



Conceptual rendering of the SS *United States* by author-illustrator David Macaulay

# Museum and Visitor Experience Planning Survey

*INFORMING THE FUTURE*

**2020-2021**



**SS UNITED STATES  
CONSERVANCY**

SAVING AMERICA'S FLAGSHIP



Photograph courtesy of Jane Schulling.

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Photograph courtesy of Kingston Winget.

## INTRODUCTION

### *SS United States: Taking Her Place Among Giants*

As much a patriotic symbol of our nation as the Empire State Building or Washington Monument, the *SS United States* is a powerful reminder of America's soaring ambition and ability to rise to any challenge. "America's Flagship" represents a striking synthesis of post-war technology, architecture, and artistic innovation, making her a global ambassador of her namesake nation. The ship's red, white, and blue funnels became a source of pride and inspiration following the upheavals of the Second World War. Over the last decade, the *SS United States* Conservancy has led the growing effort to save this iconic symbol of our nation. Taking its place among other important historic preservation organizations, such as the efforts to save Grand Central Terminal and the Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, the Conservancy has grown from a small grassroots effort to a major national preservation effort.

After the *SS United States*' withdrawal from service in 1969, she was kept as a reserve ship for the US Navy until 1978 and then a succession of private owners attempted to return her to seagoing service. In 1984, Seattle developer Richard Hadley auctioned off all of the ship's furnishings and fittings, and by 1994, the ship's interiors were stripped and remediated in the Ukraine in preparation for redevelopment. In 2010 *SS United States* Conservancy received a leadership grant from Philadelphia philanthropist H.F. "Gerry" Lenfest, enabling the ship's purchase as well as upkeep for 20 months.

As owners of "America's Flagship," the *SS United States* Conservancy leads the global effort to ensure that this enduring expression of American pride and innovation educates and inspires for generations to come. The Conservancy began as an initiative of the *SS United States* Preservation Society, founded in

1992. Incorporated as an independent nonprofit organization in Washington, DC in 2009, the Conservancy formed a prominent board of directors and advisory council, recruited a talented team of staff and consultants, and opened offices in Washington DC, New York, and Philadelphia.

The Conservancy's work to save one of the nation's great post-war treasures has included building a global community of supporters from all 50 states and almost three dozen countries, building a major collection of art, archives, and artifacts from the *SS United States*, developing plans for a future *SS United States* museum and innovation center, earning extensive national and international press coverage, mounting educational and communications programs, and advancing plans for the *SS United States'* redevelopment and conversion into a mixed-used development in an urban waterfront setting.

In tandem with its current partnership with RXR Realty, a prominent commercial real estate developer, the Conservancy has begun laying the groundwork for its future museum. While its core focus will be telling the story of America's Flagship, the museum will also aim to connect the ship's magnificent history to broader social, historical, and artistic themes. The Conservancy aims to explore and showcase the *SS United States'* emergence as a singular, American, post-war achievement and provide visitors with a range of immersive experiences, state-of-the-art displays, and special events.

Beginning in April of 2020, the Conservancy's Museum and Visitor Experience Planning Survey (Planning Survey) was distributed to the Conservancy's members and supporters. Garnering over 1,000 responses, the Planning Survey prompted potential museum audiences to think deeply about what aspects of the *SS United States* interested them and why. The Planning Survey yielded extensive insights into our communities' interests, which will help to inform our curatorial practice and planning moving forward. Furthermore, this report provides our supporters with a glimpse into how the Conservancy is advancing its current and future curatorial process.

This report will serve as a crucial document to inform the Conservancy's future approach to the shipboard museum. It will aid in the creation of a roadmap for the development of a powerful and unique experience that will attract visitors to the *SS United States* from across the nation and around the world. This Planning Survey report intends to serve as a baseline for the potential development of projects and exhibitions in the *SS United States'* future museum. It also is part of our continuing effort to fulfill our commitment to Conservancy supporters to involve them as much as possible in the process.

By outlining the Conservancy's approach, we hope to frame the data collected within the confines of the Conservancy's main tenets: Redevelopment, Preservation, and Engagement. This report will not only share the responses of the survey, but will also offer initial analyses to form a more holistic understanding of the interests and needs of our audience base. The "Potential Areas of Impact" and "Curatorial and Collections Engagement" sections will offer a more in-depth review to the findings of the survey. By highlighting the top three topics our respondents found most intriguing and outlining how the best practices of display can be implemented within the museum, we can begin to lay the groundwork of a potential shipboard museum.

In conclusion, this report offers our current and future audience base, as well as Conservancy leadership, staff and supporters, an outline and overview of the range of interpretive opportunities offered by the Conservancy's collections while also putting forth meaningful suggestions for future engagement. This document will serve as a foundation for the potential development of the *SS United States'* shipboard museum: informing both future curatorial practices as well as trends among audience members.

*"It's critically important at this time to emphasize how much of a "national project" [the SS United States] was and how many jobs it created in different states."*

- Anonymous Survey Responder



Photograph courtesy of Kenneth Karlin.

# THE CONSERVANCY'S APPROACH

## *Focusing Our Efforts*

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In our efforts to save the SS *United States* and preserve its legacy, the Conservancy has identified three key approaches critical to transforming the Big U into a world-class museum and innovation center: Redevelopment, Preservation, and Engagement. These three approaches are essential as we advance plans for a meaningful and sustainable, mixed-use cultural landmark. As a result of the Conservancy's efforts, the SS *United States* has gone from a largely forgotten relic to achieving national and global recognition once again.

## REDEVELOPMENT

Since acquiring the SS *United States* in 2011, the Conservancy began exploring the vessel's redevelopment, creating detailed plans for the ship's potential conversion into a stationary, mixed-use attraction. In late 2018, the Conservancy entered into a promising partnership with RXR Realty. Though impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, RXR has continued to explore the vessel's redevelopment prospects and is working to secure a permanent location for the ship. During RXR's due diligence period, the Conservancy is advancing early design-development work for a world-class museum that celebrates the ship's history

while addressing a range of compelling societal issues. Our partnership with RXR Realty allows for the Conservancy to seamlessly fold our vision for the museum into the larger mixed-use development in a way that is adaptive and modern while respecting the ship's historic design.

This Planning Survey report will help to inform the *SS United States'* redevelopment plan moving forward by calling attention to restoration objectives while also recognizing an overarching need for innovation. By asking questions such as:

1. What categories and spaces should be considered for restoration by the Conservancy to create a shipboard "heritage trail" in partnership with RXR?
2. How should film, digital techniques, and presentations be incorporated to showcase original shipboard spaces that cannot feasibly be recreated?

The Conservancy's Planning Survey report was able to directly pinpoint the interests of the public as we advance our curatorial vision and plans. The Planning Survey not only sought respondents' views on spaces they desired to engage with in the future museum, but how to explore and showcase spaces that could not be recreated. Engaging our audience in this manner is important to our future redevelopment efforts as it helps the Conservancy understand the best practices which our future museum and cultural center might employ.

## PRESERVATION

The preservation of the *SS United States* is predicated on much more than just the redevelopment of the vessel. A ship that reflects the best of American ingenuity and innovation, the *SS United States* served as a symbol of the nation's triumphant emergence after the trauma of World War II. She was a floating showplace of mid-century modern design, epitomizing the era's focus on new materials and manufacturing technologies, modernism, and post-war recovery. People from around the world looked to the world's fastest ship not only for travel but for immigration and for work. It is the stories of small-town families who embarked on journeys to distant shores, or immigrants who crossed seas to begin a new life, who make the ship an important cultural landmark. Preserving those memories of former passengers and crew is crucial to making the history of the *SS United States* come alive.

The Conservancy has collected and recorded the first-hand accounts of former passengers and crew members, and these will be incorporated into the future shipboard museum's exhibitions and interactive content as palpable "Living History". The Conservancy has also acquired an extensive collection of artwork and artifacts from the ship that demonstrate the extraordinary and innovative craftsmanship that made the *United States* a singular achievement. This ever-growing collection of artifacts and artwork original to the ship and larger maritime history offer endless material for engaging displays. Through a comprehensive inventory of individual and institutional collections of *SS United States* objects and memorabilia, as well as an exhaustive inventory of artifacts that remain on board the ship, the Conservancy is prioritizing the cataloging and analysis of shipboard artifacts prior to the vessel's redevelopment.

The results of the Planning Survey will play a crucial role in helping the Conservancy understand what our audience base would like to see most within the future museum space. By asking survey respondents to share what aspects of the *SS United States* should be highlighted in the Conservancy's shipboard museum and visitors' center, these responses can help inform how the Conservancy prioritizes the ship's historic spaces and the objects in its collections. These insights provide invaluable guidance in how we should best bring the *SS United States* to life for future visitors by the responses and suggestions of future visitors.



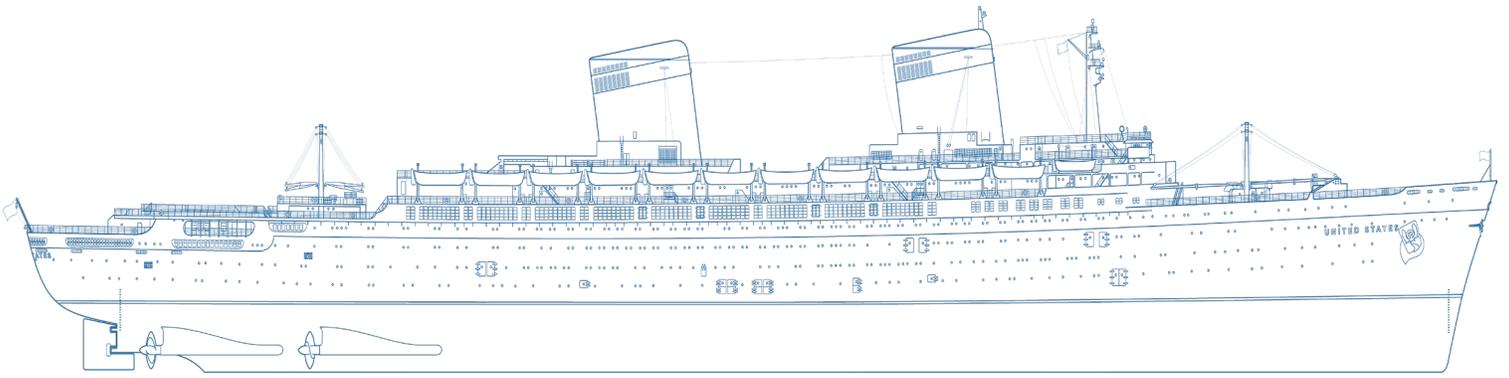
SS *United States*' designer William Francis Gibbs views his beloved vessel. Photograph courtesy of Melvin Konner.

## ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a top priority for the future museum and visitors' center. Display and restoration are crucial, but without an added strategy dedicated to facilitating meaningful visitor engagement, these efforts are simply not enough. The Planning Survey sought to gather information regarding best practices of display and restoration to maximize engagement among our audience base. Survey questions included:

1. How might the Conservancy incorporate broader social, artistic, and historical themes that inspire reflection and discussion?
2. What program components and interpretive devices might be included within exhibitions in order to provide engaging and interactive content?

Generating responses to these questions offers guidance to the Conservancy as it conceptualizes and develops innovative, functional, and interactive exhibitions and displays. By learning more about museums and exhibitions that have inspired our audience, as well as the techniques and topics our audience is interested in, the survey results can offer the Conservancy a useful record of potential models and tools for future engagement practices.



# RESULTS

## A Comprehensive Understanding

### SNAPSHOT OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- **42%** of responders have been interested in the *SS United States* since her days at sea.
- **82.2%** of responders identified as male, **17%** of responders identified as female, and **.08%** of responders identified as non-binary/other.
- **41.9%** of all responders were over the age of 65.
- **53.6%** of respondents had a personal travel story from the *SS United States*, whether their own experience, or that of a family member.

