Residents

Race/Ethnic identity	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
Black/African American	6	4	7
Asian	4	4	5
Hispanic	3	2	3
Native American/Alaskan			
Native	0	0	1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific			
Islander	0	0	1
White	83	87	81

Notes: Differences between visitors and non-visitors are not statistically significant.  
More than one description could be selected.

Table 27  
Visitor's Gender

Gender	All NMAH visitors (%)	Did not visit <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)	Visited <i>Bearing Witness</i> (%)
Female	46	47	45
Male	54	53	55
Total percentage	100	100	100

Note: Differences between visitors and non-visitors are not statistically significant.

Table 28  
*Bearing Witness* Visitors Segmented Defined by Exhibition Characteristics That Enhanced Satisfaction

Visitor segment	<i>Bearing Witness</i> exhibition satisfaction			Share of <i>September 11</i> visitors (%)	Defining characteristics of visitor segments
	More than fully satisfied (%)	Fully satisfied (%)	Less than fully satisfied (%)		
<b>A</b>	63	33	4	14	<b>Adequate information</b> <b>Visitor messages enhanced visit</b> <b>Something especially interesting</b>
<b>B</b>	33	52	14	6	<b>Adequate information</b> <b>Visitor messages enhanced visit</b> <b>Nothing especially interesting</b>
<b>C</b>	53	42	5	11	<b>Adequate information</b> <b>Visitor messages did not enhance visit</b> <b>Adequate objects</b> <b>Jennings video enhanced visit</b>
<b>D</b>	38	53	9	31	<b>Adequate information</b> <b>Visitor messages did not enhance visit</b> <b>Adequate objects</b> <b>Jennings video did not enhance visit</b>
<b>E</b>	31	42	27	16	<b>Adequate information</b> <b>Visitor messages did not enhance visit</b> <b>Too few objects</b>
<b>F</b>	40	45	15	6	<b>Too little information</b> <b>Visitor messages enhanced visit</b>
<b>G</b>	29	46	25	17	<b>Too little information</b> <b>Visitor messages did not enhance visit</b>

Notes: Adequate information includes about the right amount and too much.  
 Adequate objects includes about the right amount and too much.  
 Adequate seating includes about the right amount and too much.

## **Appendix B Study Methodology**

### **Survey**

Interviews were conducted on November 23 and 24 and December 7 and 8, 2002. Potential interviewees were identified using a standard OP&A continuous sampling selection procedure to assure a representative sample of NMAH visitors at the time of the survey. The survey responses were weighted by the relative numbers of visitors passing the interview location during interview sessions to assure a representative sample for the entire survey period. Interviews were completed with 628 respondents out of 720, intercepted for a cooperation rate of 87 percent. Subsequent checking comparing respondents and non-respondents showed that relatively more minority visitors and visitors accompanied by children refused to participate. In addition, the sample contained more men than a normal December NMAH audience. These potential sources of bias were controlled by statistically weighting the survey data. If the survey showed a 50 percent response to a question, e.g., “yes,” we can be confident that the percentage, if every NMAH visitor had been interviewed, would be between 46 and 54 percent (with 95% probability).

A survey, such as the present survey, is only a snapshot of visitor responses at one point in time; thus, it is impossible to tell if visitor responses would remain as favorable when *Bearing Witness* is less emotion-laden for the American public.

### **Data Analysis**

The OP&A team divided the *Bearing Witness* visitors into seven visitor segments. The visitors in a specific visitor segment all had similar reactions to the exhibition, giving the same responses to certain survey questions. The statis-

tical analysis selected questions that produced segments of visitors who were significantly different in their degrees of satisfaction with their experiences. This process proceeded iteratively by selecting responses to questions that branched all visitors into the two most significantly different visitor segments. Then one of the two branches was divided into two more branches using responses to another question. The latter branches were also split, and so forth, until no additional questions showed significant differences or until the segments were too small.

The statistical tool OP&A used was SPSS AnswerTree. This program allows a combination of different types of variables to explain a dependent variable. In this case, the variable was satisfaction with the *Bearing Witness* exhibition. Unlike regression, Answer Tree can work with ordinal and nominal variables as well as interval variables. Regression assumes that all variables are interval. AnswerTree splits the survey sample into subsets of respondents and searches for the most statistically significant effects of variables. Regression also assumes uniform effects.

