

THE BATTLE OF THE ENOLA GAY

When the *Enola Gay* went on display in June 1995, visitors to the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum found a truncated airplane: only fifty-six feet of fuselage could be squeezed into the building. But more than wings were missing. So was the exhibition that got sheared away after a campaign of vilification arguably without precedent in the annals of American museology.

In the summer of 1994, reports flaming through the mass media had denounced the impending show as a monstrous attempt to recast the history of the Second World War. A typical description, by the *Washington Post's* Eugene Meyer, called it "an anti-nuke morality play in which Americans were portrayed as ruthless racists hellbent on revenge for Pearl Harbor, with the Japanese as innocent, even noble victims fighting to defend their unique culture from 'Western imperialism.'" Editorials blasted "anti-American" curators and warned that "revisionists" had hijacked the museum to promulgate PC history.

Air Force veterans responded angrily. Here they were, amidst the festivities marking the 50th anniversary of the Normandy landings, ready to take their turn in the sequence of celebrations. Instead, said the media, youthful visitors to the Smithsonian would soon find their grandparents reviled as racists and war criminals.

These assertions were based on a misconstruction of National Air and Space Museum (NASM) intentions, and a profound misrepresentation of what the curators actually wrote. Few of the angry vets ever read the proposed scripts -- not unreasonably, given that each of the eventual five was over 500 pages long and none was easily available. Neither had many of the pundits, most of whom cribbed their analysis from a series of articles by John T. Correll, editor of *AIR FORCE Magazine*.

My review of the scripts and their fate suggests that most of Correll's charges were unwarranted, some outrageously so. I do not claim that NASM officials were fault free. There were indeed problems with their first draft -- though mostly these were errors of omission rather than commission -- and their handling of the crisis once it blew up left much to be desired. But by no means did they deserve the abuse heaped upon them.

More than individual reputations are at stake here. The scrapping of the *Enola Gay* exhibition raises troubling questions about the future of public historical discourse in the United States. The successful campaign to muzzle the Smithsonian was a battle fought on the history front of America's ongoing culture war. This essay seeks to understand the event and to set it in its larger context.

First Draft

The initial script of "Crossroads: The End of World War II, The Atomic Bomb, and The Origins of the Cold War " (January 12, 1994), had five parts, one per gallery, each consisting of proposed label copy and suggested artifacts.

The first section ("A Fight to the Finish") dealt primarily with the final year of the war. The introductory segment asserted Japan's culpability for the sequence of events that led to the bomb. Recapitulating Japan's 1930s expansionism ("marked by naked aggression and extreme brutality"), it sketched the course of the war from Pearl Harbor on, mentioning Japanese atrocities, use of slave labor, racist attitudes, and maltreatment of prisoners of war ("often starved, beaten and tortured.") It then -- in a space dominated by a kamikaze aircraft looming overhead -- zeroed in on the fierce Japanese resistance at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, finding in it "a terrible warning of what could be expected in the future".

The section did include two shortly to be infamous sentences: "For most Americans, this war was fundamentally different than the one waged against Germany and Italy -- it was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism."

These were not great sentences -- not wrong, in context, but easily misrepresented. Americans *were* in a fury in 1945 -- and why *shouldn't* they have been, given Pearl Harbor, four years of ferocious war, and recently declassified accounts of the Bataan death march? Many were calling for revenge, some even for extermination. But this is not to say -- nor did the script - - that the war, or the bomb, were *only* motivated by vengeance.

Nor was it wrong to observe that the Japanese believed unconditional surrender would mean the end of the Emperor system and the collapse of their culture. Or that many Japanese -- then and to this day -- represented their racist exploitation of other Asians as a shield against western imperialism. The script didn't ratify this self-perception, it demonstrated it, as crucial to understanding the tenacity of Japanese resistance.

But opponents wrenched the sentences out of context and used them to stoke outrage. Even after they were swiftly dropped, and the Smithsonian had explicitly and indignantly denied the construction put upon them, critics trotted them out again and again, in the absence of any other sentence that would so well serve their purpose.

Correll also argued that this section did not represent the history of Japanese aggression graphically enough to offset the emotional impact of later material on the effects of the bombing. Counting up the number of photographs of suffering Americans and finding it lower than the number depicting suffering Japanese, he charged that a victimology thesis lay embedded in the structure of the exhibition.

He was partly right about the effect, totally wrong about the intention. There was no plot to delete evidence of Japanese wickedness in order to manipulate visitors into finding Americans immoral. Any exhibition focused on the *Enola Gay* and its bombing run would, almost by definition, depict more Japanese than American casualties.

But curators did face a museological conundrum. Ground Zero artifacts and images, no matter how few their number, pack a wallop. So does the *Enola Gay*. Together they could overshadow almost anything in a merely introductory section. Designers at first resisted a "balance of corpses" approach -- giving, for example, equal space to the slaughter at Nanking, where more died than at Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- in part because they rejected the vengeance thesis which they were accused of promulgating. It was the critics, after all, who insisted that Hiroshima was justified not because of prior Japanese outrages -- though they had to be fed into the moral equation -- but as a military action taken to expeditiously end the war Japan had started. The curators, moreover, were assuming that most visitors already knew something about Pearl Harbor and the war in the Pacific -- subjects treated extensively in an adjacent

NASM gallery. This was a mistake. For most young Americans, those events are as distant as the Punic Wars. The museum admitted its mistake. In succeeding drafts the curators would expand the initial section, adding dramatic material on Japanese outrages (though none would tackle the history of *American* expansionism in Asia, nor would any critic remark on this oversight). Finally the staff would design a 4,000 square foot prefatory exhibition on the war in the Pacific. Tellingly, the addition of this contextual material would fail to assuage the critics.

Correll's passion for context stopped short when it came to the second section, an analysis, housed in one of the smaller galleries, of "The Decision to Drop the Bomb." Here the objection was to problematizing something deemed utterly unproblematic. Truman dropped the bomb to shorten the war and save lives, period. Raising questions about that decision, from the vantage point of "hindsight," was infuriating and illegitimate.

But questions were raised at the time, and by the nation's preeminent civilian and military leaders. The endgame of World War II raised tactical and strategic issues of great political, moral and military complexity. The script reviewed some debates that arose among participants at the time, and later between historians, explicitly labeling them as "Controversies". Why did these explorations create such an uproar?

One firestorm erupted over a hypothetical: if the U.S. had had to invade Japan to end the war, how many Americans would have died? The conventional popular wisdom on this subject is that perhaps half a million would have fallen. But this was a postwar judgement. In 1947, former Secretary of War Henry Stimson, intent on rebutting Hiroshima critics like John Hersey, claimed there would have been over a million American *casualties*. Truman later claimed a half million *lives* were at risk, a figure that Churchill doubled.

The exhibit draft, for all that it was accused of employing hindsight, relied instead on wartime estimates by MacArthur, Marshall, and various Joint Chiefs of Staff planning committees, rather than using after-the-fact figures that even the American Legion admitted were "incredibly high". It concluded that it "appears likely that post-war estimates of a half million American deaths were too high, but many tens of thousands of dead were a real possibility."

This enraged the critics. They claimed NASM had pruned the figure to render the bomb-drop immoral, as if only a gigantic quantity of saved lives could offset the enormous number of civilians actually killed. There is, one would hope, some statistic that might generate moral misgivings. Would saving 1000 American soldiers -- 100 -- 10 -- justify killing 100,000 civilians? But the script never raised such a question, never challenged the position that if an invasion had been the only alternative, the savings in lives would have justified the bombings.

The tougher question -- which the script did ask -- is whether or not an invasion was necessary in the first place. Huge numbers of veterans believed that it was inevitable, and that dropping the bomb therefore saved their lives, and the lives of many Japanese as well. But were they right? The exhibit script offended some by recalling that powerful wartime figures believed it was possible to end the war without either nuclear bombings *or* an invasion.

Leading military men insisted that the combination of blockade and conventional bombing had brought Japan to its knees. Top Navy admirals "believed that its blockade could force Japan to quit the war, while many Army Air Forces' generals thought firebombing could force surrender by itself or in conjunction with the blockade." The script also cited the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, conducted after the surrender, which said the war would "certainly" have ended before the end of 1945, probably before November 1.

Label copy also took note of direct military opposition to nuclear weapons. The show quoted a statement made in 1950 by Admiral William D. Leahy, Truman's Chief of Staff, in which he denounced the bombing as adopting "ethical standards common to barbarians in the dark ages," but added cautiously that "1945 documents only suggest that he was skeptical that the atomic bomb would ever work." It mentioned General Eisenhower's claims in 1948 and later that he had opposed its use in conversations with Truman at Potsdam in 1945, but suggested that "corroborating evidence for these assertions is weak."##1 The script did not, however, engage the contemporary and postwar reservations of American airmen such as Henry H. ["Hap"] Arnold, the commanding general of the U.S. Army Air Forces, or Generals Carl Spaatz and Curtis LeMay.##2

One "Historical Controversy" panel asked: "Would the War Have Ended Sooner if the United States Had Guaranteed the Emperor's Position?" The text noted some scholars believe this. More to the point, Acting Secretary of State (and former Ambassador to Japan) Joseph Grew, Navy Secretary James Forrestal, Assistant Secretary for War John McCloy, General Douglas MacArthur, Admiral Leahy, Winston Churchill, and Herbert Hoover were among the many who thought that modifying the unconditional surrender formula to allow retention of the emperor would strengthen the peace faction, aid in winning and effectuating an early surrender, and facilitate the postwar occupation. Truman rejected this advice -- though in the end, *after* the bombs were dropped, Hirohito *was* allowed to retain his throne.

Some historians say Truman (counseled by Secretary of State James Byrnes) feared that modification would provoke vehement popular and congressional protest. Some even argue that by waiting until the A-bombs were ready in August the U.S. high command may have muffed an opportunity to end the war in June, thus costing American lives. The script, however, said no

such thing. It stated instead that while "it is possible that there was a lost opportunity to end the war without either atomic bombings or an invasion of Japan," these alternatives were "more obvious in hindsight than they were at the time." Citing the counterargument -- that it took the shock of the bombs (and Russian intervention) to "give Hirohito a facesaving way to force a surrender on his hard-liners" -- and noting the impossibility of proving either case, the text concluded that this particular debate "will remain forever controversial."

Another question: did Truman drop the bombs primarily to forestall Soviet creation of an Asian sphere of influence, and gain diplomatic leverage in the already emerging cold war? There are historians who argue this. The show did not. It said explicitly that "most scholars have rejected this argument, because they believe that Truman and his advisers saw the bomb first and foremost as a way to shorten the war." Concern about the Russians only "provided one more reason for Truman not to halt the dropping of the bomb."