The Planning Survey asked a variety of questions in order to better understand the broader interests of our audience base. This section outlines the survey results through readable charts and figures, and offers a brief comparative analysis of significant responses. (See the Appendix for more comprehensive results)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **1,027** individuals responded to the Planning Survey, representing a comprehensive cross-section of the Conservancy's already established membership and audience.
- **93.8%** of respondents, or **947** individuals, indicated that they would like to see the restoration or recreations of selected interior spaces aboard the *SS United States*.
- Restored interior spaces and components of the ship, including the Passenger Interiors/Cabins, Bridge, and Captain's Quarters, were considered to be some of the highest priority spaces and components for restoration and display.
- Survey respondents identified two areas of particularly high interest, with a resounding **81.2%** expressing interest in seeing the Conservancy museum include a focus on the ship's groundbreaking engineering, architecture, and design. This same percentage, **81.2%**, showed interest in the "golden age" of transatlantic liners and the race for the Blue Riband.

*"The challenge is how to make the Old Girl interesting to newer generations. The older folks already know the story. How do we capture the imagination of people who have grown up with mega cruising on floating amusement parks?"*

- Anonymous Survey Responder

The Planning Survey asked a number of open-ended questions. Many of these questions offered multiple topics that respondents were asked to rank from one to five, one being “minimal interest” and five being “a great deal of interest.” In order to get the most informative results possible from the data we collected through the Planning Survey, the Conservancy employed a meticulous data analysis which included a thorough comparative analysis across responses and questions. One particularly notable set of questions asked about themes felt to be highlighted, found compelling and exciting. While similar, these questions produced important responses that dig deep into the nuanced interests of our audience base.

For example when asked “Which themes excite you the most?” Respondents felt overwhelmingly positive about the future ship-board museum engaging with notions of the “American Dream” and the *SS United States* as an iconic American achievement, with 64.8% selecting “a great deal of interest.” (Figure 1.1). The percentage of responders who felt this to be an engaging theme was higher than any other topic within that section.

Respondents also indicated “a great deal of interest” in the broader historical and political context of the *SS United States* when asked “What aspects of the *SS United States* do you think should be highlighted in the Conservancy’s shipboard museum and visitor’s center?” (Figure 1.2). While both of these questions garnered positive responses about the socio-political context surrounding the *SS United States*, when asked about “themes thought to be most compelling,” pop culture and social trends (including socio-political movements) of the 1950s and 1960s were only considered to be of moderate interest with 32.2% of respondents selecting 3 out of 5. (Figure 1.3)

Through these responses, the Conservancy was able to pinpoint specific areas of interest for our established audience, offering the Curatorial team insights into what future visitors might like to see in a museum dedicated to the *SS United States*. Through a comparison of this data, the Conservancy was able to narrow down the specific topics within a more general “History” theme to come up with Potential Areas of Impact.

The Conservancy further utilized comparative analysis in order to better understand the nuanced responses within each question itself. For example, when asked “Which themes excite you most?” the Conservancy offered multiple themes within that question that dealt with engineering, science, or technology.

Of the individuals that responded to this question, 50.7% felt “a great deal of interest” in exploring STEAM themes and, similarly, 58.6% of individuals responded with a “great deal of interest” for the ship embodying a technological and industrial “high watermark.” Alternatively, most respondents, or 28.6%, indicated only moderate interest in the ship as a vehicle for exploring sustainability themes. Again, these nuanced results help to point the Conservancy towards specific areas of interest, helping narrow down our Potential Areas of Impact to three distinct topics, Living Histories, Social (contextual) History, and Technology, Design, and Engineering.

The Conservancy asked:  
*Which themes excite you most?*

- *The ship as a vehicle for exploring sustainability themes, from examining environmental excesses of the 1950s to today’s “green” breakthroughs and marine stewardship themes (Figure 2.1).*
- *The ship’s complex design and mechanical systems as a platform to explore science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) themes (Figure 2.2).*
- *The ship as embodying a technological and industrial “high watermark” (the ship could be viewed in the context of other “high watermarks” of other innovators/innovations) (Figure 2.3).*

The Conservancy also employed questions in the Planning Survey that asked responders to suggest further ideas or topics that might be relevant to future museum planning. Knowing that our audience base

would have intimate knowledge of maritime and ship-board museums, the Conservancy felt that data in the form of suggestions could be useful for curatorial efforts. The survey specifically asked respondents to suggest potential museums/exhibitions to emulate, in order to be able to learn from successful similar projects. 40.6% of survey respondents indicated interest specifically in Ocean Liner Museums. Of this 40.6%, 72.9% (or 16.7% of total respondents) suggested the Queen Mary as a potential museum to emulate (Figure 3.4). The next most popular liner museum to emulate is the SS Rotterdam with 20.2% (or 4.6% of total respondents) suggesting interest. From these short answer suggestions and the multiple choice data, the Conservancy has been able to pinpoint potential Engagement Practices that would best suit the curatorial collection.

*The following charts are a selected number of visualizations of the data collected from the Museum Planning Survey. (Figures 1.1-1.3 & 2.1-2.3) These visualizations do not reflect the entirety of the data collected, but instead reflect some of the key aspects of the data that was discussed above.*

*Survey respondents were also asked for their own suggestions for themes they found compelling (Figure 3.2), exciting (Figure 3.3), or necessary to highlight (Figure 3.1). An in-depth analysis of these suggestions allowed the Conservancy to create these readable data charts to better understand the interests of our audience.*

**Figure 1.1**

*What aspects of the SS United States do you think should be highlighted in the Conservancy’s shipboard museum and visitor’s center?*

*The following bar graphs indicate interest on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being minimal interest and 5 being a great deal of interest.*

**The broader historical and political context of the ship’s service years (1952-1969) (for example: post-war industrialization, the Cold War, etc.)**

998 responses

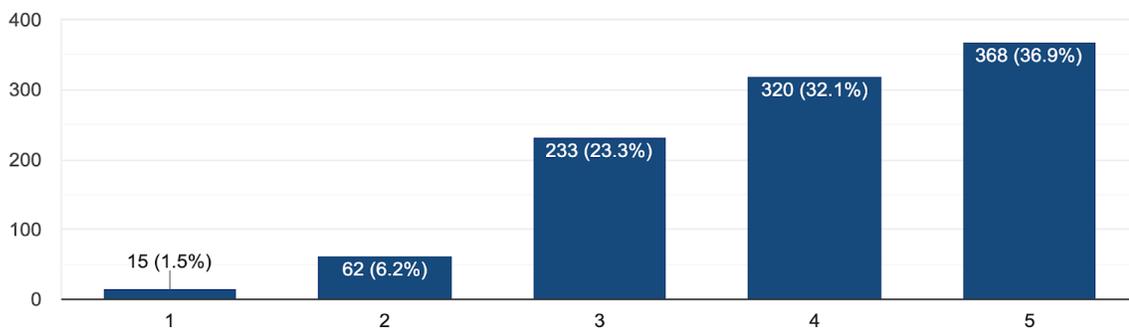


Figure I.2

The Conservancy hopes that its museum and visitor's center will inspire and excite a wide range of visitors with varied interests. Which of the following broader themes do you think are most compelling?

Pop culture and social trends of the 1950s & 1960s (immigration, civil rights and women's movements, etc.)

996 responses

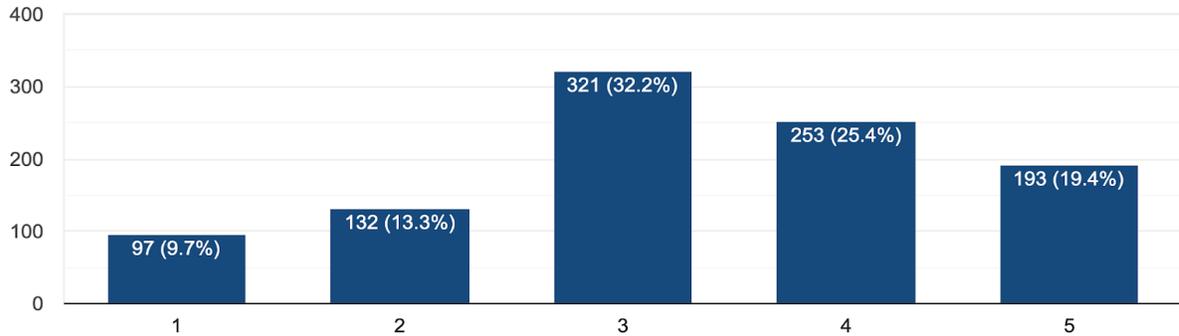
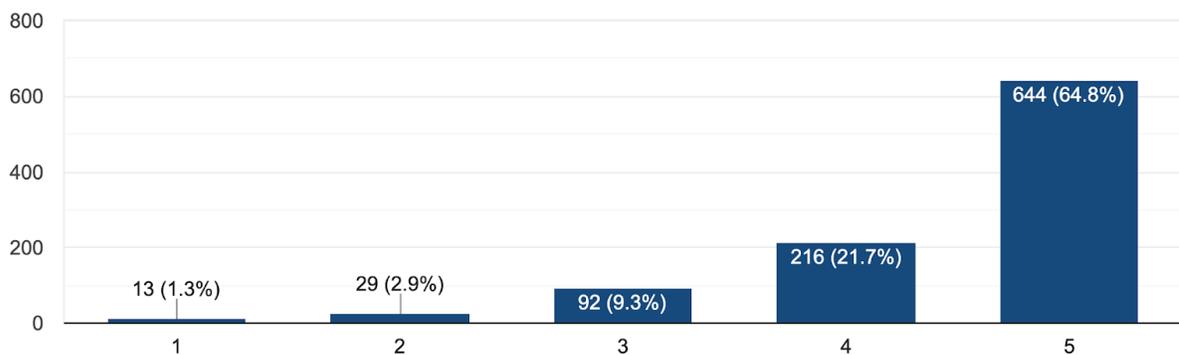


Figure I.3

The Conservancy's future museum and visitor's center seeks to inspire reflection and discussion of broader social, artistic, and historical themes. Which of the following themes excite you the most?

The ship as an iconic American achievement and manifestation of national character (themes of patriotism, post-war national pride, unpacking the American Dream, etc.)

994 responses



The Conservancy's future museum and visitor's center seeks to inspire reflection and discussion of broader social, artistic, and historical themes. Which of the following themes excite you the most?

Figure 2.1

The ship as a vehicle for exploring sustainability themes, from examining environmental excesses of the 1950s to today's "green" breakthroughs and marine stewardship themes.