The initial analysis included every question that related to the design and presentation of the exhibition. Combinations of categories (too much, about right, too little) were determined by AnswerTree to produce the most significant differences in satisfaction. The program was constrained so that ordinal combinations were possible (i.e., a combination of too little-too much was not permitted). Some survey questions asked if visitors had problems with the exhibition design (too few objects, too little information, too few seats). Since almost no visitor said that there was too much, these variables were dichotomized into too little and at least enough. Another question asked visitors to identify aspects of the exhibition that enhanced their experiences, a positive response. Our final analysis included seven variables. Three involved positive responses: messages left by previous visitors enhanced the visitors' experiences; the Peter Jennings video enhanced visits; and there was something exciting in the exhibition. Two resulted in negative responses: too little information and too few objects. No other design attributes had a significant effect on visitor satisfaction after these variables were included in the analysis.

# Appendix C

## Survey Questionnaire

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Sept 11 Visitor Survey

interv  MC  GS  CA  
 SP  RP  VH  LL

id

COUNT #: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for the Smithsonian and I'm talking to visitors about their experiences in the museum.

1. Is today your first visit to the Smithsonian?

No  Yes [Go to Q3]

2. When did you last visit this museum, the National Museum of American History?

Never q2yrs  
 Within the past year  
 \_\_\_\_\_ years ago [ ] [ ]

3. Using this card, how would you rate your visit to the American History Museum today? [Card A]

More than fully satisfied  Dissatisfied  
 Fully satisfied  Completely dissatisfied  
 Somewhat satisfied  None of above  
 Somewhat dissatisfied

4. Was there something in particular you wanted to see or do in this museum today?

No  Sept 11  Julia's Kitchen  
 Yes: **What was that?**  First Ladies  Star Sp Banner  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. On your visit today, did you see...

The American Presidency?  
 First Ladies?  
 Exhibit of objects left at the Vietnam Memorial Wall?  
 September 11: Bearing Witness to History?  
 The Star Spangled Banner Preservation?

If visited Sept 11 today, Go to Q7 next column.

6. Using this card, which letter best describes why you did not visit the September 11 exhibition today? [Card B] [Mark ONE]

A. I saw it on an earlier visit  
 B. Didn't know it was here  
 C. Too difficult to see  
 D. Plan to see it other visit  
 E. Other exhibits more interesting  
 F. Appeared too crowded  
 None of the above

Go to Q13 next page.

7. Thinking about the September 11 exhibition, how would you rate your visit to the exhibition? [Card A]

More than fully satisfied  Dissatisfied  
 Fully satisfied  Completely dissatisfied  
 Somewhat satisfied  None of above  
 Somewhat dissatisfied

8. Was there one thing about the exhibition that you found especially interesting?

No  
 Yes: **What was that?** \_\_\_\_\_

9. What change would improve the September 11 exhibition?

10. Using this card, which of these enhanced your visit to the exhibition? Choose as many as you like. [Card C]

A. Items from sites  E. Jennings video  
 B. Messages left by others  F. Photographs  
 C. Write down story  G. Touch screens/witness  
 D. Personal objects  H. None of above

11. Now I'd like your opinion of some other things inside the exhibition:

**Was there too much information, too little, or about right?**  
**Did it have too many objects, too few, or about right?**  
**Were there too many places to sit, too few, or about right?**

12. Using this card, which of these are you likely to do as a result of your visit to the September 11 exhibition? Choose as many as you like. [Card D]

A. Look for more info  D. Recommend exhibit  
 B. Help children learn  E. Visit museum more  
 C. Return to exhibit  F. None of above

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Count: \_\_\_\_\_

id

13. In your opinion, is the September 11 exhibition appropriate for children under 12?

No  Yes [Go to Q15]

14. Is it appropriate for teenagers?

No  Yes

15. Have you visited any September 11 disaster sites?

No  Yes

16. Do you live or work near any of the sites?

No  Yes

states

\*17. Where do you live?

- Washington DC  Other US state \_\_\_\_\_
- VA/MD Suburbs
- New York City  Foreign country \_\_\_\_\_
- Somerset, PA

\*18. With whom are you visiting today?

- Alone  Adult(s) with child(ren)
- One other adult  Group of teens
- Group of adults  Tour/School group

\*19. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

age

20. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- HS grad or less  Bachelor's degree
- Assoc/Jr/Tech  Some graduate study
- Some college  MA/Ph.D/Profess.

\*21. What is your racial or ethnic identity? [Mark All]

- African American/Black  Hispanic/Latino
- Asian  Native Am./Alaskan Native
- Caucasian/White  Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

\*22. Mark gender:  Female  Male

ADMIN BOX	segment	location	status
session 	1 4	Mall Side	Interview Refusal: lang
	2 5	Constitution	SI staff Refusal: other
	3 6		Ineligible _____

THANK YOU!