

Exhibition Review

Prompt:

In their national study, historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen discovered that Americans rate museums as the single most trustworthy source of information about the past. They also found that museums were second only to family gatherings as a place where Americans feel "connected" to the past. This review assignment is designed to give you an opportunity to peel back the curtain and explore how museums work by interrogating a single piece of the museum experience – an exhibition. Built by teams of experts using a combination of labels, objects, images, and other interpretive tools, exhibitions are the bread-and-butter of the modern museum. Fortunately, our university is located in one the museum capitals of the United States, if not the world. At the heart of Washington D.C.'s museum scene stands the [Smithsonian](#) and its network of nineteen museums and galleries, all of which are available to the public free of charge. For this assignment, you will need to visit and review one of the newest exhibitions at the Smithsonian's [National Museum of American History – Changing America: The Emancipation Proclamation, 1863 and the March on Washington, 1963](#).

Your final exhibition review must be at least 1500 words long and is due via email to me (jg7138a@american.edu) by 12 pm, Thursday, June 26th.

Assignment

For this assignment, you must visit and craft an original review of *Changing America: The Emancipation Proclamation, 1863 and the March on Washington, 1963*. Historical exhibitions are arguments about the past laid out in physical space, and so your review should critically examine several aspects of the exhibition, from its "big idea," structure, and design to visitors' behavior in the exhibition space. Your review should also briefly compare *Changing America* to another exhibition at the National Museum of American History before concluding with a final assessment of the exhibition, its successes, and its failures. Below, I've created an outline that should help you structure your final review. ***I recommend that you read through this outline before your visit so that you can adequately answer these questions later.***

- **Big Idea, Structure, and Design** (2-3 pages)
 - Big Idea
 - What's the "big idea" of the exhibition?
 - Structure
 - Was the exhibition linear or multi-directional? Was there an "ideal" path through it? How could you tell?
 - Was the exhibition organized by chronology, topic, or theme? Did it have different sections?
 - Does the exhibition have a central object or space? If so, why do you think the curators included it? What does it accomplish? If not, why do you think the curators chose not to include it?
 - Section Design (***please focus in on at least two different sections with some detail***)
 - How does the section integrate labels, objects, and other kinds of interpretive tools together to tell a coherent story?
 - Are any aspects of the section particularly effective? Why?

- **Visitor Behavior** (1-2 pages)
 - Were people exploring the exhibition individually or in groups?
 - How did people behave in the exhibition?
 - Did they talk to each other in groups or go through the space silently?
 - How did people move through the exhibition? Did they all follow a similar path through the exhibition space? Did they sit down to rest or talk?
 - Did people use technology in the exhibition? If they did, how so? Were people taking photos, texting, or doing something else?
 - Was there a particular section of the exhibition where people congregated? If so, what were they doing there, and do you think that was what the curators intended?

- **Comparison** (0.5-1 page)
 - Spend a short time walking through another exhibition at the National Museum of American History. Compare and contrast that exhibition to *Changing America*.

- **Final Assessment** (0.5-1 page)
 - By this point, you're an expert on both *Changing America's* design and how people behave in it. Knowing what you know, give your readers your informed opinion: How successful is the exhibition? Does it successfully explore a "big idea"? Why or why not? What could have improved the exhibition? And would you recommend the exhibition to others? (1 paragraph)

Citation Instructions

For this assignment, you shouldn't need to cite any sources. If you'd like to quote from an exhibition label directly, simply note that you are quoting from the exhibition in your review.

Formatting Instructions

For your exhibition review, there are a few academic standards you should follow:

- After your title but before your review, insert the full citation for the exhibition you are reviewing. You'll find the citation for the *Changing America* exhibition below.
- Include a header with your name, the date, the class number, and the assignment (Review 1) in the top right corner of the first page.
- 12 point, Times New Roman font.
- 1 inch margins (the standard in Microsoft Word).
- Double or 1.5 spacing.
- Page numbers (first page optional)
- No cover page, but I'd love it if you gave your review a unique title.