1,004 responses

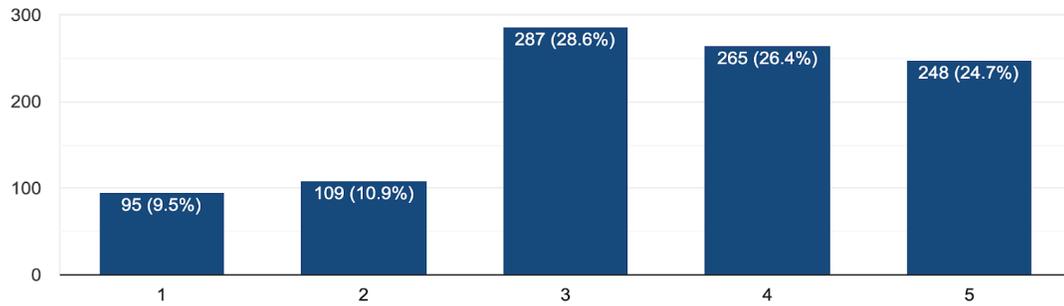


Figure 2.2

The ship as embodying a technological and industrial "high watermark" (the ship could be viewed in the context of other "high watermarks" of other innovators/innovations)

991 responses

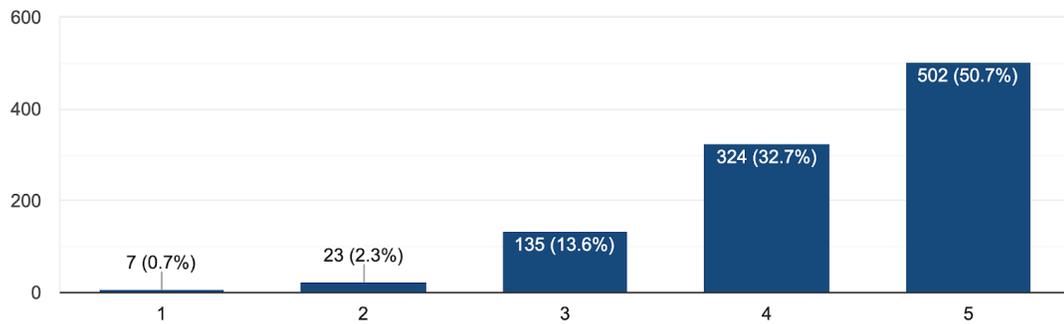
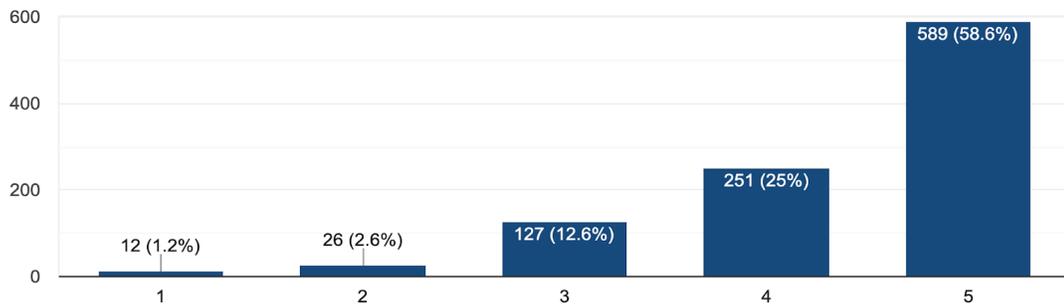


Figure 2.3

The ship's complex design and mechanical systems as a platform for exploring science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) themes

1,005 responses



The following charts are selected visualizations of the data collected from the Museum Planning Survey. These visualizations are representations of respondent suggestions and are meant to provide a basic overview and categorization of input shared. These charts do not reflect the entirety of the data collected, but instead reflect some of the key aspects of the data that was discussed above. An in-depth analysis of these suggestions will continue to inform the Conservancy of best practices to suit the interests of our audience.

Figure 3.1

### Suggestions for Aspects to be Highlighted

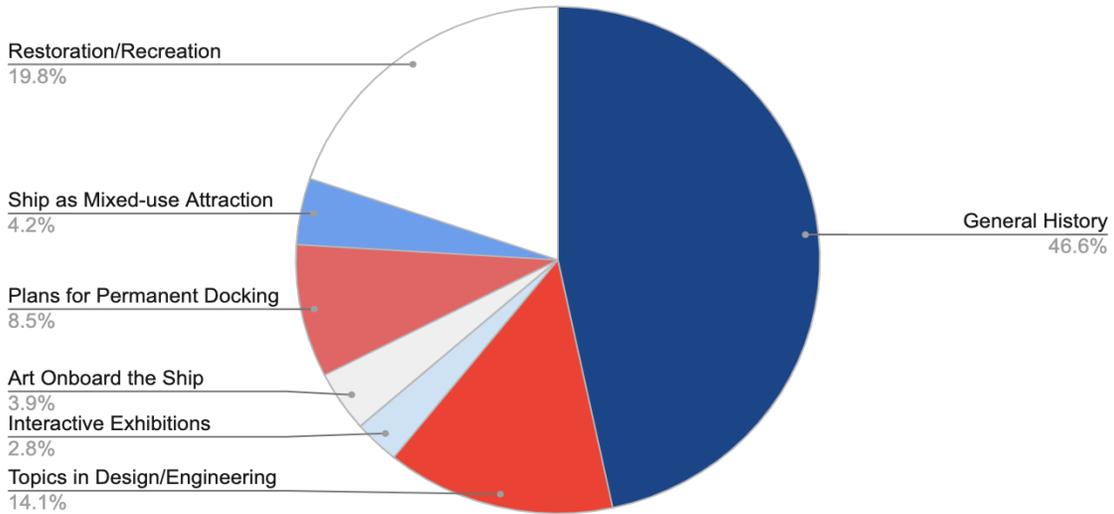


Figure 3.2

### Further Suggestions for Themes Found Compelling

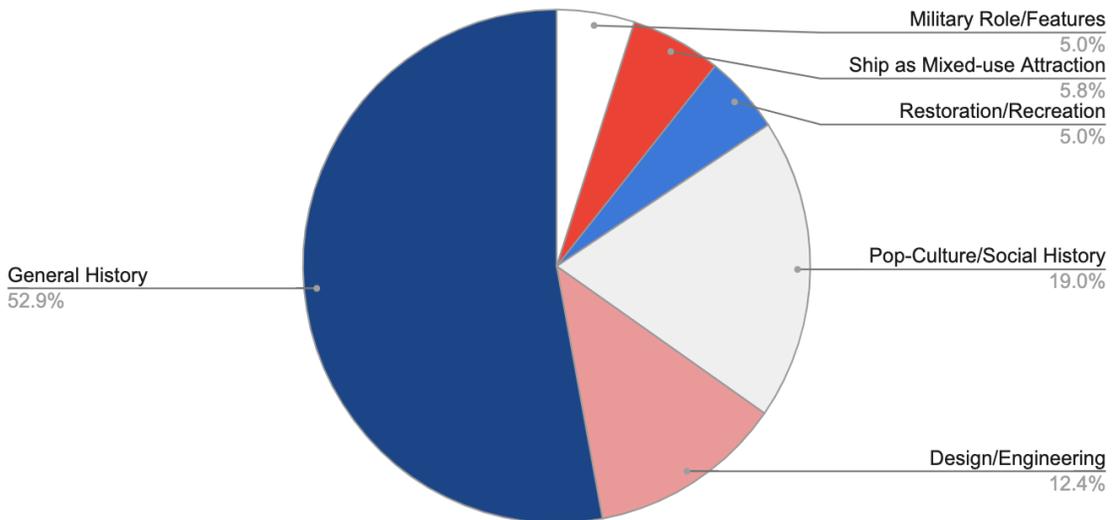


Figure 3.3

### Broader Themes Responders Found Most Exciting

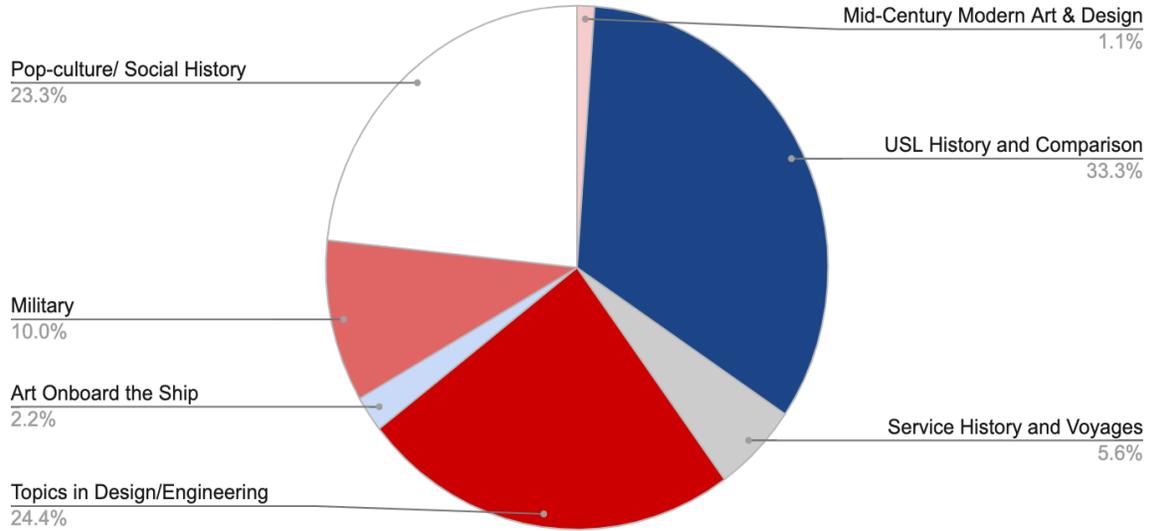
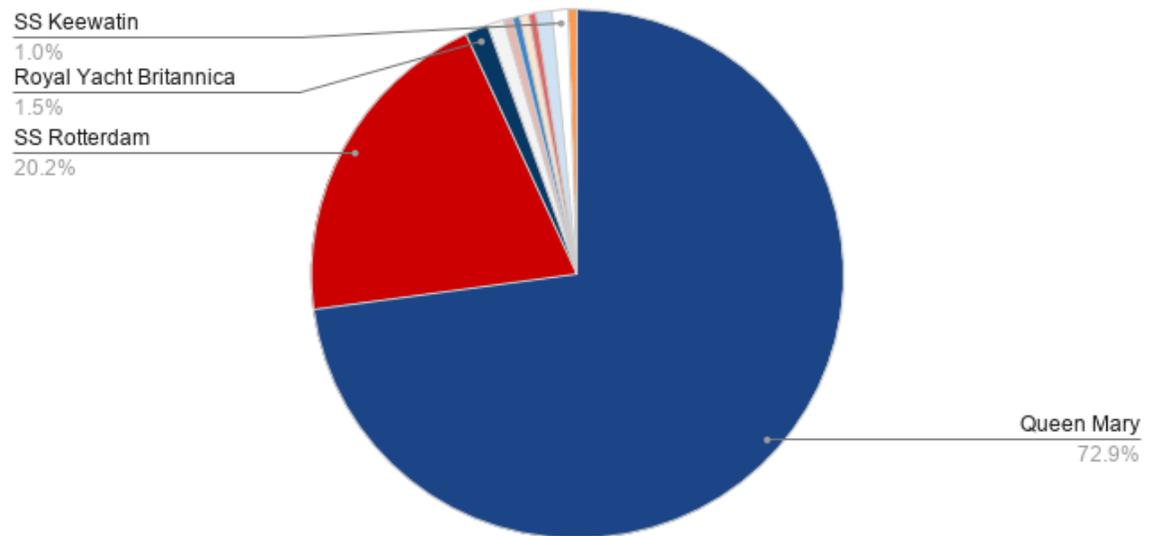


Figure 3.4

### Suggestions for Liner Museums to Emulate





Mae, Janette, and Inez Gautier pose for a US Lines publicity still. Photograph courtesy of Janette Gautier.

## POTENTIAL AREAS OF IMPACT

### *Inspiring Future Generations*

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**T**hrough survey engagement, the SS *United States* Conservancy has been able to outline three potential areas of impact on which the future museum might focus. These areas are: (1) Living Histories, (2) Social History, and (3) Technology, Design, and Engineering surrounding the context of the SS *United States*.

## LIVING HISTORIES

When survey respondents were asked to suggest further aspects to be highlighted within the museum space, 46.6%, an overwhelming majority, indicated their interest in some sort of historical analysis or discussion (Figure 3.1). In order to understand and outline what types of history these individuals were suggesting, the Conservancy further analyzed the data labeled as History (Figure 4.1) and separated it into seven separate subjects: (1) Art/Design History, (2) General History, (3) Living History, (4) Pop-Culture History, (5) Service History, (6) US History, and (7) *United States* Lines History. A majority of respondents, 37.4%, indicated their interest in some sort of "Living History."

The Conservancy defines living history as including, but not limited to: (1) Crew and passenger experiences, (2) Immigration stories, and (3) Celebrity encounters. What the Conservancy defines as "Living Histories" are crucial to the preservation of the SS *United States* as not only an American monument but also a cultural memorial to those who played a role in the lifetime of the ship. By recording the stories and experiences of those who were directly influenced by the SS *United States*, including passengers, crew, as well as family members and even supporters of the ship, the Conservancy can solidify the ship as an important site for generations to come. The Conservancy intends to preserve these memories by collecting and displaying ephemera, objects, and memorabilia, as well as sharing and showcasing this content through dynamic audio, video, and digital platforms.