Was atom-bombing cities a violation of rules of war? There were strictures against attacking civilian populations; democracies had denounced fascists for violating these rules in Barcelona, Guernica, London and China; and reservations about bombing civilians were raised by Eisenhower, Leahy, and Marshall. But the show argued that for most Americans, the earlier moral constraints against killing civilians had already crumbled in the course of a savage war, and that most key decision makers "did not see [nuclear attacks] as being drastically different than conventional strategic bombing...."

Was dropping the bomb racist? In Europe the U.S. Army Air Force stuck to precision attacks on military targets -- or at least professed to -- as late as the Dresden firebombing, when Marshall and Stimson publicly disavowed any policy of "terror bombing on civilian populations." Days later General LeMay napalmed Tokyo, launching an incendiary campaign

that killed more civilians in five months than the Allies had in five years of bombing Germany. Some historians have argued that anti-Asian racism helps explain the difference in approach.

The script, however, did not even raise the issue. It did note that most Americans considered their European enemies to be good people misled by evil leaders, while viewing Japanese as "treacherous and inhuman." The text traced this disparity in attitude to contemporary horror at Japanese atrocities and to longstanding anti-Asian racism. (The script also underscored *Japanese* racism, observing that "Allied people and leaders were pictured as inhuman demons, lice, insects, and vermin," and that "propaganda made frequent reference to the 'Jewish' nature of the Allied cause.") Nevertheless, the proposed label copy insisted that nuclear weapons would have been used against Germans had they been ready in time, thereby denying the charge of racial motivation.

Should there have been a warning or a demonstration? The script mentioned the objections raised by scientists and officials like McCloy and Undersecretary of the Navy Ralph Bard. (It did not, oddly, mention the reservations expressed by General Marshall. In May 1945, Marshall said the bomb should be dropped only on a "straight military objective such as a large military installation," and then, if necessary, on a manufacturing center, but only after civilians had been warned so they could flee.) The text also laid out the "valid concerns that a warning could endanger Allied servicemen and that a demonstration might be ineffective or a failure" -- objections on which Truman relied. And it emphasized that Hiroshima at that time was still a military target -- all too readily, in the opinion of some historians.

The important thing to note about this part of the exhibition is that, overall, it adequately and appropriately provided visitors with a sense of the complexities of the bombing decision and the controversies surrounding it. It is possible to quarrel with this or that formulation. The

information could have been presented in greater depth, and more dramatically, perhaps by using videotapes of historians and participants. Some of the label copy could have been, and almost certainly would have been, formulated more cogently. It was, after all, a first draft; few writers would want their initial efforts subjected to such fierce and public scrutiny. But given those attacks, what's striking is the text's conformity with the findings of responsible scholarship, its moderate and balanced stance on the issues, and the fact that, in essence, it supported Truman's decision.

Part III, "The World's First Atomic Strike Force," was planned for the cavernous arena where the giant plane was to be housed. Here the exhibition script presented the pilots' story "extensively and with respect," as Correll admitted on one occasion. Indeed the show emphasized the bravery and sacrifices of those who fought. But neither Correll nor anyone else ever again remarked on this vast mass of material, which so starkly contradicted claims that the NASM dishonored veterans. Nor was there ever any discussion of the quarter hour videotape the museum put together with crew members from the two bombers, a commemorative component which veterans who saw it loved.

Critics seized instead on Part IV, "Cities at War," which looked at Hiroshima and Nagasaki's role in the Japanese military effort, and then depicted the nuclear devastation wrought upon them. Here visitors were to have moved into a somber space of giant blowups, powerful objects, and taped reminiscences of survivors. Correll decried not only the number but the nature of the artifacts included -- a lunchbox containing "carbonized remains of sweet green peas and polished rice," a fused rosary. But the stubborn facts are that high school girls *were* out in force on August 6 clearing rubble at what became Ground Zero, and that Nagasaki *was* the center of the Catholic community in Japan. It's possible that a more understated display may have been

more effective, and aroused less ire, though opponents disliked even its later, toned-down version.

Was the museum, as charged, angling for America to "apologize for its use of the atomic bomb to end World War II?" asked NASM's then-Director Dr. Martin Harwit? "Of course not!" "Should we show compassion for those who perished on the ground? As human beings, I believe we must."

The analysis of bomb damage, moreover, was intended to educate, not manipulate. Information about the split-second annihilation caused by the blast, the way 7200 degree fahrenheit heat vaporized people, and the short and long term effects of radiation, made clear the error of contemporary assumptions that nuclear bombs were merely bigger versions of conventional ones. Some critics argued there was no need for NASM to rehearse such gruesome information as it was already widely known. Alas, the latest Gallup Poll finds that one in four Americans don't even know an atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, much less what impact it had when it exploded.

In the last gallery, a coda on "The Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki" spoke to this educational vacuum. It treated the bombings as not simply the end of World War II but as "symbols of the arrival of the nuclear age, and as a glimpse of the realities of nuclear war." Although the exhibit could hardly do more than gesture at the complex history of the Cold War in the space allotted, it did at least raise some important issues.

It offered an all-too-brief survey of the postwar nuclear arms race. It noted the invention of hydrogen bombs, a thousand times more powerful than their atomic predecessors. It mentioned the buildup of world stockpiles to 70,000 warheads by the mid-1980s. It sketched the emergence of antinuclear movements concerned about atomic-test fallout and radioactive wastes.

It discussed the end of the cold war and the signing of arms control agreements. And it referred to the continuing dangers of nuclear proliferation and atomic terrorism. Its concluding panel stated: "Some feel that the only solution is to ban all nuclear weapons. Others think that this idea is unrealistic and that nuclear deterrence--at a much lower level--is the only way that major wars can be prevented."

Offense and Defense

The January 12th draft was discussed by a group of scholarly advisers on February 7, 1994.##3 Most had suggestions for improvement but almost everyone was basically laudatory. Dr. Richard Hallion, the Air Force Historian, called it "a great script." He joined with his military historian colleague Herman Wolk in pronouncing it "a most impressive piece of work, comprehensive and dramatic, obviously based upon a great deal of sound research, primary and secondary," in need only of a "bit of 'tweaking'".

The Air Force Association thought differently. During the previous summer and fall, Harwit, with admirable if incautious openness, had actively solicited the group's involvement. Though he received a strongly negative response to a July 1993 concept treatment, Harwit nevertheless sent along the January 1994 draft script for review. The AFA, breaching confidentiality, leaked it to media and veterans groups, accompanied by a slashing Correll critique in the April 1994 issue of *AIR FORCE Magazine* -- a sneak attack that set the terms and tone of the ensuing debate. (Air Force Historian Hallion now also became a vigorous critic, the "great script" of February becoming "an outright failure" by April.)

Over the following months inaccurate and malicious accusations tumbled forth in a variety of forums.

The *Washington Times* said Truman's reasoning for using the bomb "was dismissed by the curators in favor of a theory that he ordered the bomb dropped to impress Soviet leader Josef Stalin."

The *Wall Street Journal* said scriptwriters "disdain any belief that the decision to drop the bomb could have been inspired by something other than racism or blood-lust." Picking up on Correll's claim that kamikaze pilots were treated "with near-mystical reverence," the *Journal* decried the "oozing romanticism with which the *Enola* show's writers describe the kamikaze pilots." The curators had supposedly called them "youths, their bodies overflowing with life," a charge reporter Ken Ringle repeated the next day in *The Washington Post*. But the quoted text was in fact an excerpt from a pilot's journal, included to give viewers "insight into [the kamikaze's] suicidal fanaticism, which many Americans would otherwise find incomprehensible."

Washington Times columnist R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. called the museum staff a bunch of "politically correct pinheads." Had one million Americans died invading Japan, Tyrrell added, "surely that would have left some of the present pinheads . . . fatherless or even, oh bliss, unborn."

Lance Morrow, writing in *Time*, found the script "way left of the mark." It managed to "portray the Japanese as more or less innocent victims of American beastliness and lust for revenge." "A revisionist travesty," the text "seemed an act of something worse than ignorance; it had the ring of a perverse generational upsidedownspeak and Oedipal lese majeste worthy of a fraud like Oliver Stone."

Increasingly, critics charged anti-Americanism. When Harwit asked if veterans really suspected the National Air and Space Museum was "an unpatriotic institution," Correll replied: "The blunt answer is yes."

The AFA editor began probing the Smithsonian staff's backgrounds. Director Harwit had a suspicious resumé. He had been born in Czechoslovakia and raised in Istanbul, Correll noted, before coming to the US in 1946. Harwit had, to be sure, joined the U.S. Army in 1955-7, but he had been "influenced" by his work on nuclear weapons tests at Eniwetok and Bikini. This experience had led him to assert that "I think anybody who has ever seen a hydrogen bomb go off at fairly close range knows that you don't ever want to see that used on people."

As for the curators, Correll pointed out that "none of them [were] veterans of military service," that one (Tom Crouch) planned a lecture at the "Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California," and that another (Michael Neufeld) was of Canadian origin.

Ringle of *The Washington Post* observed that the said Canadian had spent his undergraduate years at the University of Calgary from 1970-4, "when Americans were fleeing to Canada to escape the Vietnam War." Ringle contrasted Neufeld with an elderly American POW, who during an interview came "close to tears" wondering if the curator wasn't suggesting "that the thousands of Japanese killed by those bombs were somehow worth more than the thousands of American prisoners in Japan?"

Pundits hammered at the curators' deficient patriotism. Jeff Jacoby of the *Boston Globe* claimed the script was "anti-American." Jonathan Yardley in *The Washington Post* called it as "a philippic not merely against war but against the United States," a piece of "anti-American propaganda."

The American Legion, too, said the script inferred "that America was somehow in the wrong and her loyal airmen somehow criminal..." One disgruntled veteran, noting that the Japanese "have bought most of Hawaii and lots of the US," added: "Lets hope they have not bought the Smithsonian."

Congressmen picked up the un-American refrain. Sam Johnson (R-Texas), an Air Force fighter pilot for 27 years and a POW in Vietnam for seven, denounced the scripts as "a blatant betrayal of American history." Peter Blute (R-Massachusetts) fired off a letter to Smithsonian Secretary Robert McCormick Adams, cosigned by 23 colleagues, condemning the proposed exhibit as "biased" and "anti-American."

Unprepared for such a barrage, Smithsonian officials scrambled to placate their opponents. Distancing himself somewhat from his curators, Harwit told his staff that "a second reading shows that we do have a lack of balance and that much of the criticism that has been levied against us is understandable." He called for revisions to accommodate legitimate concerns.

Air & Space issued a second version on May 31 -- now renamed "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II" -- and then a third on August 31. Each expanded the treatment of earlier Japanese aggression. Each cut out some of the objects and language deemed objectionable. Each was greeted by renewed demands for additional changes.

