

PAPER/PRESENTATION 4: Museum Assessment and Evaluation

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Museum Assessment: “Celebrating Jackie” Online Exhibit

The Smithsonian’s online exhibit “Celebrating Jackie,” hosted by the National Museum of African American History and Culture, explores the life and legacy of Jackie Robinson. It’s a well-designed digital space that pays tribute to Robinson not just as an athlete but as a symbol of courage, resistance, and change. This assessment evaluates the exhibit using the four-part framework outlined in the Assessing Excellence rubric: Comfort, Engagement, Reinforcement, and Meaning. I looked at how well the exhibit orients the viewer, holds attention, delivers information, and connects to broader human concerns. What follows is a breakdown of each category with three selected sub-criteria.

Comfort

Orientation in the exhibit is strong. You land on a clearly labeled homepage with sections you can scroll through vertically—no complicated menus or drop-downs. Subheadings like “Early Years,” “Breaking Barriers,” and “Legacy” guide you through without feeling lost. Navigation is linear and makes sense.

In terms of convenience and ergonomics, the site loads quickly and works well on both desktop and mobile. Text is readable and images scale smoothly. There’s no audio or sound pollution—so nothing distracts from the content. The layout is clean. There's enough breathing

room between elements that it doesn't feel like information overload.

As for control of one's own experience, the site lets you engage at your own pace. Nothing autoplays. You scroll when you want to scroll, click when you want to click. You don't need to follow a rigid timeline—it's respectful of different levels of interest and attention spans. It's not a cluttered homepage—it sets up expectations and invites you in without demanding prior knowledge or a specific viewing order. Even for users who might not be familiar with Jackie Robinson's full story, it offers a smooth entry point without assumptions.

Engagement

The exhibit grabs attention right away. The opening image of Jackie Robinson sliding into home, paired with bold type, sets the tone. This isn't a dry biography—it's about impact. That impact is carried through a mix of historic photos, personal artifacts, timelines, and short explanatory captions. There's also a video section embedded later in the exhibit that adds movement and sound to what was otherwise a still-image-based experience.

In terms of variety of formats, it hits a decent balance. It doesn't overwhelm with tech but mixes photos, scanned documents, quotes, and short-form videos. There's enough diversity in format to keep the experience from going flat.

On the intellectual and physical side of engagement, it works well for a range of users. Physically, you just scroll—no barriers there. Intellectually, it invites you to connect dots: from segregation to protest to legacy. The content is layered, but not inaccessibly academic. There's also a sense of reverence in how it's presented—no pretentiousness, just strong images and clean design that respects the subject matter.

Reinforcement

The exhibit is not overwhelming. There's a balance between emotional resonance and factual content. It doesn't drown you in statistics or try to be a full-blown encyclopedia. Each section delivers a clear message, and then moves on.

Presentation is logical. It flows from early life to baseball career to cultural legacy. Timelines are chronological, but thematic captions help you connect across time—like how Jackie's experiences in the army laid the groundwork for how he handled public pressure later.

The structure is compact but effective. You get a sense of closure by the end—not just of one man's story, but of the ripples that followed. Nothing feels redundant or tacked on. Even when dealing with heavy themes like racism and public pressure, it keeps its tone grounded, which helps the material stay accessible.

Meaning

The exhibit builds on prior knowledge while also expanding it. If you come in already knowing Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball, you leave understanding the depth of his personal discipline, his activism, and his restraint. You also understand that he wasn't a perfect hero—he was complicated, and the exhibit doesn't flatten that.

It absolutely carries relevance. The language around justice, fairness, and protest hits especially hard in today's social climate. You can draw a straight line from Robinson's experience to contemporary issues of equity in sports, education, and public life.

The last section moves into something close to transcendence. It doesn't just celebrate his

achievements—it positions him as a moral figure. Not flawless, not mythic, but fully human and fully engaged in the struggle for justice. That leaves a mark. It's a reminder that exhibits like this aren't just about teaching—they're about unlearning, about challenging oversimplified heroic narratives.

While the “Celebrating Jackie” exhibit doesn't use holograms or immersive interviews like the Holocaust preservation projects mentioned in the KNKX article, it's clearly working toward the same goal: using digital tools to hold on to the emotional core of lived experience. There's a similar urgency in preserving Jackie Robinson's story—not just the dates and records, but the atmosphere, the risk, the restraint, and the human cost. The digital format doesn't replace human presence, but it does extend its echo.

Works Cited

Morris, M. (2022, April 10). *Museums turn to immersive tech to preserve the stories of aging Holocaust survivors*. KNKX Public Radio.

<https://www.knkx.org/2022-04-10/museums-turn-to-immersive-tech-to-preserve-the-stories-of-aging-holocaust-survivors>