## SOCIAL (CONTEXTUAL) HISTORY

When survey respondents were asked to elaborate on themes they found to be compelling, an overwhelming majority, 52.9%, also indicated an interest in History (Figure 3.2). However, when analyzed further, the type of history respondents found most compelling was *United States Lines* History with a count of 42.2% of suggestions (Figure 4 .2). In the same analysis, 21.9% of respondents indicated that social history was most compelling. Interestingly, respondents also found *United States Lines* history most exciting, with a count of 33.3% of suggestions. The third most popular theme, with 23.3% of suggestions, was cultural context (the second most popular suggestion, with 24.4% respondent engagement was STEAM themes, which is to be discussed below) (Figure 3.3).

Using this data, the SS *United States* Conservancy found that "Social History" is another big area of interest. The Conservancy defines "Social History" as the contextual history of the SS *United States* including (1) Service history and the history of *United States Lines*, (2) Maritime history as a crucial part of socio-political history, and (3) the History of the SS *United States*.

The impact of *United States Lines* and ocean liners on transportation was considerable. To offer faster overseas travel, in a time before the Jet Age, meant coming one step closer to a global society. It is in this sense that the service history of the SS *United States* can be examined in the context within which she came to be: this includes the social and political moments and movements that shaped *United States* history. The Conservancy will explore how to best engage with these histories through discussions of political leaders who sailed aboard the SS *United States* as well as collecting memorabilia from former crew and passengers. The Conservancy will also engage with artwork from the ship that touches upon socio-political issues through permanent and/or rotating exhibits and engage with immigration stories and policy.

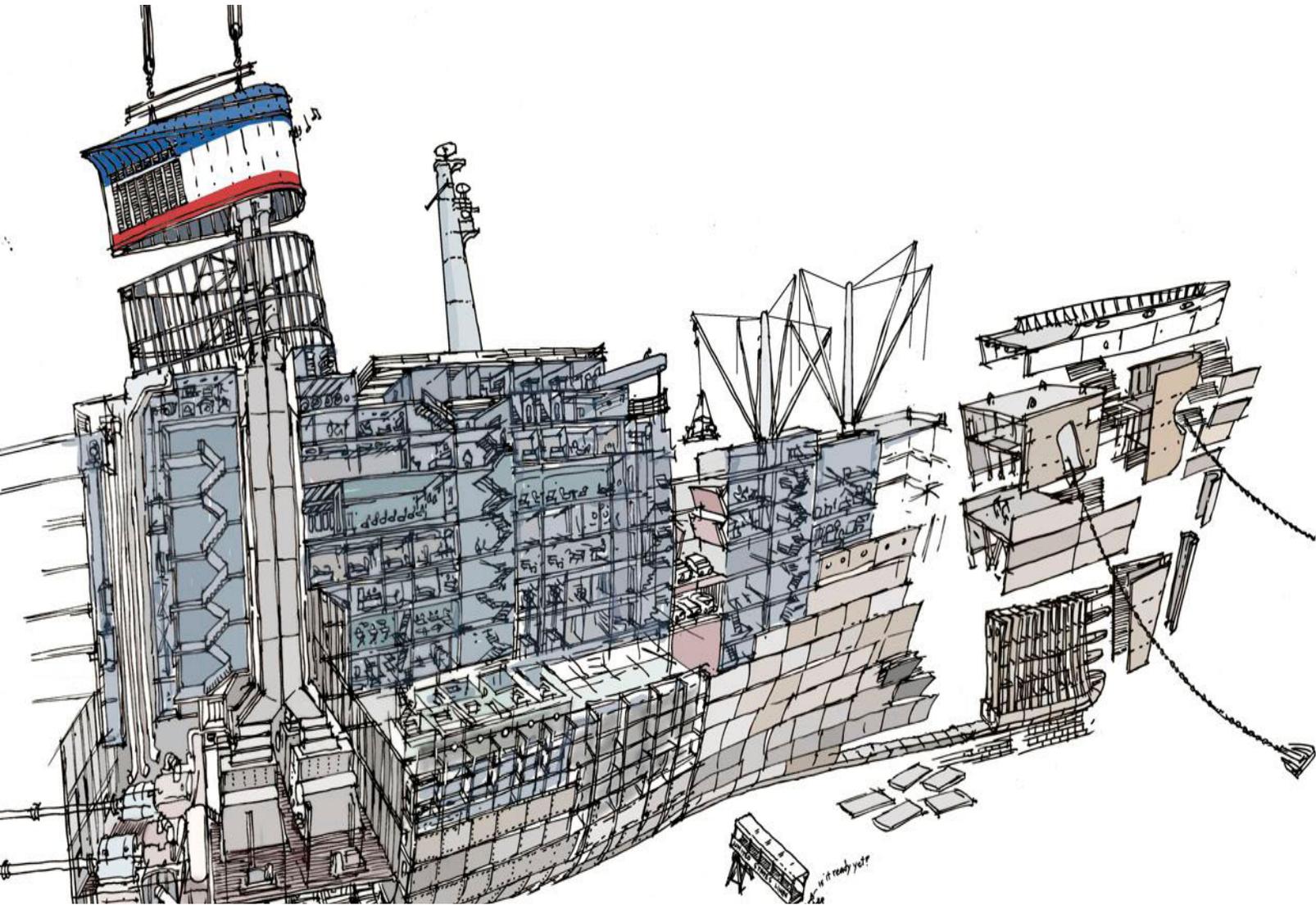
## TECHNOLOGY, DESIGN, & ENGINEERING

The Conservancy's understanding of the theme of Technology, Design, and Engineering includes (1) Engaging with the history of the ship's designer, William Francis Gibbs and his revolutionary design, (2) The relationship between technology and the SS *United States* (including the race for the Blue Riband, the incorporation of a range of technological innovations, including the Radarange, and the rise of the Jet Age), and (3) Mid-century modern design, aesthetics, and theory.

Technology, Design, and Engineering was a favorite topic among survey respondents when asked about further suggestions for themes to be highlighted, found exciting, and most compelling. 24.4% of survey respondents indicated that they found STEAM themes to be most exciting; the second most popular opinion among respondents in that question. (Figure 3.3) When asked which themes were most compelling, the third most popular opinion was Design/Engineering with 12.4% of respondents suggesting this theme. (Figure 3.2) Similarly, when asked which aspects of the SS *United States* should be highlighted, 14.1% of respondents suggested Design/Engineering, the second most popular opinion as well. (Figure 3.1) These responses indicated to the Conservancy that themes surrounding Technology, Design, and Engineering were of great interest to our audience base and offered a clearer vision of what should be a focus for future Curatorial efforts.

The SS *United States* was the pinnacle of post-war technology, luxury, and design and represented the best maritime innovation the world had to offer at the time. Due to the 'Flagship's' iconic nature, the SS *United States* was also privy to some of the newest commercial technology including the Radarange, or as we know it now, the microwave, as well as air conditioning, and the "dimmer switch" for lighting. Many of these inventions were popularized through travel and use on the ship and have shaped technology

today. By engaging with the themes of Technology, Design, and Engineering the Conservancy is able to consider the impacts the *SS United States* had on the world in her own time, but also highlight the technological advancements that were developing around her. By thinking critically about the technology and design of and aboard the *SS United States*, the Conservancy has the opportunity to make crucial connections to today's trends and progressions. The Conservancy can engage this theme by displaying blueprints and specs of the *SS United States* and detailing the design of the ship for the audience, using innovative techniques as an homage to the groundbreaking engineering of the ship. By providing a thorough framework of the ship's engineering and design processes, visitors will be able to better understand what made the *SS United States* a truly remarkable entity.



Conceptual rendering of the *SS United States* by author-illustrator David Macaulay

The following charts are selected visualizations of the survey data collected in the survey's open-ended questions. These visualizations do not reflect the nuance and specifics of this data, but instead depict it in broad categories. The Conservancy has retained the full responses to the survey's open-ended questions, and this detailed input will continue to guide and inform the Conservancy's museum planning process going forward.

Figure 4.1

**Suggestions for Topics in History to be Highlighted:**

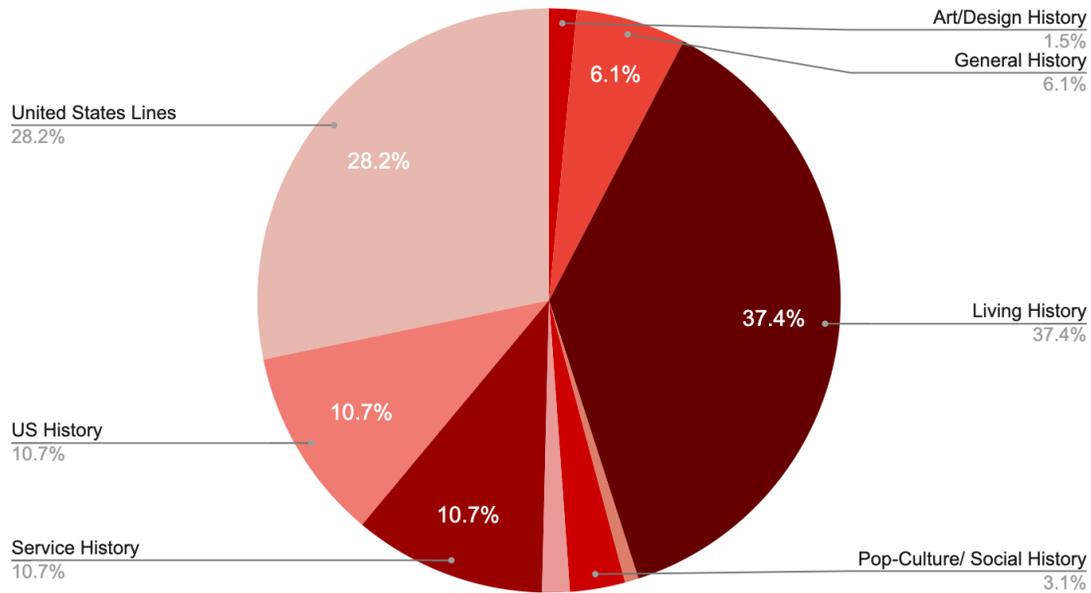
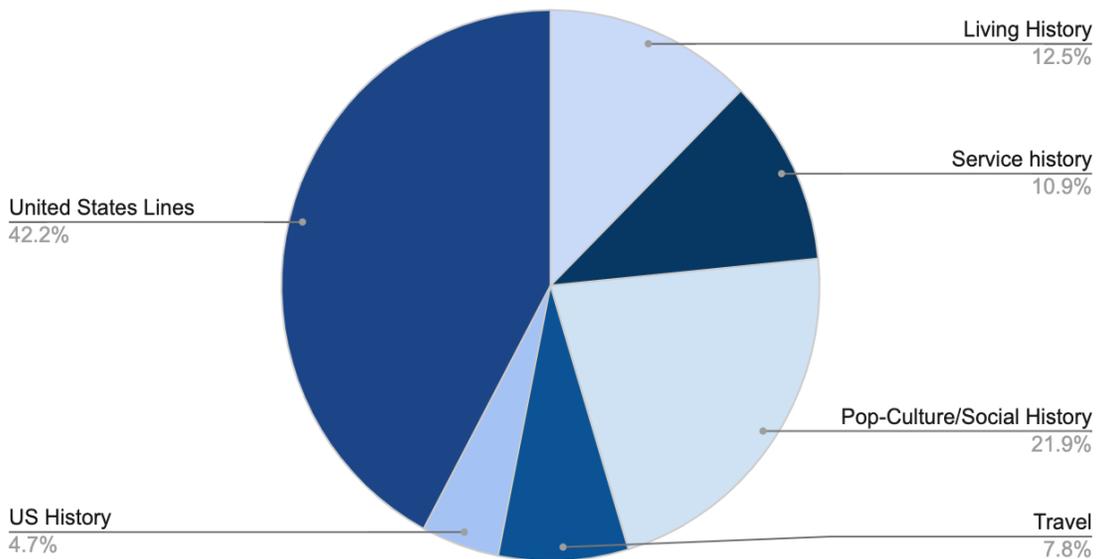


Figure 4.2

**Suggestions for Topics of History Found Compelling**





Photograph from the SS United States Conservancy's Albert W. Durant Photography Collection

# CURATORIAL PRACTICES AND COLLECTIONS ENGAGEMENT

## *Preserving a Legacy*

Through survey analysis, the Conservancy outlined three specific categories of engagement that would best serve the collection and audience participation: (1) Restoration, (2) Display, and (3) Interactivity. Through a combination of these three curatorial practices, the Conservancy hopes to capture the interests and imaginations of audience members of all ages and demographics.