Congresspeople escalated their involvement. Senator Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kansas) was already on record as insisting that "we should not interpret the dropping of the bomb as we look at it today," but rather "put it in the context of the time" (as if the script hadn't run into trouble for doing precisely that). On September 19 she introduced a "Sense of the Senate" resolution. It declared that even with the latest changes the script was "revisionist and offensive." The Senate

enjoined the NASM to avoid "impugning the memory of those who gave their lives for freedom" (though even Correll had admitted it treated the veterans "with respect.")

Senator Slade Gorton (R-Washington) laid out even more explicitly the kind of historical interpretation the government might deem acceptable. He attached to the Interior Department's appropriations bill a provision that Congress "expects" the *Enola Gay* exhibit to "properly and respectfully recognize the significant contribution to the early termination of World War II and the saving of both American and Japanese lives."

On September 21, the day Gorton's injunction was adopted, Smithsonian officials sat down for their first marathon negotiating session with the American Legion. The Institution had turned to the nation's premiere veterans' group, using the good offices of Smithsonian Undersecretary Constance Newman, thinking perhaps that if it could be persuaded to sign off on a script, further assaults might be forestalled.

For a time the strategy seemed to be working. "This exhibit is taking a more balanced direction," said a Legion spokesman. "It's not a propaganda piece by any means." But to obtain this support museum representatives had to submit to a line-by-line script review -- "they drafted pages while we talked," boasted a Legion spokesman -- and to accept extensive transformations. High Smithsonian officials believed they were responding to valid concerns raised by an important focus group, addressing issues of style not substance, and grouping caveats (but not eliminating them) in order to emphasize the main line. But the scripts that emerged from this process -- a fourth on October 3, and a fifth and final one on October 26 -- had been shorn of nuance and controversy.

The last version evoked Japanese bushido ideals ("Die but never surrender") to justify asserting that invasion "casualties conceivably could have risen to as many as a million

(including up to a quarter of a million deaths)." This estimate, museum spokesmen conceded, was not based on any new evidence but was an "extrapolation" from Okinawa casualties. The treatment of alternatives to invasion, debates over unconditional surrender, questions about Nagasaki, the reservations of high ranking military and civilian figures like Leahy, Eisenhower, and even Truman himself -- all were now drastically reduced, or deleted altogether. Further Ground Zero images and artifacts -- especially those depicting women, children and religious objects -- were jettisoned; only a single picture of a corpse remained. The last section dealing with nuclear proliferation was scrapped.

The exhibition, originally an effort to understand the *Enola Gay's* mission, had become an effort to justify it. As the script now summarized the story: "Japan, although weakened, was not willing to surrender. The atomic bomb offered a way to change that. A bloody invasion loomed if atomic bombs did not force Japan to surrender. . . . For Truman, even the lowest of the estimates was abhorrent. To prevent an invasion he feared would become 'an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other,' and to try and save as many American lives as possible, Truman chose to use the atomic bomb."

The last words were given to six veterans who had written NASM during the controversy. Four of the six cited letters endorsed punctuated the script's thesis. "I honestly feel, wrote one, "that millions of lives, both American and Japanese, were saved by that one crew on that one airplane!" "Americans, in my estimation, should make no apologies for strategic fire-bombing or dropping the atomic bomb," said another. "It took that to win the war!"

So thoroughgoing and one-sided were the changes that they amounted to a recantation. As the outgoing National Commander of the Legion reported to his troops: "We went face to face with the Smithsonian officials, and they blinked."

Now it was the scholarly community's turn to protest. The Organization of American Historians' Executive Committee wrote the Smithsonian's Board of Regents on September 19 urging them "to support the National Air and Space Museum staff." On October 22 it condemned "threats by members of Congress to penalize the Smithsonian Institution." The OAH also deplored "the removal of historical documents and revisions of interpretations of history for reasons outside the professional procedures and criteria by which museum exhibitions are created."

On November 16, a group of 48 "historians and scholars" charged a "transparent attempt at historical cleansing." They protested the excision of documents, the removal of artifacts, the whitening out of contemporary and historical debates, and the alteration of interpretations in the absence of new evidence. Though "we yield to no one in our desire to honor the American soldiers who risked their lives during World War II to defeat Japanese militarism," the historians said, the deletion of so many "irrevocable facts" had reduced the exhibit "to mere propaganda, thus becoming an affront to those who gave their lives for freedom."

Peace groups, too, objected. The Fellowship of Reconciliation, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Pax Christi USA were among those declaring that pressure from military and veterans groups had "compromised the integrity of the exhibit." Activists met with NASM officials on December 15, 1994 to decry "political censorship." They demanded the exhibit state that why the bomb was dropped and whether it had been necessary to end the war "are matters of vigorous scholarly and public debate on which Americans do legitimately disagree."

Amid all this uproar, the organized museum community remained noticeably silent.

Endgame

The focal point of these charges and countercharges was the newly arrived Smithsonian Secretary, I. Michael Heyman.

Before his official installation on September 19, 1994, the former Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley had opposed AFA-inspired pressure on NASM. Writing in August for the October issue of *Smithsonian Magazine*, the incoming Secretary urged resisting those who "want the exhibition to be devoted solely to the justifications for dropping the bomb (with omissions of its effects)." Curators, he insisted, were educators not propagandists.

After his installation, Heyman tried to use the outcry from the scholars and peace groups to carve out a middle ground position. "The Institution is now being criticized from both ends of the spectrum -- from those who consider the exhibition as a 'revisionist' product critical of the United States to those who accuse us of staging an exhibition which glorifies the decision of the United States to use atomic weapons. . . . This indicates to me that we are probably squarely in the middle, which, as a national institution, is not a bad place to be."

But the Air Force Association wasn't interested in compromise, it wanted unconditional surrender. The October 26th revision, Correll admitted, had corrected many of "the worst offenses," removed most "anti-American speculation," and attained "parity" in casualty photos. No matter: it was not "an acceptable salvage job". It continued to ask questions, "to doubt, probe, and hint." "I don't think there should be doubts about whether that policy [of unconditional surrender] is right," Correll declared, in effect setting himself above most of the nation's wartime leaders.

It was, he concluded, "no longer enough to clean up this exhibition script." Now it was "imperative" that Smithsonian officials go after the curators who had "produced such a biased, unbalanced, anti-American script in the first place."

The American Legion, however, remained a stumbling block. In October, Director of Internal Affairs Hubert R. Dagley II had rejected narrow views of the controversy that denounced the show only as "an unflattering portrayal of one branch of the armed forces" or "an indictment of strategic bombing". The Legion expressed what it considered more high-minded concerns -- the exhibit's "potential to undermine not only our people's faith in their forefathers, but also their confidence in a revered and respected American institution" -- the Smithsonian. Though it rejected an outright endorsement, it also refrained from condemning the script it had helped produce.

But the Legion came under attack from media-inflamed veterans for being "more liberal" and "not as combative" as the Air Force Association. By January, the group was backing away from neutrality, claiming the fifth script hadn't gone far enough, and hinting that without additional changes it would shift over to opposition. Indeed, on January 4th, National Commander William M. Detweiler made an in-house recommendation to call for cancellation.

Changes were forthcoming, but not ones the Legion was looking for. In mid-November, a delegation of historians led by Advisory Committee member Barton Bernstein had met with Harwit. They presented him with documentary evidence falsifying the October 26 draft's claim that, in the crucial meeting on June 18, 1945, Truman had been given an estimate of 250,000 casualties for the invasion of Kyushu. They cited Admiral Leahy's diary entry, written that evening, which stated that "General Marshall is of the opinion that such an effort will not cost us in casualties more than 63,000 of the 190,000 combatant troops."

On January 9, 1995, Harwit -- his scholarly integrity on the line -- proposed to the Legion a change in this volatile subject. He submitted two pages of new label copy. They did not, as was widely reported, accept 63,000 as an "official" figure; the historians all agreed such numbers

were speculative. But the new text did drop the 250,000 figure, along with equally ungrounded claims that American casualties "conceivably could have risen to as many as a million (including up to a quarter of a million deaths)." The revised text continued, however, to underscore Truman's awareness that Japan had "some two million troops defending the home islands"; his fear of "an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other"; the likelihood that many additional Allied and Asian lives would have been lost; and the fact that for Truman, "even the lowest of the casualty estimates was unacceptable." It concluded, as before, that "to save as many lives as possible, he chose to use the atomic bomb."

This may have been more accurate but it made the Legion leadership's already shaky position completely untenable. On January 19th, seizing the opportunity Harwit had naively handed them, they called for the show's cancellation. In a public letter to President Clinton, they charged the Smithsonian with including "highly debatable information which calls into question the morality and motives of President Truman's decision to end World War II quickly and decisively by using the atomic bomb."

Five days later, on January 24th, 81 Congresspeople sent a letter to Secretary Heyman demanding Harwit's ouster for his "continuing defiance and disregard for needed improvements to the exhibit."

Opposition opinion now crystallized around a suggestion of General Paul Tibbets, the man who had named the *Enola Gay* (after his mother) and piloted it over Hiroshima. Early in the debate, Tibbets, unhappy that many were "second-guessing the decision to use the atomic weapons," had issued a soldierly injunction: "To them, I would say, "Stop!" The plane, Tibbets declared, needed only an eleven word label: "This airplane was the first one to drop an atomic

bomb.' You don't need any other explanation." Tibbets wanted no questions, no controversies, no account of bombs bursting in air.

Facing special hearings in the House and Senate, threats to the Smithsonian's budget (77% of which came from the federal government), and a loss of confidence among corporate contributors on whom he was counting to fund a planned 150th Anniversary celebration in 1996, Secretary Heyman called it quits. On January 30, 1995, adopting Tibbet's position, he scrapped the exhibition in favor of "a display, permitting the *Enola Gay* and its crew to speak for themselves."

Stakeholders

Heyman argued this was the wrong show in the wrong place at the wrong time. The NASM had "made a basic error in attempting to couple an historical treatment of the use of atomic weapons with the 50th anniversary commemoration of the end of the war." The veterans "were not looking for analysis," he said, "and, frankly, we did not give enough thought to the intense feelings such an analysis would evoke." The implication was that curators should have waited a few years, or even a decade, until the old soldiers had faded away.

It's a plausible position. Some veterans certainly saw Air & Space more as shrine than museum. Aviator groups -- convinced the Smithsonian had barred the B-29 out of embarrassment -- had been fighting for years to get it restored and displayed, to validate their wartime sacrifices. It was Harwit, ironically, who came to their defense. Convinced they deserved a commemoration he pushed to have the restoration ready for the 50th anniversary. Some vets no doubt felt betrayed to learn the NASM intended to raise any questions whatever

about the plane's mission, even those asked by their wartime commanding officers. As did Tibbets, they wanted the *Enola Gay* presented pristinely, like the *Spirit of St. Louis*, not juxtaposed with evidence of the damage it had wrought, even if that damage was declared justifiable.

