AMERICAN WRITER’S MUSEUM:
MY AMERICA EXHIBIT

Visitor Survey Summary

July 2020
American Writer’s Museum:  
*My America Exhibit*  
Visitor Survey Summary

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Introduction

My America: Immigrant and Refugee Writers Today, is a special exhibit at the American Writers Museum (AWM) honoring and exploring the work of contemporary immigrant and refugee writers in America. The exhibit includes an immersive multimedia exhibit, a related live program series with participating authors, and in-depth educational experiences and activities that all explore the influence of modern immigrant and refugee writing in America on our culture, history, and daily lives. The website, My-America.org, is an extension of that initiative, bringing a select set of the exhibit material to a wider audience. AWM was closed to the public in early March 2020 due to Covid19 related restrictions. During the museum’s closure, elements of the My America exhibit were accessible to the public over the My-America.org website.

AWM contracted with Rockman et al (www.rockman.com; REA) a research and evaluation firm with offices in San Francisco and Bloomington, Indiana, to conduct a mixed methods summative evaluation to assess how visitors to My America comprehend the exhibition and think about the humanities ideas and themes that were presented.

Executive summary

Visitor response to the My America exhibit was overwhelmingly positive. The exhibit’s highly praised graphic and visual elements enhanced the visitors’ learning experience, providing an acute insight into a range of American immigrant writers stories, successes and travails. Visitors came away with a greater understanding and insight into the concept of duality and identity as experienced by these writers. Two thirds or more of visitors commented that they learned something new, found the exhibit interesting and informative, and wanted to learn more about topics and themes presented. The exhibit also inspired a majority of visitors to read books by American immigrant writers, and caused them to have a greater appreciation of American immigrant writers telling the story of America. Visitors praised the exhibit for helping to raise their awareness of the immigrant experience, many acknowledging that they were thinking about immigrant-related issues for the very first time. Nearly all visitors said they would recommend the exhibit to others.

Method

The initial evaluation plan called for a mixed methods approach that was to consist of onsite surveys with exhibit visitors. Survey items were developed in collaboration with AWM staff. After an initial training by the REA researcher, AWM staff were planning to collect onsite evaluation data with visitors to the exhibit and My America special events. Data collection was
to occur between February – June/July 2020. However, due to the museum closure data collection had to be curtailed in March 2020.

**Survey summary**

**Participant Characteristics**

Visitors were asked to describe their age group and with whom they attended the exhibit, with response options including: 1) Adult (older than 18 years of age), 2) Younger than 18 years, 3) Here with my family, 4) Here with my friend, and/or 5) By myself.

Of the 29 visitors that completed the survey, 76% (n=22) identified as an adult (older than 18), 24% (n=7) attended with their friend, 21% (n=6) attended with their families, 17% (attended alone, and 10% reported being younger than 18 years (Figure 1). Eighteen participants (62%) identified as female, whereas nine participants (31%) identified as male.

*Figure 1. Age and Group – Percentages (N=29)*

**Note:** Visitors were asked to ‘select all that apply.’ Totals exceed 100%

Visitors were asked whether they had read a book by an American immigrant writer. Most visitors (72%) reported reading a book (fiction or non-fiction) by an American immigrant writer, while 14% were not sure and 7% reported ‘no.’

*Figure 2. Have you ever read a book by an American immigrant writer? – Percentages (N=29)*
Learning and behaviors

Visitors were asked to report on the impact that the exhibit had on learning and behaviors.

Based on the responses a strong majority of visitors came away with new knowledge and appreciation of the American immigrant writer experience, and were interested in learning more. Most visitors reported learning something new in the exhibit (90%; n=26), thought that the exhibit was informative (86%; n=25), and that they would go home and talk to their friends about the exhibit (79%; n=23) (Figure 3). Just one visitor reported that the exhibit was uninteresting (3%; n=1).

Visitors “strongly agreed” with statements on post-exhibit behaviors and gains, including (from highest percentage of agreement to lowest)

- Being interested more about the American immigrant experience (72% strongly agreed)
- Reading books by American immigrant writers (66% strongly agreed),
- Having a greater appreciation of American immigrant writers telling the story of America (66% strongly agreed), and
- Learning something new about the American immigrant experience overall (52% strongly agreed) (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Agreement with statements on impact of exhibit on learning and behaviors – Percentages (N=29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned something new in the exhibit</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exhibit was informative</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will go home and talk to my friends about this exhibit</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exhibit wasn’t interesting to me</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Visitors were asked ‘select all that apply.’ Totals exceed 100%.
Experience and understanding of immigrant writers

Visitors were asked how much each of the following aspects of the *My America* exhibit enhanced their experience and understanding of American immigrant writers. Exhibit graphics appeared to have the greatest impact on visitor learning and engagement.

Overall, with 1 being “Not at all” and 4 being “Very much,” most visitors “very much” agreed that the exhibit graphics (69%), text information (55%), video author interviews (48%) and writing station (41%) enhanced their experience and understanding of the American immigrant writers (Figure 5).

*Figure 5. Aspects of the Exhibit that Enhanced Visitors' Experience and Understanding - Counts (N=29)*
Describing the exhibit

Visitors were asked to list four words they would use to describe the exhibit. Based on their word choices, visitors felt they came away with new knowledge, which was presented in an absorbing and effective manner. Below lists the top 10 most frequently cited descriptive words, with “Informative” (11%) and “Interesting” (6%) being listed most (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Aspects of the Exhibit that Enhanced Visitors’ Experience and Understanding - Counts (N=29)

![Bar chart showing the top 10 descriptive words]

Note: Visitors were asked to select four words. Percentages include the most cited words.

Most interesting thing learned

When asked to openly describe the most interesting thing learned in this exhibit, visitor responses varied. One theme that emerged was visitors’ recognition of the concept of duality as it relates to being an American and an immigrant. Visitors also commented on discovering a new understanding of the idea of home. Other visitors appreciated the exhibit’s graphic displays, in particular the timelines, while others commented on the depth of storytelling and diversity in experiences amongst the writers. A number of visitors noted the authors’ collective struggles with identity and their sense of place. Visitors praised the exhibit for helping to raise their awareness of the immigrant experience, many acknowledging that they were thinking about immigrant-related issues for the very first time. Visitors found individual stories emotional and poignant, one noting how different these stories were from their own personal experience. Visitors also referenced acquiring new knowledge such as learning about slavery, and about the first Mexican-American author who wrote a book in English.
Recommending the exhibit to others

An overwhelming majority of visitors (96%) would recommend the My America exhibit to others (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Recommendation of My America Exhibit - Counts (N=26)