## RESTORATION

The topic of restoration was a popular theme among survey respondents, with 93.8% indicating an interest in seeing replicas of staterooms or other interior spaces, and 19.8% (or the second most popular) of respondents indicating that restoration was a crucial aspect to be highlighted (Figure 3.1). When asked to suggest further themes or topics for the Conservancy to engage with, the majority of respondents, or 33.6%, indicated further interest in restoration of spaces onboard (Figure 5.1). Additionally, when asked to suggest further interpretive or engaging exhibition practices, 13.2% of respondents indicated that restoration was of great interest, making it the third most popular recommendation. Specific spaces or elements of interest for restoration were the Propellers, Engine Room, Cabin/Staterooms, and the Navajo Lounge.

The Conservancy's most important role is the continued preservation of the *SS United States* and her history. As noted previously, the interiors of the vessel were entirely removed by a previous owner for asbestos abatement and preparation for redevelopment, so iconic spaces would necessitate recreation rather than restoration. Through redevelopment, it is possible to bring certain aspects of the ship back to

life and offer a glimpse at what it was to travel aboard the *SS United States*. From analyzing this survey, the Conservancy was able to further identify our audience's desire for the restoration and/or recreation of select, iconic, shipboard spaces. This information will help to create a foundation upon which the Conservancy can pursue restoration projects that best preserve the ship's history while also maximizing audience engagement.

## DISPLAY

Displays and exhibitions will be the backbone of public engagement with the history and importance of the *SS United States*. The *SS United States* Conservancy's shipboard museum will potentially employ a variety of techniques aimed at engaging and inspiring audiences of all ages and interests.

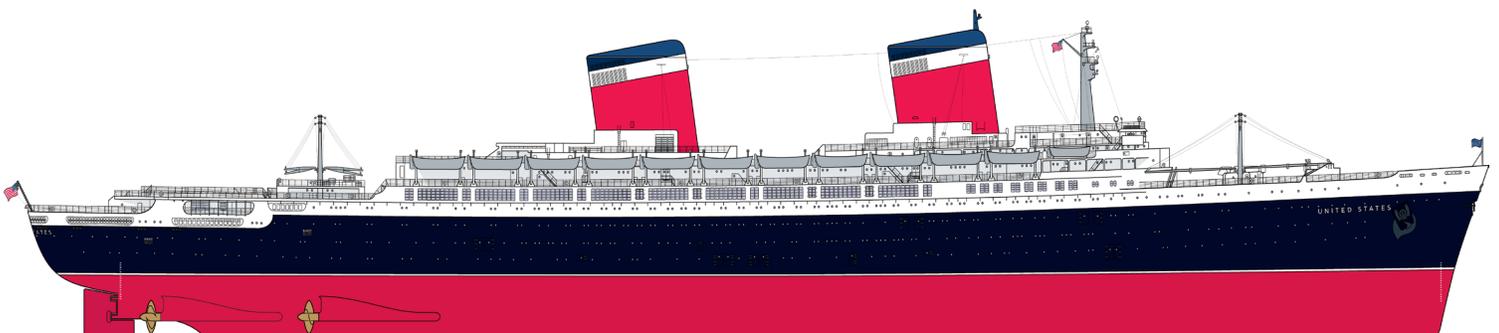
To better understand the types of displays our audience base might respond to, the Planning Survey asked "Which program components and interpretive devices do you enjoy when you visit museums?" The most popular topic selected, with 52.2% of respondents indicating a 5 out of 5, was "x-ray devices" that reveal "the way things work" and peel back the layers beneath the surface.(see appendix Figure d.2) This response received the majority of interest by survey respondents indicating a high level of interest in informational displays about the design and engineering of the ship. The second most popular type of display was traditional displays of art and artifacts in display cases with 50.6% of survey respondents indicating a "great deal of interest" (See appendix Figure d.1).

To better understand what specifically it was that the audience felt should be showcased, the Survey asked which specific object or exhibition should be included in the future museum? Individuals generally responded in one of four categories:

- (1) Art/Artifacts (30.8%)
- (2) Object Restoration ( 30.3%)
- (3) Service Objects ( 23.6%)
- (4) Engineering (15.3%) (Figure 5.3)

Of the most popular category, Art/Artifacts, the most common suggestions were (1) Artwork found on board and (2) the Original Steinway Piano, both of which had 20.7% of suggestions (Figure 5.4). The two most popular Restoration suggestions were (1) the restoration or recreation of the Engine Room and (2) a General restoration/redevelopment of the ship itself (Figure 5.5).

By asking questions specifically thinking about display, the Planning Survey helped the Conservancy to pinpoint particular objects and types of exhibitions desired by our audience base. In turn, this information will aid in setting a foundation for future curatorial efforts including potential objects to be permanently displayed within the museum space as well as engaging themes for temporary exhibitions.





*Jim Davis during his 1959 voyage from New York City to the United Kingdom. Jim's father convinced the captain to take them to the bridge.*  
Photograph courtesy of Jim Davis.

## INTERACTIVITY

As discussed previously, various spaces on board the *SS United States* are not feasible to restore and will be activated commercially, rather than utilized for the museum. This, however, serves as an opportunity, rather than a setback, for the future museum and visitor's center in which to engage our audience in unconventional and innovative ways. Using today's cutting edge technologies, the Conservancy has the unique opportunity to create interactive and educational spaces within a museum setting. The incorporation of technology, such as games, virtual reality, or interactive devices, into future exhibitions will not only allow the Conservancy to recreate and showcase important spaces on board the *SS United States*, but will also appeal to a wide range of audiences and their individual interests.

In response to the question: Which program components and interpretive devices do you enjoy when you visit museums?, survey respondents indicated "a great deal of interest" in x-ray devices that reveal the way things work with 52.2% of respondents selecting 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 (See appendix Figure d.2). The third most popular selection was 3D encounters with key figures using virtual reality with 46.8% of respondents indicating "a great deal of interest"(appendix Figure d.3). Interestingly, the selection considered least popular was Interactive learning stations offering games and challenges with the majority of respondents, or 32%, voting "moderate interest"or a 3 out of 5 (appendix Figure d.7).

The Planning Survey also asked respondents to suggest further methods of engagement so that the Conservancy might obtain the opinions and interests of the audience base in their own words. Of the suggestions given, the three most popular categories, or themes of engagement were: (1) Lectures and films, (2) Education- based Initiatives, and (3) Restored/Recreated Spaces.

The following charts are selected visualizations of the survey data collected in the survey's open-ended questions. These visualizations do not reflect the nuance and specifics of this data, but instead depict it in broad categories. The Conservancy has retained the full responses to the survey's open-ended questions, and this detailed input will continue to guide and inform the Conservancy's museum planning process going forward.

Figure 5.1

**Suggestions for Topics to Further Engage With**

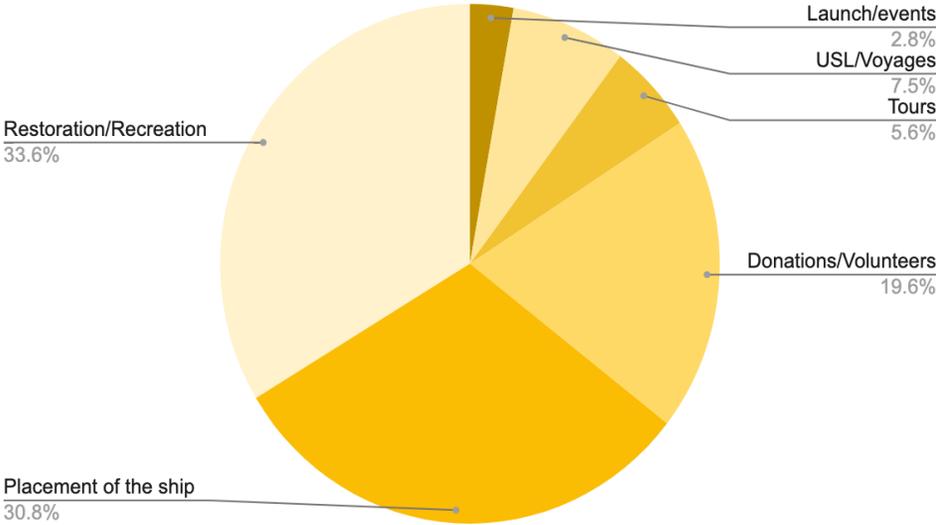


Figure 5.2

**Suggestions for Interactive or Engaging Exhibitions**

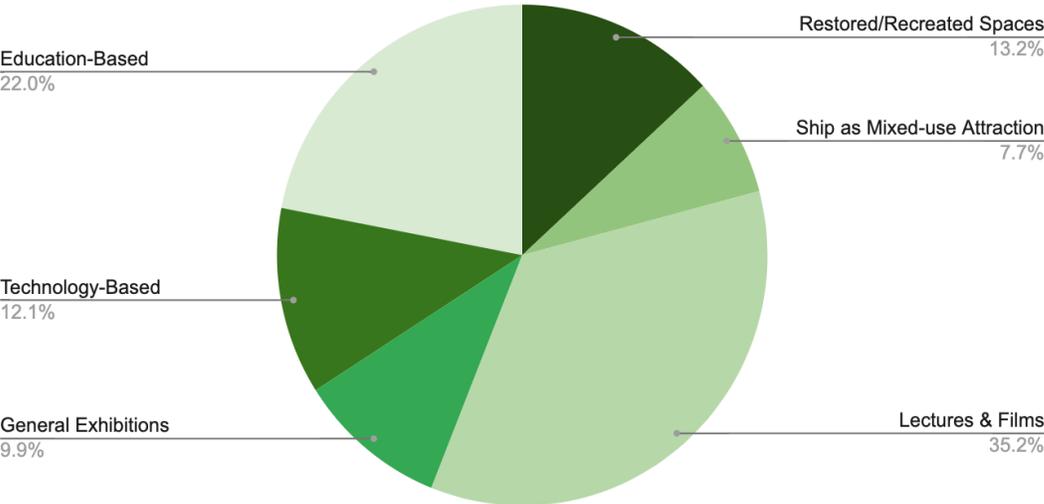


Figure 5.3

If you were asked to choose only one artifact or exhibit for inclusion in the museum what would it be and why?