So perhaps it was foolhardy to make the attempt. Perhaps, once the distress became apparent, the NASM should have folded its hand immediately, avoiding the drawn-out and damaging saga that followed. But there are problems with such a seemingly politic perspective.

First, while historian Edward Linenthal is right to remark that fiftieth anniversaries "intensify arguments over any form of remembrance" because they "are the last time when you have massive groups of veterans or survivors who are able to put their imprint on the event," the mere passage of time does little to dull the edge of controversy. Recall the brouhaha that exploded over "The West as America" show -- a treatment of century-old events -- and the impassioned debates that broke out over Columbus' enterprise on the 500th anniversary of his first voyage.

Second, the postponement strategy is condescending to the veterans. Many protestors were not acting out of "feelings" -- in contrast to the museum's "analysis" -- but from a belief that the show was advancing an analysis with which they disagreed. Many were simply out to achieve the "balance" or "context" that the mass media assured them was atrociously absent. If the Museum had aggressively presented them with accurate information about the first script -- and certainly the last one -- many might have been won to the Smithsonian's side in support of a full-rigged exhibition. Witness the posting on a WWII e-mail network from a veteran and former exhibition critic: "I have reviewed the most recent script (#5) and it is a considerable improvement over its predecessors and in fact I am not unhappy about it."

This raises, in turn, the third and largest problem. Heyman has faulted his curators for paying insufficient attention to the Smithsonian's "stakeholders." Apart from the fact that NASM worked with veterans all along -- in the end so closely that they may have abdicated their curatorial responsibilities -- the comment suggests the Secretary hasn't sufficiently confronted the dilemmas museums face these days.

In recent years curators have reached out to communities they wish to represent and address, seeking to involve them in the process of exhibit production. Excellent in theory, this has proved difficult in practice. In the case of immigrants, blacks, workers, women, and Native Americans, it turns out to be no simple matter to discover who exactly "the community" *is*. Or who gets to speak for that community. Or what to do when some groups contest the right of other groups to serve as spokespeople. Or how to respond to claims that, e.g., only Latinos can/should speak for Latinos. Or how to rebut a group that denies a museum's right to say anything at all about it without prior approval. Or what to do when an exhibit offers a variety of perspectives on a controversial issue, only to be met with a dogmatic insistence that only one of the perspectives is true, that the very notion of debate is "relativistic" and illegitimate.

The problems are no less complex when dealing with atomic bombs. Why are WWII veterans the significant "stakeholders" here? Are not the Second World War and the postwar proliferation of nuclear arms issues of transcendent national importance, of concern to all American citizens?

And even if veterans *are* the "relevant public," which veterans are we talking about? There have been a variety of military actors in this drama; the press and Smithsonian alike too easily conflated them. There's no question that old soldiers gave the anti-NASM protest its moral

legitimacy and political clout. But they were not the only combatants in this struggle. Part of the NASM's problem, I think, is that it never quite realized who and what it was up against.

The Battle for Air and Space

John Correll introduced NASM curators to his constituency; let me introduce *his* constituency to the wider world. The Air Force Association has been presented throughout this affair as a veterans organization. Even Harwit described it as "a non-profit organization for current and former members of the U.S. Air Force". But a perusal of the ads in Correll's *AIR FORCE Magazine (AFM)* makes instantly clear that it's a good deal more than that. In marked contrast to the American Legion's journal, where the wares on sale include hearing aids, power mowers, Florida retirement homes, and talking memo-minders, the AFM's pages are festooned with glossy advertisements for sleek warplanes produced by various of the Air Force Association's 199 Industrial Associates (whose ranks include Boeing, du Pont, Martin Marietta, Northrop Grumman, Rockwell, and Lockheed, which hawks its F-16 to Correll's readers for only "a \$20 million price tag.")

The AFA, in fact, is the air wing of what Dwight Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex. It was founded in 1946 at the instigation of Hap Arnold (with Jimmy Doolittle as first President). Arnold, hyper-attentive to public relations, set up the AFA to lobby for creation of an independent Air Force, to fight postwar budget cutbacks, and to "keep our country vigorously aroused to the urgent importance of airpower." It has been the semi-official lobbying arm of the United States Air Force ever since.

In succeeding decades the AFA institutionalized relations with the defense industry by sponsoring mammoth expositions of military hardware (known to critics as the Arms Bazaar);

opposed Kennedy's Test-Ban Treaty; denounced Johnson's refusal to unleash airpower in Vietnam (a Correll predecessor deplored America's renunciation "of the use of even the smallest of nuclear weapons"); battled the peace movement; railed against the "anti-military, anti-industry" atmosphere of the 1970s; and warned about the dangers associated with a "relaxation of tensions, and an end to the cold war."

But the Cold War ended, as did the glory days of the Reagan buildup, and the AFA turned to fighting the cutbacks in military budgets "demanded by the liberal community." During the period Correll was assaulting the Air & Space Museum, his magazine featured articles like "Another Year, Another Cut," "Boom and Bust in Fighter Procurement," "This Isn't the Bottom Yet," "More Base Closures Coming Up," and "The Case for Airpower Modernization." When not urging Congress "to shift the burden of the cuts to entitlement spending -- and thus spare defense," AFM writers were warding off attacks from the Army ("They need money," said Correll, "and they are ready to take a bite out of the Air Force to get it") or making preemptive strikes on the Navy.

In an era of imperiled budgets and reduced political clout -- a function, Correll believed, of the diminishing percentage of veterans in the country and Congress -- the AFA was more than ever concerned with image. "Attitude surveys show waning desire among young people to join the military," Correll noted, a decline he attributed in part to negative portrayals by the news media and entertainment industry.

Whether one thinks well or ill of the AFA's positions, it should come as no surprise to find it paying meticulous attention to how the premiere achievement of American airpower -- arguably the one instance in which strategic bombing, not an Army invasion or a Navy blockade, triumphantly ended a major war -- would be treated at the most popular museum in the world.

The AFA's relationship with the NASM, moreover, was consanguineous. Hap Arnold, who fathered the AFA in 1946, beget the NASM the very same year. Arnold wanted to give aviation a history and extend the wartime interest in aeronautics into the next generation. The General saved large numbers of his war birds from being converted to scrap metal, and he lobbied Congress for a museum. To bolster his case, Arnold sought and received supporting petitions from 267 museum boosters, many of them representatives of such aviation firms as Northrop, Lockheed, Douglas, McDonnell, Sperry, Sikorsky and Republic, the same constituency from which AFA would draw its Industrial Associates. One witness stressed that a museum could win thousands of future voters to the cause of aviation, voters who in turn would influence their Congressman "to develop aviation, both civil and military, in the years to come."

In the decades after Congress established the National Air Museum (expanded to embrace Space in 1966), relations with the AFA were cordial and fraternal. In 1949, for instance, the National Air Museum cooperated with the Air Force Association in putting on the National Air Fair, the country's largest air show to date. It was at this event that the *Enola Gay*, flown in by Col. Tibbets from storage in Arizona, was officially presented to the Smithsonian.

When the Museum's drive for a building on the mall got stalled during the Vietnam War, it was re-ignited by Senator Barry Goldwater, board chairman of the AFA's Aerospace Education Foundation and soon-to-be recipient of its highest honor, the H.H. Arnold Award. Goldwater declared the NASM "a cause that is right" and "a cause that deserves a fight." A properly housed museum that presented a "patriot's history" would, he argued, inspire the nation's "air and space minded" young people. Interestingly Goldwater didn't think the *Enola Gay* should be included in that story. "What we are interested in here are the truly historic aircraft," he explained to a

Congressional committee. "I wouldn't consider the one that dropped the bomb on Japan as belonging to that category."

After the new building opened in 1976, the NASM blossomed. Its world-class collection of airplanes (like Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis) accumulated over decades by the indefatigable Paul Garber, along with the awesome lunar landers, moon rocks and missiles assembled during the triumphal era of space flight, helped attract enormous crowds. The NASM became the most massively visited museum in the world, welcoming in recent years over eight million people a year.

But NASM went beyond simply amassing aircraft. It was one of the first museums anywhere to seriously examine the evolution of aviation and aeronautic technology. Like most museums of science and industry, however, NASM kept its focus on the hardware, adopting an evolutionary approach that assumed technological development was inherently progressive. It was, as former Director (and former astronaut) Michael Collins said, "a cheery and friendly place," marked by a "spirit of optimism." Former Director Walter Boyne, a career Air Force officer, prolific historian, and AFA member, kept the institution on the same path.

Relatively little attention was paid to the social consequences of flight, particularly military flight. The WWI and WWII galleries remained little more than cabinets of aero-curiosities. The collections of planes and mementoes, the heroic murals, the mini-shrines (fashioned from personal effects and reminiscences) to AFA deities Hap Arnold and Jimmy Doolittle -- none of these grappled with the fundamental purpose of war, the infliction of damage on the enemy.

This did not trouble the museum's corporate sponsors or military donors or the Air Force Association. The institution was largely run by ex-military personnel; it featured gleaming

civilian and military aircraft (most of them emblazoned with corporate logos and/or service insignia); it trumpeted aviation's very real technological accomplishments while ensuring that seldom was heard a discouraging word. The NASM promoted just the kind of public image that Arnold and Goldwater and the AFA had always intended to foster.

NASM did not lack for critics, however. A 1979 *White Paper on Science Museums* suggested that its decontextualization of artifacts and its cozy compliance with the promotional demands of corporate donors made it "basically a temple to the glories of aviation and the inventiveness of the aerospace industry." Later commentators concurred in calling it "a giant advertisement for air and space technology." And by the late 1980s the Smithsonian Council agreed that it was no longer "intellectually or morally acceptable to present science simply as an ennobling exploration of the unknown," or technology merely as "problem solving beneficial to the human race."

In 1987, Cornell astrophysicist Martin Harwit was chosen over an Air Force general to be the new NASM Director. Harwit set out to demonstrate the social impact of aviation and space technology -- the ways it transformed daily life "both for the good and the bad." This applied to the military sphere, too. "No longer is it sufficient to display sleek fighters," he said, while making no mention of the "misery of war."

The NASM continued to do traditional kinds of AFA-friendly programming. It put on a commemorative program for the 50th anniversary of Jimmy Doolittle's raid over Tokyo. It mounted an exhibit (curated by Neufeld, the suspect Canadian) that honored the P-47 Thunderbolt, delighting the 2,000 member association of its former pilots. Harwit also supported Richard Hallion (later a vigorous critic of the *Enola Gay* scripts) in creating a laudatory show on airpower in the Gulf War.