Citation for *Changing America*:

" Changing America: The Emancipation Proclamation, 1863 and the March on Washington, 1963," National Museum of African American History and Culture.
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/changing-america-emancipation-proclamation-1863-and-march-washington-1963>. Temporary exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. (3800 sq. ft).

Rubric:

	Excellent Mastery 5.0-4.5	Good Mastery 4.4-4.0	Some Mastery 3.9-3.5	Minimal Mastery 3.4-3.0	No Mastery 2.9-0
Analysis of Big Idea, Structure, and Design 35%	The analysis successfully analyzes the exhibition. Readers gain an in-depth understanding of the exhibition's big idea, its overall structure, and the design of two specific sections. The review uses numerous specific examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	The analysis successfully analyzes the exhibition, with a few minor oversights. Readers gain a good understanding of the exhibition's big idea, its overall structure, and the design of two specific sections. The review uses several specific examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	The analysis successfully analyzes the exhibition, with a few serious oversights. Readers gain an adequate understanding of the exhibition's big idea, its overall structure, and the design of two specific sections. The review uses a few specific examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	The analysis somewhat successfully analyzes the exhibition, but has several serious oversights. Readers gain a cursory understanding of the exhibition's big idea, its overall structure, and the design of two specific sections. The review uses a few general examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.	The analysis does not successfully analyze the exhibition. Readers gain almost no understanding of the exhibition's big idea, its overall structure, and the design of two specific sections. The review uses almost no examples drawn from the text to illustrate its points.
Analysis of Visitor Behavior 20%	The review successfully analyzes visitor behavior in the exhibition, rigorously describing how people interacted with each other, how they moved through the exhibition, if and how they used technology, and if and how people congregated in particular sections. Numerous specific observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her description.	The review successfully analyzes visitor behavior in the exhibition, carefully describing how people interacted with each other, how they moved through the exhibition, if and how they used technology, and if and how people congregated in particular sections. Several specific observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her description.	The review successfully analyzes visitor behavior in the exhibition, adequately describing how people interacted with each other, how they moved through the exhibition, if and how they used technology, and if and how people congregated in particular sections. A few specific observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her description.	The review somewhat successfully analyzes visitor behavior in the exhibition, causally describing how people interacted with each other, how they moved through the exhibition, if and how they used technology, and if and how people congregated in particular sections. A few general observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her description.	The review does not successfully analyze visitor behavior in the exhibition. Few if any observations from the writer's visit support his or her description.
Comparison of Exhibitions 15%	The review successfully compares <i>Changing America</i> to another exhibition using almost all the criteria from the sections above. Numerous specific observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her comparison.	The review successfully compares <i>Changing America</i> to another exhibition using many of the criteria from the sections above. Several specific observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her comparison.	The review successfully compares <i>Changing America</i> to another exhibition using some of the criteria from the sections above. A few specific observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her comparison.	The review somewhat successfully compares <i>Changing America</i> to another exhibition using one or two of the criteria from the sections above. A few general observations from the writer's visit illustrate his or her comparison.	The review does not successfully compare <i>Changing America</i> to another exhibition.
Final Assessment	The writer concludes the review assessing the exhibition's success (or failure) to explore a "big	The writer concludes the review assessing the exhibition's success (or failure) to explore a "big	The writer concludes the review assessing the exhibition's success (or failure) to explore a "big	The writer concludes the review assessing the exhibition's success (or failure) to explore a "big	The writer does not conclude the review assessing the exhibition's success (or failure) to explore a "big

15%	idea." Numerous specific observations from the writer's visit support his or her judgment.	idea."Several specific observations from the writer's visit support his or her judgment.	idea."A few specific observations from the writer's visit support his or her judgment.	idea."A few general observations from the writer's visit support his or her judgment.	idea."
Mechanics 10%	Spelling, punctuation, grammar all correct; proper sentence and paragraph construction.	Occasional errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph construction; not severe enough to hinder an understanding of the review.	Weaknesses in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph construction make sections of the paper unintelligible.	Problems in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph construction make sections of the paper unintelligible.	Problems in spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence and paragraph constructions severe as to make the paper unintelligible.