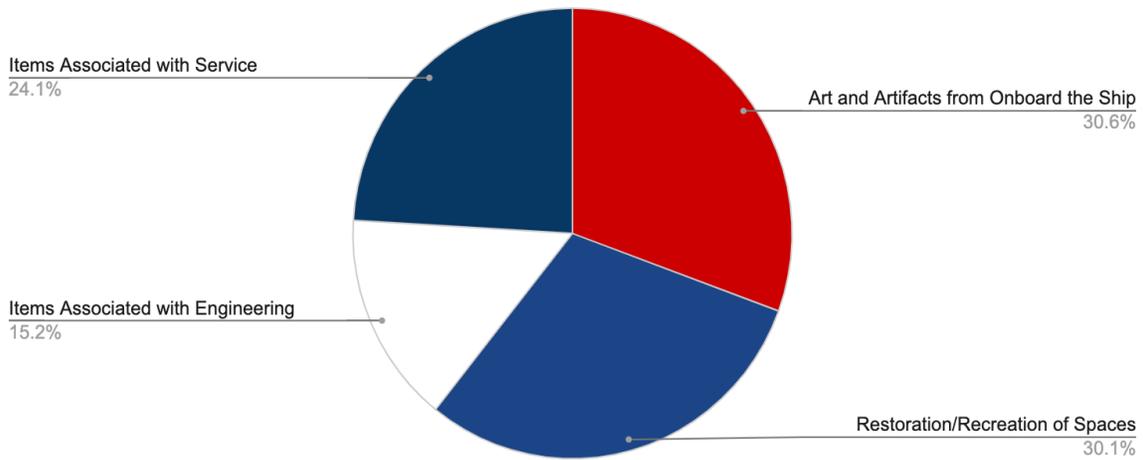


Figure 5.4

Suggestions for Art & Artifacts to be Displayed

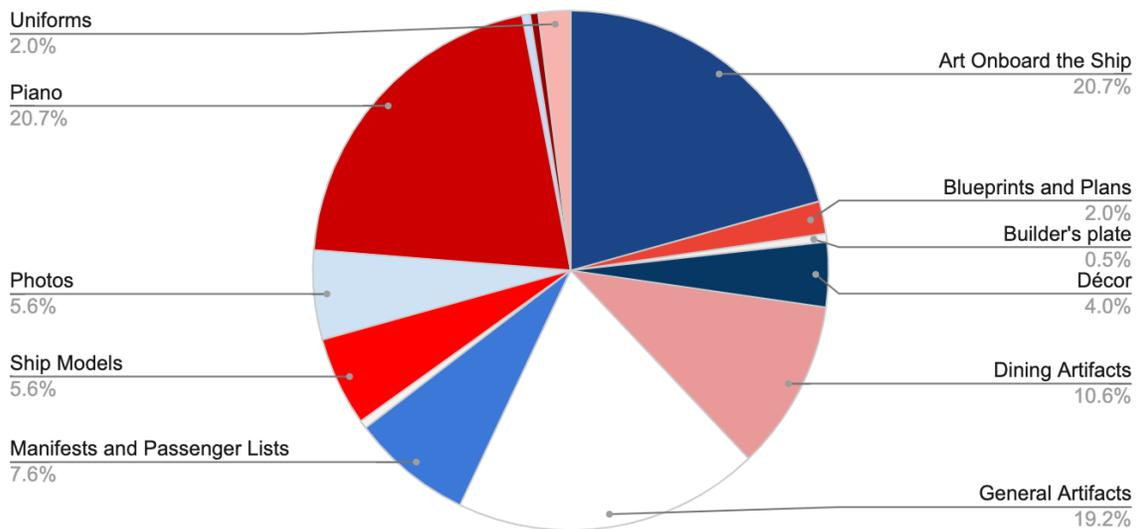


Figure 5.5

### Suggestions for Spaces & Objects to be Restored or Recreated

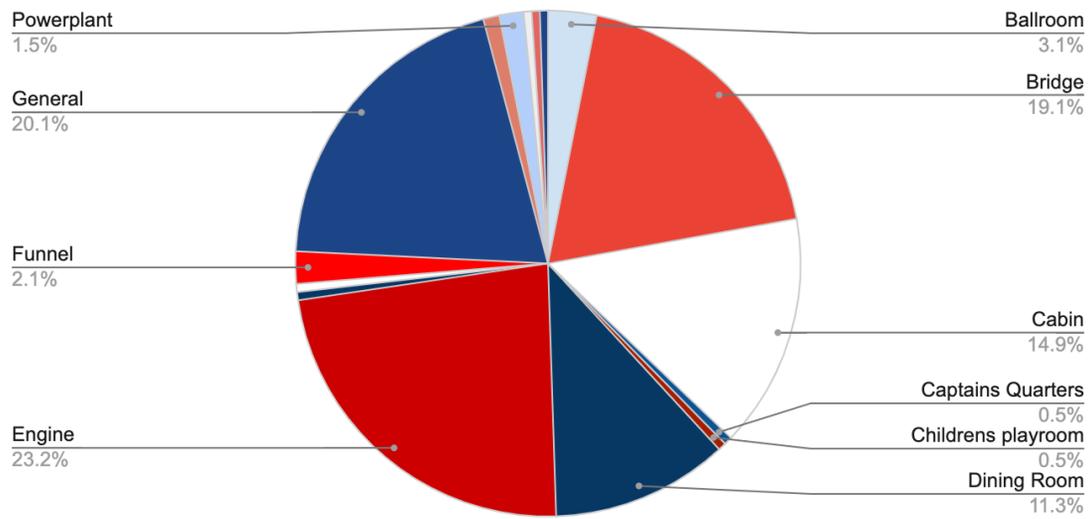
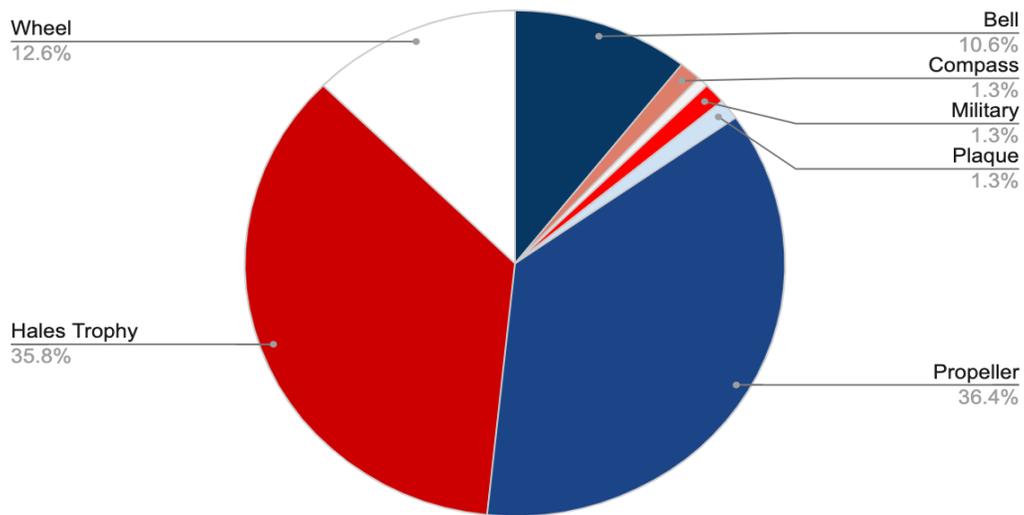


Figure 5.6

### Suggested Items Associated with Service for Inclusion





Photograph courtesy of Nick Landiak.

## CONCLUSION

### *Gathering Inspiration Into Action*

Ocean liners, and maritime travel in general, transformed and redefined the *United States* from its earliest years as a nation. At a time when the only way to cross the Atlantic Ocean was by ship, the speed and ease with which ocean liners did so made the world much more accessible and helped to create today's global community. The *SS United States* in particular changed maritime transportation in ways that still impact and influence engineers, passengers, and consumers alike. It is central to the Conservancy's mission to ensure that the *SS United States* is preserved but also used as a catalyst for education and meaningful discussion. The "Big U" not only shines a light on the enduring themes of American innovation and ingenuity, but it also can act as a lens through which we can view topics like immigration, pop culture, social and art history, and technology, in new and exciting ways, while celebrating the history of the *United States*.

While the data gathered by the Planning Survey is important to the growth and cultivation of a successful future museum and visitor's center, the Conservancy also acknowledges that there is more information to be gathered and work to be done. This Planning Survey report is a preliminary, yet critical, step in the larger process of developing a space that both appeals to our audience base, yet also a powerful draw to a broader audience that might not have normally engaged with the *SS United States*.

One of the biggest challenges for any museum, let alone a museum dedicated to the history and preservation of a single space, is to create content that continually captures the attention and inspires visitors across generations. By learning more about what our current audience base hopes to see in the museum, as well as what they find inspiring and engaging, the Conservancy is able to put these responses, and the information, gathered into action.

# APPENDIX

The following data visualizations reflect nearly the entire collected data from the Museum Planning Survey. This includes: demographics of the respondents, short answer data visualizations, and results previously discussed in the report. The bar graphs indicate interest on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being minimal interest and 5 being a great deal of interest.

What aspects of the SS United States do you think should be highlighted in the Conservancy's shipboard museum and visitor's center?

Figure A.1

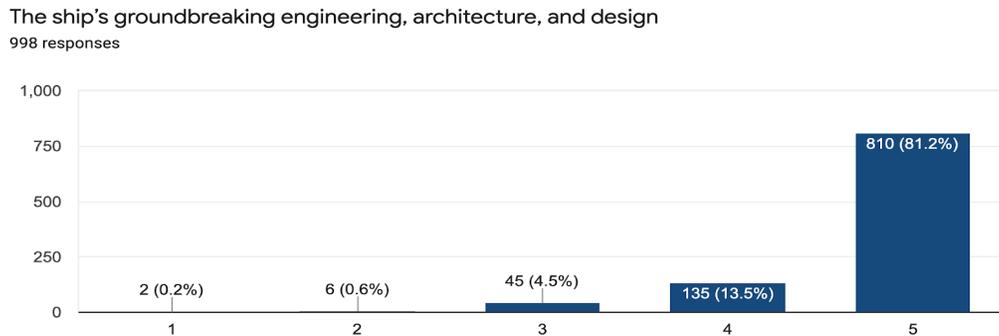


Figure A.2

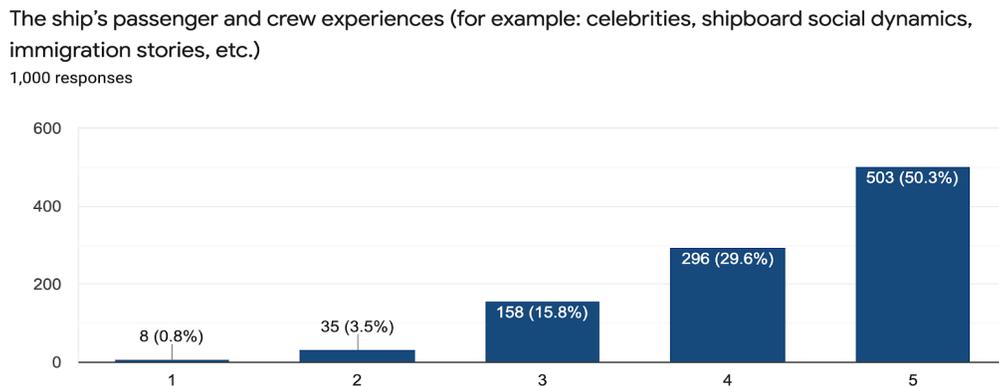


Figure A.3

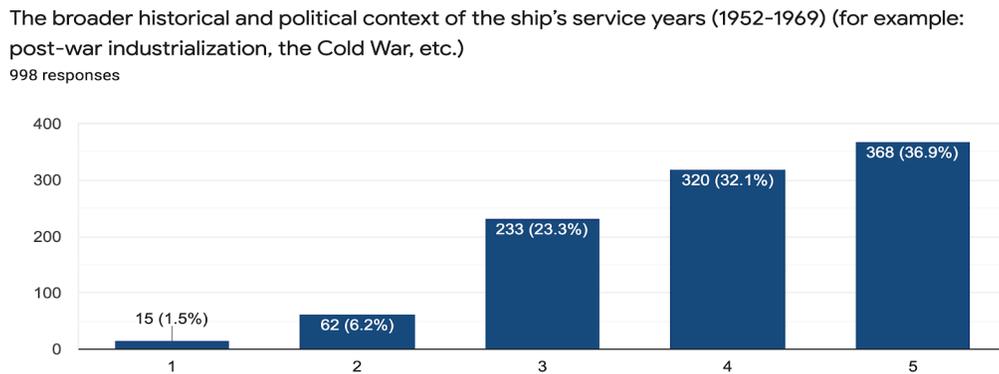


Figure A.4

The ship's original art installations and mid-century modern interior décor  
1,000 responses