But Harwit also authorized new departures.

NASM treatment of military hardware had heretofore invariably skirted its lethal purposes, even in the case of Nazi weaponry. Label copy for the museum's V-2 rocket emphasized its progressive role in the history of technology. In 1990, however, the V-2 was given new panels which: recounted its use as an indiscriminate instrument of murder (they included the NASM's first-ever image of a corpse); noted it was built by concentration camp prisoners thousands of whom perished in the process; demonstrated how scientists like Wernher Von Braun avoided grappling with the ethical implications of their work; and provided superior technical detail about rocketry. Press reaction was startled but positive. One reviewer hailed the new "truth in labeling" as "striking in comparison to the fairy tale it has replaced...."

Another novel exhibition deployed an American Pershing II missile side-by-side with a Soviet SS-20 as the twin foci of an examination of arms control agreements. This, too, garnered only positive reports.

Next, in 1991, the institution replaced its old World War I gallery -- whose artifacts had fallen prey to insect infestation -- with a rich and imaginative show. It began with popular culture images depicting the war as a series of romantic duels between Knights of the Air -- pulp magazine accounts, a compilation of clips from Hollywood films, and Snoopy and his Flying Doghouse ("Curse you, Red Baron"). The origin of these images -- which resonate to this day -- was traced to wartime newspapers, businessmen, and government propagandists who seized on the courage and daring of individual aces to portray aerial combat as a chivalric adventure. But the careful analyses that followed made clear the grim and unglamorous realities of fighter pilot life and death. Powerful dioramas of trench warfare and discussions of particular battles also

demonstrated the important but secondary role of wartime air power, and dramatic displays on Germany's air attacks on London illustrated the birth of civilian bombing.

Again, reaction in the mainstream press was overwhelmingly favorable. Hank Burchard of *The Washington Post* was astonished to find such "rank heresy" in an institution "that has from the beginning served as the central shrine of the military-industrial complex." Though he complained that the exhibition still soft-pedaled the realities of aerial combat, which was "more akin to assassination than to jousting," he concluded: "But hey, a museum largely run by pilots can hardly be expected to badmouth them, and anyway this is a quibble compared with the quantum leap forward into historicity that this exhibition represents."

Finally, a direct precursor of the *Enola Gay* show -- a five minute videotape on the restoration process, which included powerful images of bomb damage -- attracted considerable visitor attention and no negative commentary whatever.

To key NASM staff it seemed that these plaudits and silences had cleared the way for the *Enola Gay*. Despite the continuing trepidation of some within the institution, they swept ahead with plans for the exhibition.

From the Air Force Association's perspective these new initiatives must have seemed like serpents wriggling their way into the Garden of Eden. Certainly Correll's April 1994 AFM critique of the *Enola Gay* included a retroactive blast at the World War I exhibition -- that "strident attack on airpower" -- as having been a harbinger of what followed. Everything about it appalled him. The curators' notion that "dangerous myths have been foisted on the world by zealots and romantics." The criticism of the "cult of air power," with the sainted Billy Mitchell among the designated offenders. The "theories" quoted in the exhibit's companion book about military airpower having the potential for "scientific murder" (Correll apparently forgetting for

the moment that the offending phrase was actually Eddie Rickenbacker's, the most famous of all U.S. aces, who reminded Americans that "fighting in the air is not a sport. It is scientific murder.") The way the show emphasized "the horrors of World War I" (as opposed to its upbeat dimensions?). And above all, the fact that it "takes a hostile view of airpower in that conflict," to the point where "the military airplane is characterized as an instrument of death."

To his credit, Correll published in the June 1994 AFM a strong rejoinder from Richard H. Kohn, former Chief of Air Force History for the USAF. The NASM, Kohn argued, had in recent years succeeded "in broadening the scope and value of its exhibits by presenting thoughtful, balanced history rather than mere celebration of flight and space travel." The World War I exhibit, he said, was "not at all hostile to airpower. It presents the war realistically and explains aviation's role in it." It was Correll, not the curators, who favored a "political use of the museum: to downplay war's reality and to glorify military aviation." Such a bias, Kohn insisted, "would not be in keeping with the museum's or the Smithsonian's mission and would embarrass the Air Force community, which, having experienced the history, would want it presented truthfully -- with strength, balance, sensitivity, and integrity."

Correll was having none of it. He believed, borrowing the words of a fellow editor, that "a new order is perverting the museum's original purpose from restoring and displaying aviation and space artifacts to presenting gratuitous social commentary on the uses to which they have been put." People come to Air & Space to see old aircraft, Correll claimed. "They are not interested in counterculture morality pageants put on by academic activists." It was precisely because curatorial "interests and attitudes have shifted" that the *Enola Gay* exhibit had gone wrong. It was imperative that the Smithsonian's "keepers and overseers take a strong hand and stop this slide" and get the museum back on track.

Here, I think, one can see the structural faultlines that underlay the surface struggle over texts. How the *Enola Gay* was to be interpreted was important in its own right. How to interpret the meaning of Hiroshima was of vital significance both to the Air Force Association and to Air & Space; indeed the plane itself had been entwined in the institutional lives of both organizations since their inception. But the curators' exhibition plans for the *Enola Gay* were also seen as the latest in a series of museological departures that taken together signaled AFA leaders that "their" institution was being taken away from them.

They were determined to get it back. The wrestling match over control of the interpretation was emblematic of the struggle for control of the institution. The AFA, less interested in improving the scripts than in axing their opponents, adopted a policy of taking no prisoners. Convinced the curators were subverting the museum, it was but a short step to accusing them of subverting the Republic.

In the supercharged atmosphere surrounding the Fiftieth Anniversary of Hiroshima, Correll's charges easily touched off a museological conflagration. But to understand why it developed into a national incident we need to examine the larger context. For the Battle of the *Enola Gay* was only one of several engagements that broke out that summer, all along the History Front of a wider Culture War.

In his 1993 book, *See, I Told You So*, Rush Limbaugh warned his fellow conservatives that "we have lost control of our major cultural institutions. Liberalism long ago captured the arts, the press, the entertainment industry, the universities, the schools, the libraries, the foundations, etc."

"This was no accident," he explained, noting that "in the early 1900s, an obscure Italian communist by the name of Antonio Gramsci theorized that it would take a 'long march through the institutions' before socialism and relativism would be victorious." If these key institutions could be captured, "cultural values would be changed, traditional morals would be broken down, and the stage would be set for the political and economic power of the West to fall."

In the last twenty-five years, Limbaugh continued, "a relatively small, angry group of anti-American radicals" -- the "sixties gang" -- finally succeeded in executing Gramsci's master plan. Seizing the commanding heights of the cultural economy they became "firmly entrenched in all of the key cultural institutions that are so influential in setting the agenda and establishing the rules of debate in a free society." From these redoubts they denigrated American values, policed the nation's thought and speech, promoted victimization theories, exalted women and people of color over white males, and pushed a divisive multiculturalism. At the same time their allies in the welfare and regulatory bureaucracies were busy squashing entrepreneurial initiative.

Of particular concern were those who "bullied their way into power positions in academia." These professors immediately set about demolishing traditional history, the sort which "was once routinely learned by every schoolchild in America." They promulgated instead "a primitive type of historical revisionism." The essential Revisionist message -- the core of the "indoctrination taking place today in American academia" -- consisted of several propositions: "Our country is inherently evil. The whole idea of America is corrupt. The history of this nation

is strewn with examples of oppression and genocide. The story of the United States is cultural imperialism -- how a bunch of repressed white men imposed their will and values on peaceful indigenous people, black slaves from Africa, and women."

Up and down this new "politically correct" canon Rush roamed, succoring casualties of the onslaught. Poor Christopher Columbus, accused of wiping out savages (who were in any event "violent and brutal"), was the victim of a hoax perpetrated by the sixties gang, who routinely "ascribe fictitious misdeeds to people not alive to defend themselves". The Pilgrims and Puritans, another trashed group, are "vilified today as witch-burners and portrayed as simpletons" in order to cover up the importance of religion in "shaping our history and our nation's character." The early pioneers had singlehandedly "tamed a wilderness" -- "Nothing was handed to them" -- but now their anti-government vision and self-reliant accomplishments were being "turned upside down" in order to justify the reign of Big Government.

A full response to such falsehoods would take us too far afield, but let me briefly attend to the last two. *Pace* Limbaugh's portrait of the state of religious studies, scores -- hundreds -- of scholars have over the past thirty years produced a superb and respectful body of work on religion in American life; one could fill a small library with volumes on the seventeenth century alone. As for Limbaugh's sturdy pioneers, they were among the first to demand -- and receive -- governmental aid in the form of land grants, roads, canals, railroads and armies. This quasi-socialism passed to their twentieth century descendants, who vigorously sought agricultural subsidies, military contracts, and the giant irrigation and electrification projects that built up sunbelt/gunbelt states with tax dollars drained from their frostbelt cousins.

But pointing out Rush's errors -- a cottage industry these days -- is somewhat beside the point. Myths can't be refuted by facts. And Limbaugh was out to launch a crusade, not an

academic conference. "As we saw during the 1980s," he told his troops, "we can elect good people to high office and still lose ground in this Culture War. And, as we saw in 1992, the more ground we lose in the Culture War, the harder it is to win electoral victories. What we need to do is fight to reclaim and redeem our cultural institutions with all the intensity and enthusiasm that we use to fight to redeem our political institutions."

Happily a field marshal had appeared with exactly the credentials needed to wage such a war. Newton Leroy Gingrich had long since proven himself a master of the political arts, having battled his way to a leadership role in the House of Representatives. He was also an ex-professor of history, and eager to intervene in the battle against Revisionism. In 1993, Gingrich began beaming a twenty-hour college course called "Renewing American Civilization" to over 130 classrooms across the country, and the ten million subscribers to National Empowerment Television.

Central to the course was an analysis of U.S. history, not a subject in which Gingrich had been rigorously trained. Though he had taken some courses in American history at Tulane, his major was in Modern European, and, at the behest of his adviser, he wrote his 1971 Ph.D. Dissertation on "Belgian Education Policy in the Congo, 1945-60." During his professorial years at West Georgia College (1970-1978) he spent only four years in the History Department -- teaching mainly Western Civilization and European subjects -- before moving over to the Geography Department and launching an Environmental Studies program. Most of his time at West Georgia was given over to repeated runs for Congress, leaving little time for scholarly research. Indeed by 1975, having published nothing whatsoever, he realized he had no chance of getting tenure and abandoned the notion of applying for it. Had he not been elected to Congress he would have been out of a job. Yet Gingrich brushed aside questions about his expertise. "I'm

not credentialed as a bureaucratic academic," he noted waspishly, "I haven't written 22 books that are meaningless."