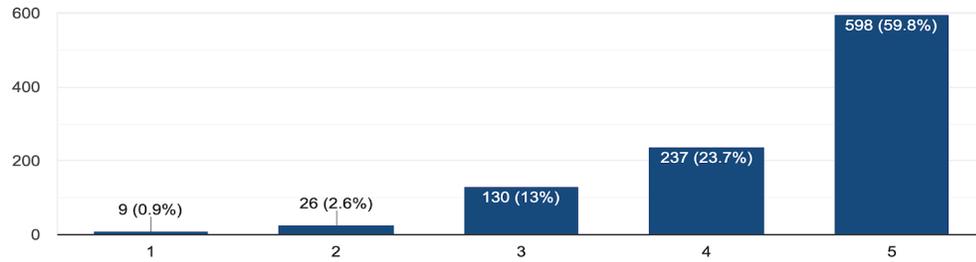
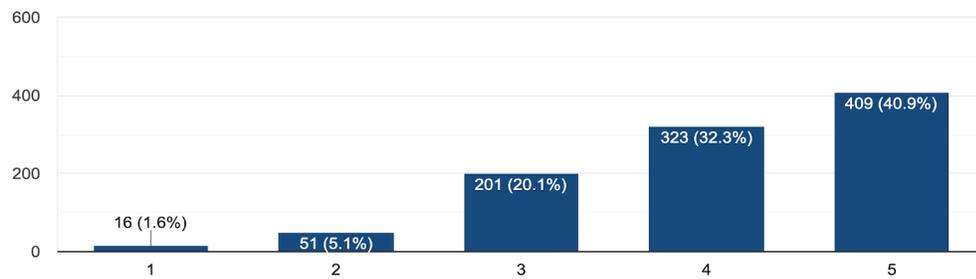


Figure A.5

The ship's post-service career and the story of her rebirth and revitalization  
1,000 responses



The Conservancy hopes that its museum and visitor's center will inspire and excite a wide range of visitors with varied interests. Which of the following broader themes do you think are most compelling?

Figure B.1

Mid-century modern art and design  
994 responses

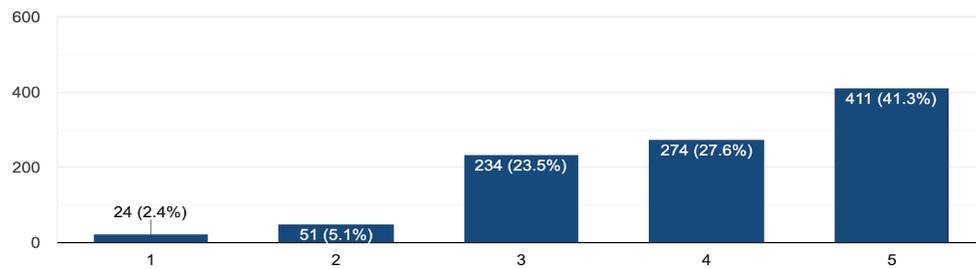


Figure B.2

The “American Century” and U.S. post-World War II history  
994 responses

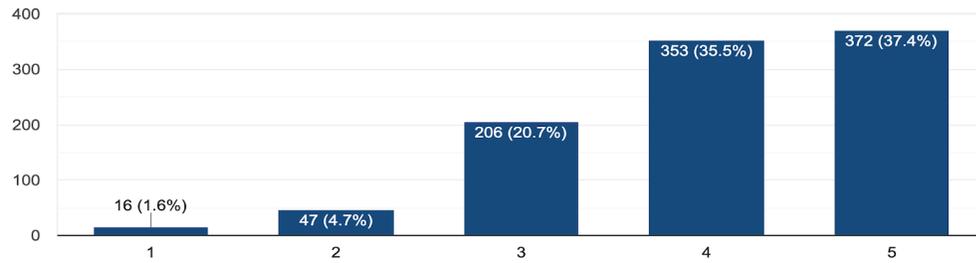


Figure B.3

Industrial design, discovery, and innovation  
991 responses

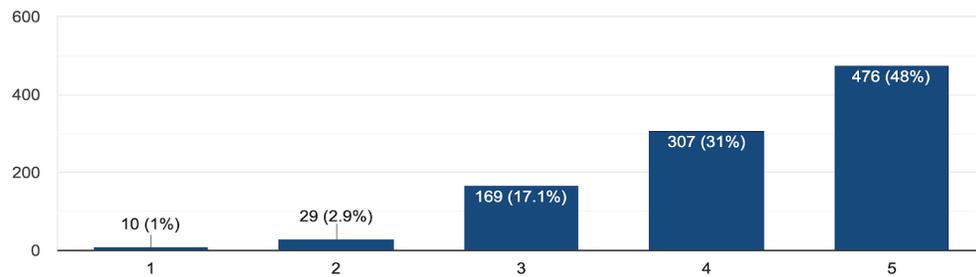


Figure B.4

American maritime history  
994 responses

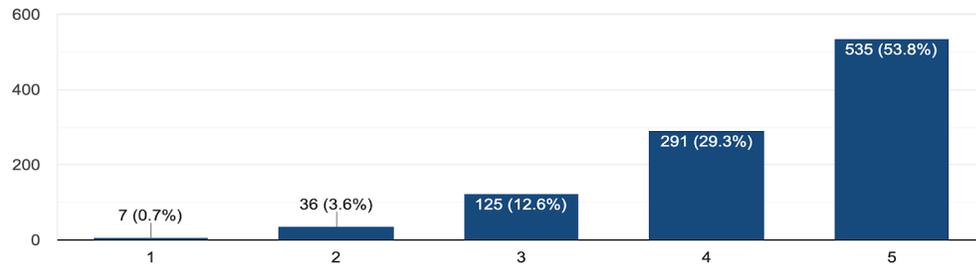


Figure B.5

The "golden age" of transatlantic liners and the race for the Blue Riband  
994 responses

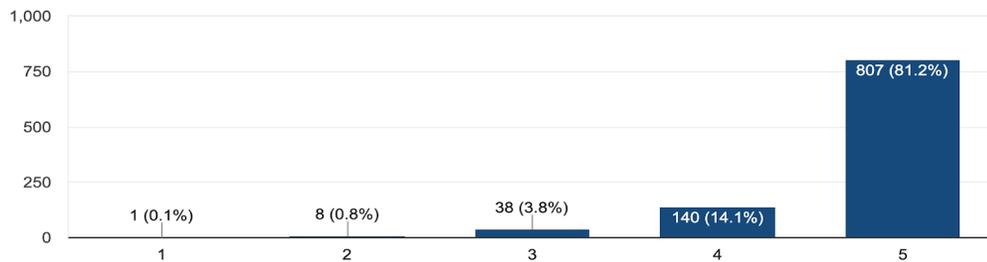
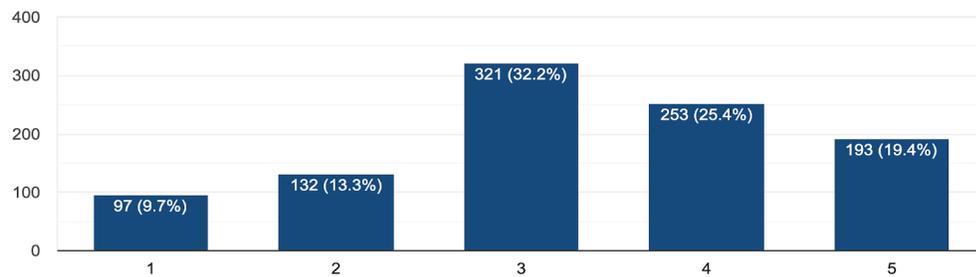


Figure B.6

Pop culture and social trends of the 1950s & 1960s (immigration, civil rights and women's movements, etc.)  
996 responses



*The Conservancy's future museum and visitor's center seeks to inspire reflection and discussion of broader social, artistic, and historical themes. Which of the following themes excite you the most?*

Figure C.I

The ship as embodying a technological and industrial "high watermark" (the ship could be viewed in the context of other "high watermarks" of other innovators/innovations)  
991 responses

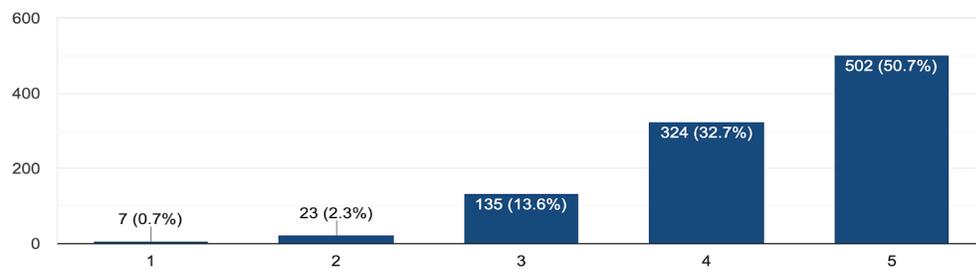


Figure C.2

The ship's complex design and mechanical systems as a platform for exploring science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) themes

993 responses

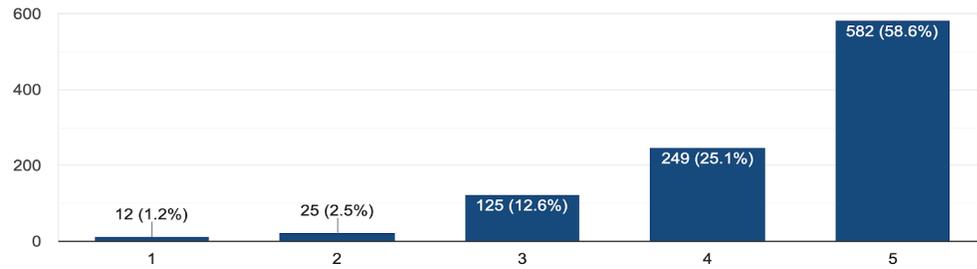


Figure C.3

The ship as an iconic American achievement and manifestation of national character (themes of patriotism, post-war national pride, unpacking the American Dream, etc.)

994 responses

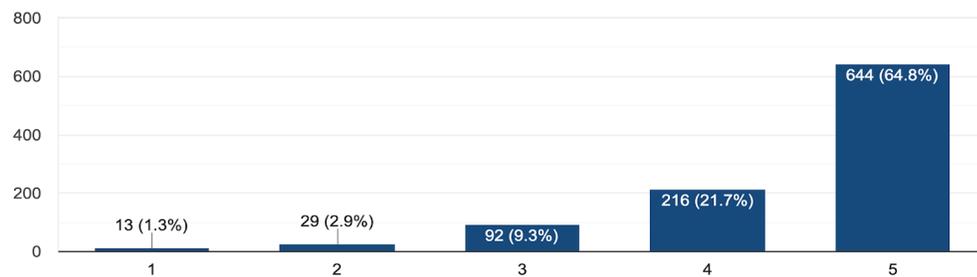


Figure C.4

The ship as a vehicle for exploring sustainability themes, from examining environmental excesses of the 1950s to today's "green" breakthroughs and marine stewardship themes.

992 responses

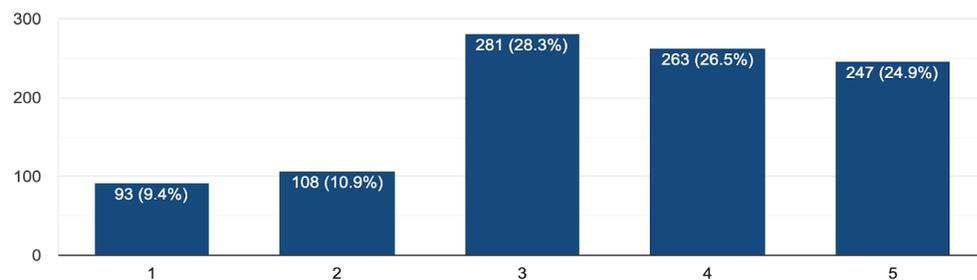


Figure C.5

The ship as an exemplar of mid-century modern art and design  
992 responses

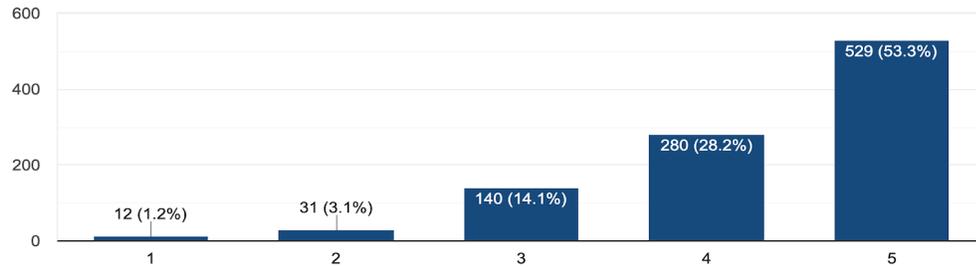
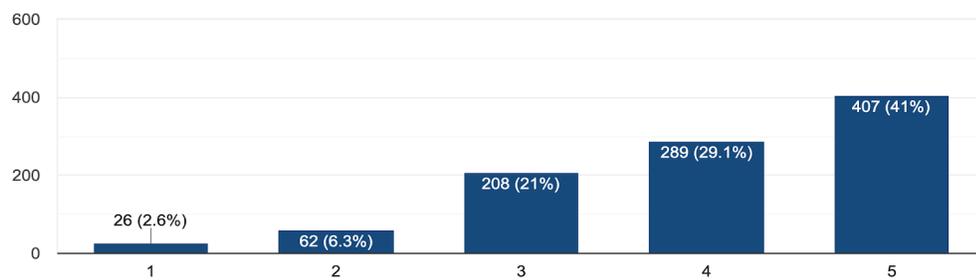


Figure C.6

The ship as a vehicle for embarking on journeys of discovery (explorations of ship's original ports of call, the cultures of distant lands, exotic journeys)  
992 responses



Museums utilize a range of tools and approaches to educate and engage the public. Which program components and interpretive devices do you enjoy when you visit museums?

Figure D.I

Traditional displays of art, artifacts, and stories curated in display cases and interpretative panels  
988 responses

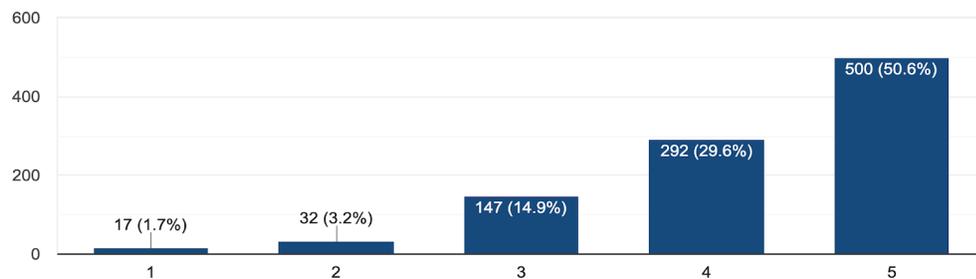


Figure D.2

“X-Ray” devices that reveal “the way things work” and peel back the layers beneath the surface  
990 responses

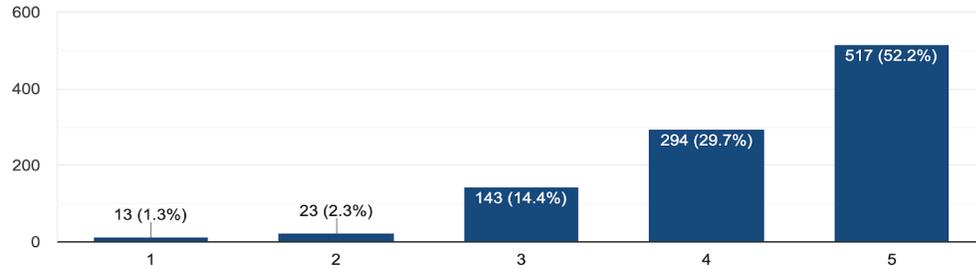


Figure D.3

Live 3D encounters in which holograms provide virtual reality interactions with key individuals and artifacts  
993 responses

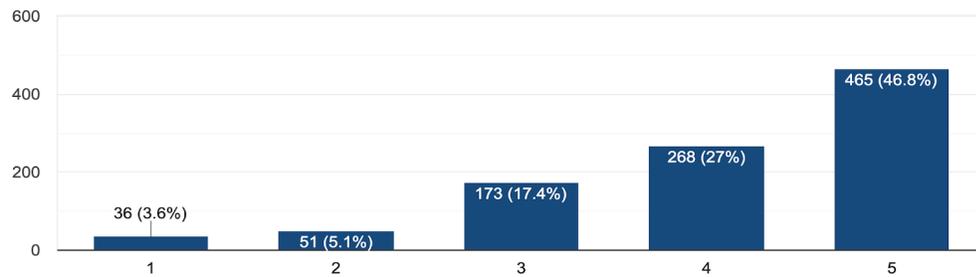


Figure D.4

The ship as a vehicle for exploring sustainability themes, from examining environmental excesses of the 1950s to today’s “green” breakthroughs and marine stewardship themes.  
992 responses

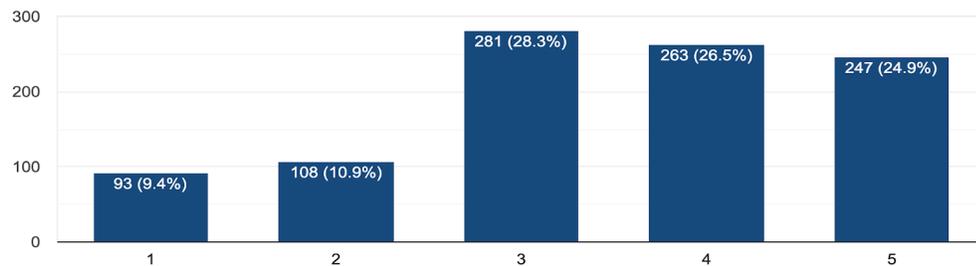


Figure D.5

Audioscapes that complement visual experiences as they are activated upon reaching selected venue/spaces  
983 responses

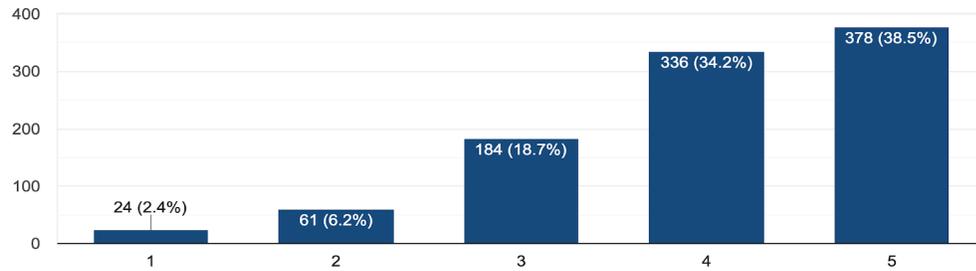


Figure D.6

“First Person Arts” showcasing video clips and interactions with historical figures and other evocative personalities  
990 responses

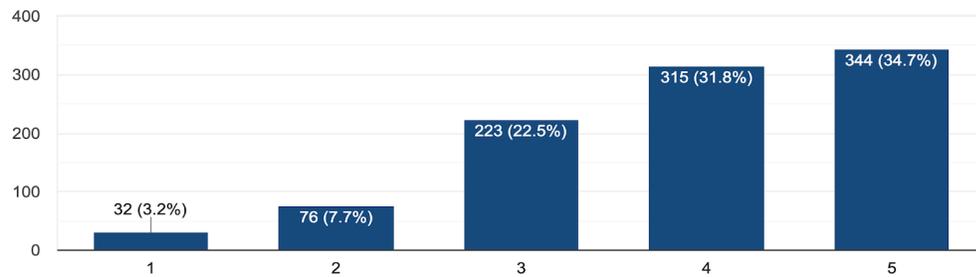
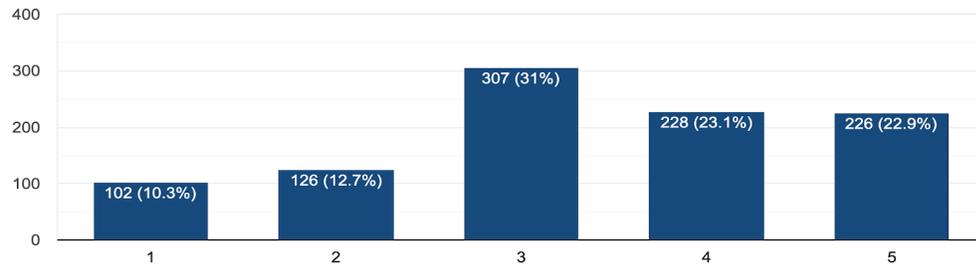


Figure D.7

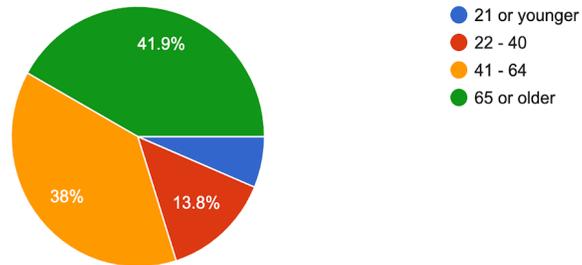
Interactive learning stations offering games and challenges  
989 responses



*Demographics: The following data visualizations reflect the demographics of those who responded to the survey. This information was collected anonymously.*

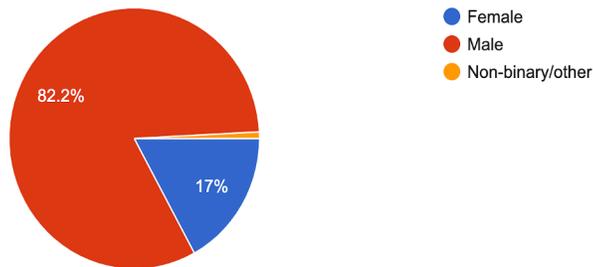
**Figure E.1**

What is your age?  
1,010 responses



**Figure E.2**

What is your gender?  
992 responses



**Figure E.3**

When did you become interested in the SS United States?  
991 responses

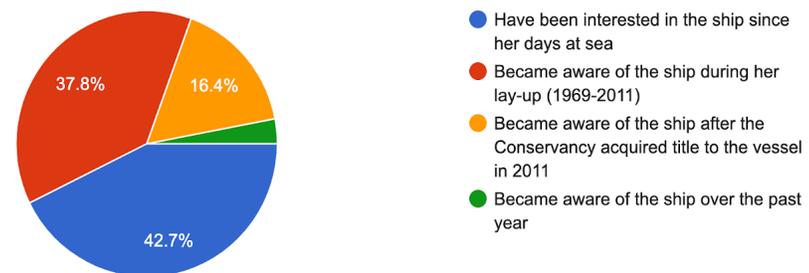
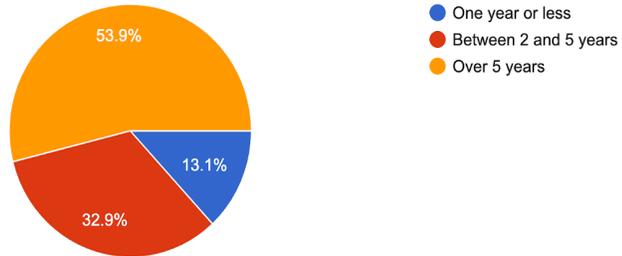


Figure E.4

For how long have you supported the SS United States Conservancy?

853 responses



Photograph courtesy of Margaret L. Smith.





**SS UNITED STATES**  
CONSERVANCY

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SAVING AMERICA'S FLAGSHIP

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