In his 1994 lectures, especially one given February 12th on "The Lessons of American History," and in speeches and interviews throughout the year, Gingrich asserted the existence of an "American Exceptionalism," which he believed was rooted in distinctive "American Values". These included individualism, "the religious and social tenets of puritanism," the centrality of private property, freedom from government control, and the availability of opportunity (which left Americans "prepared to countenance very substantial economic inequalities"). He admitted past contradictions between profession and practice -- slavery, male-only suffrage -- but seemed to believe these had been overcome not by organized struggles, but by an ineluctable rippling out of the ideals themselves. Unlike his competent dissertation, or his 1984 *Window of Opportunity*, which advanced an ersatz-Marxist thesis about a contradiction between America's forces of production (a computer-driven information revolution) and its social relations of production (a putatively anti-technological welfare state and culture), Gingrich's more recent teaching conveyed little sense of agency, little awareness of how history happens.

Gingrich, in fact, said remarkably little about U.S. history, and a fair amount of what he did say was wrong. There was little sustained encounter with actual historians, though he occasionally waved books at his class (Daniel Boorstin's volumes were favorite wands), and he was fascinated by Gordon Wood's suggestion that conservative Republicans should claim descent from Jefferson, not Hamilton. He did urge students to read biographies, but as sources of inspiration or for tips on problem solving. (He himself claimed to have been fortified during his repeated defeats in Georgia politics by reading lives of Lincoln, and accounts of Churchill's tribulations had buoyed him up while struggling singlehandedly to unseat Speaker Jim Wright).

As had his hero Ronald Reagan, Gingrich reached back to late 1930s, early 1940s movies for his version of American history, citing *Boys' Town* on orphanages, or *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* on the great railsplitter -- though he also embraced more contemporary sources, such as Hollywood's recent version of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Gingrich invoked classic American myths, the truth (or more often falsity) of which was of little concern compared to their serviceability as moral fables. The point of studying the past was not to discover how things changed but to ransack it for role models. Newt's was a "McGuffeyite history-of-America-by-edifying-anecdote," as Gary Wills has noted.##4

Gingrich's idealized U.S. past was also a static one. For centuries, nothing much happened. Then, in the 1960s, things lurched into sudden downward motion. From 1607 to 1965, as he put it in his somewhat discombobulated manner, "there is a core pattern to American history. Here's how we did it until the Great Society messed everything up: don't work, don't eat; your salvation is spiritual; the government by definition can't save you; governments are into maintenance and all good reforms are into transformation." Then, abruptly in the sixties, "the whole system began decaying." Why? Because the U.S. got beguiled by irresponsible, "self-indulgent, aristocratic values." And these led, apparently overnight, to the welfare state, drug use, hippies, multipartner sex, and the pregnant poor. "From 1965 to 1994" -- an epoch that would seem to embrace the Age of Reagan as well as the Age of Johnson -- "we did strange and weird things as a country."

The culprits were the same ones Limbaugh had fingered -- counterculture elitists who despised traditional values. From the 1770s to the mid-1960s, there had been "an explicit long-term commitment to creating character," crucially by studying history. But secular left-wingers couldn't "afford to teach history because it would destroy the core vision of a hedonistic,

existentialist America in which there is no past and there is no future, so you might as well let the bureaucrats decide." For Gingrich, properly taught history was a form of ideological inoculation; without it, we "get drowned in European socialist ideas, and we get drowned in oriental ideas of mandarin hierarchy". Once the booster shots stopped coming, the country swiftly succumbed to a host of moral maladies.

The solution was clear. It was time to return to "teaching the truth about American history, teaching about the Founding Fathers and how this country came to be the most extraordinary civilization in history." We should get back to Victorian basics, burnish up the old fables. "We spent a generation in the counterculture laughing at McGuffey Readers and laughing at Parson Weems's vision of Washington." Cherry tree and little hatchet, redivivus.

In truth, Gingrichian history bore little relation to America's complex and sprawling saga. What he had crafted, rather, was a secularized sacred narrative that flowed from an Edenic past through a fall from grace in the sinful Sixties into a degenerate present, and on, hopefully, to future redemption through a return to prelapsarian values.

Republican Revanche

Redemption drew nigh in the summer and fall of 1994, as the insurgent "conservative" movement spearheaded by Limbaugh and Gingrich drove towards capturing Congress. It was at just this moment that the *Enola Gay* first appeared on Republican radar screens, courtesy of the Air Force Association. It proved an irresistible target.

Out on the hustings right wing candidates had been happily beating up on the monstrously powerful thought police and bureaucrats, whose unAmerican values and policies they blamed for the country's disorder and decay, as well as the declining fortunes of white male

voters. Along came an exhibition in which, allegedly, arrogant PC curators accused white males (aged veterans, no less) of being racist aggressors. Better still, it supposedly cast the Japanese as victims, rather than as transgressors to be held accountable for their immoral actions. In exactly the same way, the politically-correct crowd had claimed victimhood status for blacks, women, and assorted welfare layabouts, who were in fact responsible for their own condition.

The show thus afforded yet another opportunity for shifting (white male) electoral attention away from the Republicans' corporate sponsors, who were assiduously dismantling the nation's industrial economy, downsizing vast numbers of (white male) middle managers and (white male) factory workers into the ranks of the un- and under-employed.

Conservative commentators picked up and amplified Correll's critique. The exhibit script provided clear evidence (according to right wing columnist John Leo) that "the familiar ideology of campus political correctness" had been "imported whole into our national museum structure." Critics were quick to point out that this wasn't the Smithsonian's first transgression. Back in 1991, the National Museum of American Art's "The West as America" had critiqued the pioneer saga celebrated by Limbaugh-Gingrich-ism, touching off an uproar. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, Matthew C. Hoffman of the Competitive Enterprise Institute suggested that, over the previous several years, there had been "a gradual change in the Smithsonian's character." Little by little "a portion of the national heritage it represents has been lost to a campaign of ideological revisionism." It was now in the hands of "academics unable to view American history as anything other than a woeful catalog of crimes and aggressions against the helpless peoples of the earth."

Republican Congressmen -- like Sam Johnson (R-Texas), Tom Lewis (R-Florida), Peter Blute (R-Massachusetts) -- feasted on the issue all summer and fall of 1994. In August, for

instance, Lewis opined on behalf five other Congressmen and himself that the Museum's "job is to tell history, not rewrite it." Senators were also active. Slade Gorton won passage of his injunctive legislation. Nancy Kassebaum cast her directive resolution in such a fashion -- the NASM should avoid "impugning the memory of those who gave their lives for freedom" -- that with the election less than two months away, no Democrats, not even liberal ones, were prepared to vote against it. More disturbingly, no one, right or left, took issue with the assumption underlying such initiatives -- that the Federal Government had the right to mandate historical interpretations.

Standards Bearer

On October 20th, just as the fifth and final *Enola Gay* script was emerging from the latest round of revisions, the History Wars escalated once again. Lynne Cheney, former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, launched a preemptive strike in the *Wall Street Journal* against the *National Standards for United States History*, due to be issued five days later. Several years in the making, and funded in 1992 by the NEH while Cheney was still Director, the document was intended as a voluntary guide for teachers. Astonishingly ambitious, it offered broad analytical themes, over 2600 specific classroom exercises, and suggestions for encouraging historical thinking. Over 6,000 teachers, administrators, scholars, parents, and business leaders were involved in the drafting process, which was marked by wide ranging open debates, and the involvement of 35 advisory organizations, including the Organization of American Historians, the Organization of History Teachers, the American Historical Association, the National Education Association, and the American Association of School Librarians.

No matter. In her *Wall Street Journal* piece, and in subsequent articles and interviews, Cheney chanted the standard mantra: an inner core group -- gripped by a "great hatred for traditional history," and intent on "pursuing the revisionist agenda" -- had, "in the name of political correctness," made sure that a "whole lot of basic history" didn't appear. She proved this to her satisfaction by adopting Correll's pseudo-statistical method. "Counting how many times different subjects are mentioned in the document yields telling results," she wrote ominously. Traditional heroes were underrepresented, women and minorities mentioned too often; references to (black female) Harriet Tubman cropped up more often than to (white male) Ulysses S. Grant. In addition, the *Standards* lacked "a tone of affirmation," directed attention to social conflict, and invited debate not celebration. Predictably, she concluded her initial blast with a call for battle against the all-powerful "academic establishment".

Cheney's analysis bordered on the disinformational. The *Standards* weren't a textbook, a dictionary of biography, or a compendium of important facts, much less a pantheon or catechism. Counting white faces and listing a few famous absentees was therefore disingenuous: the issues and events that the document urged exploring patently required reference to the supposedly spurned generals and presidents. In addition, bean counters more scrupulous than Cheney discovered not only that the vast majority of cited individuals were in fact white males, but that the two most-often-mentioned of the genus were Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

Cheney's real objections -- assuming they were motivated by more than mere personal ambition and political calculation -- seemed to be to the paradigmatic shift the *Standards* represented. In its pages the American past was not a simple saga of remarkable men doing remarkable deeds. Those deeds were included -- despite Cheney's charges, for example, the Constitution was treated extensively -- but so, too, were less laudatory dimensions of the

historical record. Slavery was examined, not to denigrate the American past, but to understand it. And the *Standards*, like much contemporary scholarship, embraced the experience of ordinary people -- as heroes of their own lives and as collective actors on the world historical stage.

Some fellow conservatives -- notably Diane Ravitch -- were also critical of the *Standards* but balked at Cheney's demand that they be scrapped altogether. Especially given the *Standards'* drafters expressed willingness to respond to substantive objections, such as complaints that monetarist theories explaining the Great Depression were slighted, or that a few dozen (out of 2600) classroom exercises could arguably be described as shepherding students to preselected conclusions.

But most of the crew that copied Correll now echoed Cheney. Though few in numbers -- far fewer than the multitudes that had fashioned the *Standards* -- their command of media megaphones allowed them to manufacture another uproar. Rush Limbaugh weighed in four days after Cheney's initial intervention. With his usual insouciant disregard for facts he informed his radio audience that the "insidious document" had been "worked on in secret." In truth, the drafts had been hammered into shape in countless sessions of democratic discussion embracing enormous numbers of participants, including twenty-three days of formal (tape recorded) meetings, and hundreds of copies had been dispatched to all who requested them. Limbaugh pronounced it "an intellectually dishonest, politically correct version of American history" that ought to be "flushed down the toilet." With yawning predictability, columnist Charles Krauthammer called it "a classic of political correctness." The *Wall Street Journal* bundled letters on the subject under the headline: "HISTORY THIEVES". And John Leo o'er-hastily objected to the elevation of one Ebenezer McIntosh, a "brawling street lout of the 1760s," to the heroic stature of a Sam Adams; unfortunately for Leo, the said McIntosh turned out to be an

important leader of the Stamp Act Demonstrations in Boston. Not for three weeks did a major national news story -- in the *New York Times* -- do much more than parrot Cheney's charges, and by then, the election was over.

Victory in November didn't stem the Republican assault on Revisionists. Indeed, their accession to political power shaped the *Enola Gay* endgame. Speaker-to-be Gingrich made clear that efforts to enact the Contract with America -- a package of proposed legislation meant to dismantle much of the regulatory and welfare state and ladle out breaks to business -- would be accompanied by a campaign to "Renew American Civilization." In a post-election interview he said that the new Republican leadership intended to improve the country's moral climate, especially by "teaching the truth about American history." Before the month was out Gingrich had called for eliminating the National Endowment for the Humanities, in part because it had sponsored the History Standards, which he pronounced "destructive for American Civilization."

Almost immediately on taking office, Gingrich, acting (he said) "as Speaker, who is a Ph.D in history," chose a new historian of the House of Representatives. Christina Jeffrey, not an historian at all, but an Associate Professor of Political Science at Kennesaw State University who had helped him launch his course, was given the task of helping "in reestablishing the legitimacy of history." "History" received a setback that January when Gingrich abruptly fired Jeffrey. As it transpired, in a 1986 evaluation of an educational program that included an examination of the Holocaust, Jeffrey had argued that: "The program gives no evidence of balance or objectivity. The Nazi point of view, however unpopular, is still a point of view and is not presented, nor is that of the Ku Klux Klan." Moreover she had characterized the since widely adopted program as embodying a "re-education method" that "Hitler and Goebbels used to propagandize the German

people," a method later "perfected by Chairman Mao," and which was "now being foisted on American children under the guise of 'understanding history.'"

With this misstep, initiative passed momentarily to the Senate. On January 18, Senators Robert Dole and Slade Gorton won passage (by 99-1) of a nonbinding Sense of the Senate Resolution. It urged that the present History Standards not be certified by the Federal Government, and that funds for any future ones go only to those which "have a decent respect for the contributions of Western civilization, and United States history, ideas and institutions, to the increase of freedom and prosperity throughout the world." Democrats, noting that leaders of the *Standards* project had already met with critics six days earlier, argued against the resolution, but agreed to support it, if made nonbinding.

A week later, House members returned to the fray. On January 24th, 68 Republicans (including House Majority Leader and Gingrich ally Dick Armey) and 13 Democrats demanded Martin Harwit's ouster. Representative Blute elaborated: "We think there are some very troubling questions in regard to the Smithsonian, not just with this *Enola Gay* exhibit but over the past 10 years or so, getting into areas of revisionist history and political correctness. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered."

On the 26th, critics began tying the two issues together. Columnist George Will claimed "the Smithsonian Institution, like the history standards" was "besotted with the cranky anti-Americanism of the campuses...." Lynne Cheney, in guileful Congressional testimony, seized on one of the 2600 teaching examples to argue that fifth or sixth graders who learned about the end of World War II from the Standards would know only that the U.S. had devastated Hiroshima, but nothing of Japanese aggression. In fact the standards called explicitly for analysis of the "German, Italian and Japanese drives for empire in the 1930s"; and a suggested teaching activity

for seventh and eighth graders was to construct a time line that included the "Japanese seizure of Manchuria in 1931."

On the 26th, Speaker Gingrich also named Representative Sam Johnson -- the ardent *Enola Gay* show critic who had alerted him to the issue -- to the Smithsonian's Board of Regents. The following day Gingrich announced he had found "a certain political correctness seeping in and distorting and prejudicing the Smithsonian's exhibits," and declared the museum should not be "a plaything for left-wing ideologies."##5

Four days later Heyman scuttled the *Enola Gay* exhibit.##6 Now in full retreat mode, he also announced "postponement" for at least five years of a planned exhibit on Air Power in Vietnam; suggested that critics of "political correctness" in recent interpretive exhibits had a point; and promised the Regents he would review and, where necessary, rectify current exhibits that Board members believed reflected "revisionist history." Heyman refused to fire Harwit, but then long-time Smithsonian critic Senator Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) announced he would go ahead in mid-May 1995 with previously threatened hearings on the philosophical underpinnings of the exhibit. On May 2 Harwit resigned. The continuing controversy, he said, had convinced him "that nothing less than my stepping down from the directorship will satisfy the Museum's critics." Regent Sam Johnson immediately made clear that Harwit's departure wasn't enough, that only a full scale purge of "revisionists" would do.

The actual exhibition opened on June 28, 1995. It proved even more of a retreat than had been anticipated. Heyman claimed it simply reported "the facts," but it was heavily larded with AFA-style interpretation. The label copy declared that "the use of the bombs led to the immediate surrender of Japan and made unnecessary the planned invasion of the Japanese home islands. Such an invasion, especially if undertaken for both main islands, would have led to very

heavy casualties among American and Allied troops and Japanese civilians and military. It was thought highly unlikely that Japan, while in a very weakened military condition, would have surrendered unconditionally without such an invasion." This, of course, finessed a host of issues, among them the role of the Soviet declaration of war (utterly unmentioned here), the question of whether a *conditional* surrender might not have ended the war without either invasion *or* bombing, and the considered judgement of many wartime leaders that the Japanese might *well* have surrendered before the earliest possible invasion.

Nor, apart from a twenty second video snippet showing bomb effects (which may or may not have included an almost subliminal image of a corpse), and label copy saying that the two bombs "caused tens of thousands of deaths" (by most accounts, a gross understatement), was there *any* confrontation with the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "I really decided to leave it more to the imagination," Heyman told a June 27th news conference.

The "aircraft speaks for itself in this exhibit," the Secretary added, and indeed NASM scattered additional pieces of the giant plane throughout the embarrassingly bare galleries, trying to fill them up with mammoth chunks of metal. But, in fact, it is the *Enola Gay's* pilot and crew who speak on its behalf, in a sixteen minute concluding video presentation. It's certainly appropriate to include the crew's reminiscences as part of the story. But why should their ringing retroactive justification of their mission (and that of their colleagues over Nagasaki) be privileged, and the troubled postwar reflections of men like Eisenhower, Leahy, and even Truman himself be proscribed? It's as if the plane that dropped the atomic bomb were an artifact akin to a kettle or a wedding dress, which required only some donor-provided information about its original usage.##7

Fallout

What are the larger meanings, and likely consequences, of the battle over the *Enola Gay*? The victors have suggested their own answers to these questions. Newt Gingrich told the National Governors' Association, "The *Enola Gay* fight was a fight, in effect, over the reassertion by most Americans that they're sick and tired of being told by some cultural elite that they ought to be ashamed of their country." The editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, that GHQ of reaction, proclaimed it a triumph for the public, which had successfully "stuck its snoot inside the sanctums tended to these many years by the historians."

This is faux-populist hogwash. In truth, this generation of historians and curators has thrown open the historical tent flaps, and embraced the experience of a far broader range of Americans than had ever before been represented in museums. Just as opinion polls belie right-wing claims that public broadcasting is an elite-only enterprise, so too the vast number of citizens flocking to public historical presentations (far more than attend professional sports events) contradict claims that historians are out of touch with the larger culture.

The people packing into history museums, local historical societies, preserved historic places and National Park Service sites are drawn in part by the novel presence of their forebears' voices and stories. Not only women and people of color are now depicted extensively but vast numbers of white males as well -- the farmers and miners and sailors and steelworkers and clerks and professionals who had never before been deemed of sufficient stature to warrant inclusion in the marble mausoleums stuffed with the portraits and possessions of "historically correct" statesmen and entrepreneurs. At long last the American past is as crowded and diverse and contentious and fascinating as is the American present.

Conservative cant about liberating the masses from political correctness is more than merely misleading. The only "PC" displayed in the *Enola Gay* affair was the prior censorship that shut down the real exhibition and barred people from judging it for themselves. It was bad enough watching the show get throttled; it's insufferable to hear the censors whine about their powerlessness. If this Orwellian recasting of suppression as liberation is not rejected, if the right is allowed to frame the issue this way, the Smithsonian's humbling may herald further repression.

There are two ways so-called conservatives might try to expunge the scholarship they detest, or at least keep it bottled up inside the academy.

One is to gut governmental funding. Just as Republican Congressmen have invited business lobbyists to the legislative drafting tables, the abolition of NEH and NEA and NPR and CPB will make public history programming, like access to the airwaves, dependent on corporate funders. This will further narrow the range of acceptable historical presentations (few such enterprises will care to be identified with controversial issues), or lead to puff pieces like the histories of transport, energy, and food that Disney "imagineers" crafted for General Motors, Exxon and Kraft at EPCOT.##8

But for all the new elite's libertarian professions about reducing the power of big government, they seem drawn to authoritarian solutions. In the case of Air and Space, Congresspeople laid down an official historical "line" and demanded the firing of curators who did not toe it. Gingrich himself believes our ailing culture can be cured through state intervention, "first of all by the people appointed to the Smithsonian board." Regent Sam Johnson -- Newt's first cultural commissar -- agrees completely that "this Congress has an opportunity to change the face of America," and makes clear that his goal is "to get patriotism back into the Smithsonian."

Suppression follows all too logically from such premises. If traitors have seized the nation's cultural bastions, it's essential to root them out. The *Wall Street Journal* professes amazement that "the history profession pushed its 'new history' this far without challenge," and seeks to terminate the enterprise forthwith. Historians "fear that one set of assumptions is simply going to be imposed by fiat in place of their own," the *Journal* notes. "That would be unfortunate, we guess. But we don't plan to feel very sorry for these academics...."

The new expurgators are busily scrutinizing the "history textbooks, curricula and museum displays" that John Leo believes have become "carriers of the broad assault against American and Western culture." An outfit calling itself the American Textbook Council damned Paul Boyer's update of Merle Curti's classic history survey for, among other things, pointing out the achievements of environmentalists. John Leo blasted the same study using the now time-dishonored technique of counting up biographical references and declaring white male faces insufficiently in evidence. Lynne Cheney censured a textbook by Gary Nash, former President of the Organization of American Historians and co-director of the History Standards project, for dwelling on McCarthyism and Watergate, and being "gloomier than the story of the United States ought to be."

Even that nemesis of gloom, the Walt Disney Company, got its corporate wrist slapped by the new censorians. When *Disney's America*, the proposed history theme park, announced it would "not take a Pollyanna view" of the American past and would even evoke the experience of slavery, conservative apparatchik William Kristol warned: "If you're going to have a schlocky version of American history, it should at least be a schlocky, patriotic and heroic version," rather than something "politically correct," making "suitable bows to all oppressed groups."

Though the new nabobs have so far restricted themselves to a relatively niggling negativism, we should not underestimate how fast and how far things could slide. Though the United States has never had a State Ministry of Culture to dictate historical "lines," we've had plenty of private vigilantes patrolling our cultural institutions to ensure they promoted "patriotic" perspectives. In 1925, the American Legion declared that history textbooks "must inspire the children with patriotism" and "speak chiefly of success"; and the organization expended considerable energy during subsequent decades -- especially in the 1950s -- demanding that intellectuals it deemed un-American be muzzled or fired.

There are disturbing signs that this rough beast has been waked again. *Air Classics*, a popular magazine for aviation buffs, has been inspired by the November 1994 elections -- which proved "Americans are taking control of their government...and their institutions" -- to set the Smithsonian in its gun sights. It aims to "oust the revisionists who want to forever change history in favor of the enemy," and to establish a permanent committee to "constantly monitor the NASM, and similar institutions to stop a repeat of their nearly successful treachery."##9

Such assaults, even if restricted to the rhetorical, can lead to museological self-censorship. The NASM has already put off its Vietnam exhibition, and across the mall, at the National Museum of American History, curators worry openly that fallout from the *Enola Gay* affair will contaminate future exhibitions. "Once it's known that Air and Space sat down to a line-by-line review of the script with the American Legion," said one, "who's next? The Christian Coalition."

Yet it won't do to overstate the degree of danger. Serious obstacles confront those who would revive a full-rigged McCarthyism.

For one thing the Cold War is over. The absence of an external communist menace makes it harder to demonize internal opponents. Indeed the thawing of controls on the practice of history in Russia and Eastern Europe provides an embarrassing counterpoint to newfound U.S. government interest in policing the past. The same issue of the *New York Times* that reported four score Congresspeople had called for the firing of "defiant" curators also reported that Polish historians "have suddenly begun to savor the new-found freedom to examine and write about their country's history as they see it...." Further loosening of ideological bonds abroad will hinder their imposition at home.

In the case of the *Enola Gay*, Japan served as an acceptable substitute for the Evil Empire. Attacks on the exhibition gained strength and plausibility from Japan's egregious approach to its past. Americans (and Asians) had been rightfully indignant at the cabinet ministers, educators and curators who for decades downplayed or denied Japan's record of aggression, in sharp contrast to Germany's willingness to apologize for the criminal activities of its fascist state. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum presented its city and country solely as martyrs and victims, as if the war had begun the day the bomb was dropped. This allowed critics to charge that National Air and Space -- which was to have borrowed artifacts from the Hiroshima Museum -- shared (or had been ensnared by) its lenders' politics.##10

But those politics had begun to change. Under pressure from internal critics, particularly socialist and pacifist groups, Japan had taken significant steps toward accepting responsibility for launching the war and committing atrocities. Historians like Professor Yoshiaki Yoshimi, by irrefutably proving that Korean "comfort women" had been forced to service the Imperial Army, prodded the Government into reversing its denial of responsibility. Leading intellectuals and politicians (including the current Socialist Prime Minister, Tomiichi Murayama) called for a

Parliamentary apology to the Asian countries Japan invaded. Though this met with vehement opposition from a coalition of conservative parties, bureaucrats and business leaders, a 1994 poll found the Japanese people believed 4 to 1 that their country had not adequately compensated the citizens of conquered nations.##11

In Hiroshima itself, recently elected Mayor Takashi Hiraoka argued "that when we think about the bomb, we should think about the war, too." Overcoming opposition from groups like the Great Japan Patriots Party, he won installation of new exhibitry in June 1994, just as the *Enola Gay* affair was heating up, which described in detail the city's role in the war effort.##12

This makes the Smithsonian's cancellation particularly ironic, with the Americans (under pressure from the right) refusing to reflect on the past just as the Japanese (under pressure from the left) were beginning to confront it. Ironic and unfortunate, in that closing down a public historical enterprise that transcended narrow nationalist interpretations muffed an opportunity to bind up old war wounds and reconcile former enemies. Still, if Japan continues along this "revisionist" path, it will be harder for American xenophobes to replicate a triumph which, in any event, was rooted in singular circumstances. And while Japan may be a tough competitor, it's a capitalist competitor, and an ally to boot: it won't be as easy to (as it were) "yellow-bait" intellectuals as it once was to "red-bait" them.

Critics of mainstream academic and public historians face a different kind of problem: you can't fight something with nothing. It's clear what the new censorians don't like -- though Gingrich affixes his "counterculture" and "socialist" labels so indiscriminately that his Enemies List lacks the nice precision of Nixon's. What's not so clear is what they would put in place of the historical edifice they seek to tear down.

Most insist history should be heroic. "I think our kids need heroes," says Lynne Cheney. "I think that they need models of greatness to help them aspire." But apart from the fact that the only heroes the right deems worthy are those already enshrined in the traditional pantheon -- the Harriet Tubmans in our past don't seem to cut the mustard -- trumpeting great deeds isn't much of a substitute for serious analysis of the nation's historical development.##13

Nor is "patriotic" history, not that it's clear exactly what this means. From Matthew Hoffman's wistful recollection in the *Wall Street Journal* of the days when the Smithsonian stuck to "unapologetic celebration," it would appear that they long for unqualified boosterism. Now it's completely appropriate to insist that hard-won American accomplishments, like the steady expansion of democratic and constitutional government, be fully recounted in any full-scale historical reckoning. As indeed they are in the works of current practitioners; despite conservative canards, the *History Standards* pay them rich tribute. But does "patriotism" require striking from the public record all instances where practice fails to live up to preachment? Is their slogan, "Triumphs sí, tragedies no?" Are we to return to the see-no-evil days when Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., could present its eighteenth century town purely as a cradle of liberty without mentioning that over fifty percent of its residents were slaves? I suspect most Americans want their historians to pursue the truth, not generate feel-good fantasies. As Secretary Heyman said when he was still resisting closure, it's not the Smithsonian's job "simply to offer a romantic portrait of the nation's past; Hollywood and Disney do that quite well."

What academics have going for them, despite the cartoon characterizations their opponents bruit about, is the immense body of scholarly work they have put together over the past generation. It will be difficult (though not impossible) for opponents to vault over it and sport about in fields of mid-nineteenth century pieties. Nor will the museums that have so

successfully quarried this mine of information and analysis be easily driven back to decontextualized displays of the material culture of a privileged few.

If future *Enola Gay* debacles are to be avoided, however, museums will have to be smarter and tougher than they've ever been before. If the National Air and Space Museum can be faulted for anything, it's underestimating the tenacity and tactics of its likely opponents, and not realizing it had *enemies* to deal with. "We've been extremely outclassed," admitted NASM spokesman Mike Fetters back in September 1994. "Had we known how intense the AFA's efforts would be, we'd have moved a bit more promptly and aggressively to get our information distributed to veterans, the media, and Congress."

The way to forestall such disasters is not to retreat into controversy-free blandness; given the current climate, that's probably impossible anyway. Museum planners should instead routinely think through a show's potential political impact. They should identify groups that might be affected by, or have a particular interest in an exhibition. Once identified, the institution should seek out and, where feasible, engage these groups in authentic dialogue.

Museums, including NASM, have done a lot of this in recent years. But it's been relatively easy so far. Curators have mostly been building bridges to congruent constituencies -- women, African-Americans, Native-Americans, and white working class ethnic communities that shared the goal of making museums more diverse and democratic.

In the future, political impact assessments will have to identify potentially harsher critics as well. If a projected exhibition on the history of urban crime intends to flag handgun availability as a problem, it would be wise to anticipate National Rifle Association objections. If designers of a show on the history of public health plan to call attention to preventable lung cancer, they had best be prepared for the wrath of the tobacco industry. Treatments of

prostitution, pollution, civil rights, birth control, political corruption, homosexuality, welfare, urban planning, historic preservation, deindustrialization, foreign relations -- almost anything, in truth, that tries to set contemporary issues in historical perspective -- can be expected to outrage some part of the populace, somewhere along the political spectrum. Should such critics be declared "stakeholders" and given an automatic veto? I think not. There are better alternatives available, options whose feasibility have been tested in practice, options which can enhance rather than foreclose discussion.

One approach is to clearly label a given show as embodying the point-of-view of the curators. It would be presented as the analogue of an op-ed piece, or a column, rather than a news story. The authors-curators could be clearly introduced up front, with pictures and bios. They could lay out, in videotaped prefaces, what they are seeking to accomplish. This would undercut the notion that exhibitions are the products of omniscient and invisible narrators. It would also allow curatorial convictions to be distinguished from those of the institution, as is done routinely on television in disclaimers that state that the views presented are not necessarily those of the broadcaster. At the end of the exhibit, moreover, both critics and visitors could be given the opportunity of commenting on the presentation, using media formats ranging from simple three by five cards tacked on a wall to video-taped snippets playing on monitors.

Another strategy would be to incorporate differing perspectives into the exhibition itself. Museums should not duck debate but welcome it. Fascinating shows could be fashioned by pitting alternative perspectives one against the another: creationists versus evolutionists, developers versus preservationists, advocates versus opponents of affirmative action.

In most cases proponents will settle for being participants in a conversation. But what happens if they won't? What happens if the NRA insists that all references to gun control as a

desirable response to urban crime be deleted? What happens if fundamentalists object to having their divinely sanctioned beliefs paired with those of secular-humanist Darwinians? What to do when the Air Force Association denounces the very notion of laying out differing perspectives on the Hiroshima bombing as being inherently unpatriotic? How to respond when the very idea of presenting controversies is rejected as controversial?

Here, I think, it's essential for individual institutions to be able to refer to standards of professional rights and responsibilities, fashioned by the museological community at large. These should be akin to but not identical with standards of academic freedom in that they would apply to institutions, not individuals. A public historical organization might be expected to make use of up-to-date scholarship, follow appropriate rules for gathering evidence in its own research, provide ways for critics and visitors to respond to exhibitions, fairly present a range of opinions on controversial issues, and offer over time a reasonable variety of political perspectives. If museums adhered to such procedures, they would be guaranteed the right to mount whatever exhibitions they chose to, free from political interference.

The standards should state the principles that underlie such a call for relative autonomy, and justify its value to the larger society. Curators are educators of a special kind. They have particular responsibilities to listen to their communities. But they also have valuable skills and information to contribute to that community and a responsibility to pursue the truth. If they carry out their civic and professional obligations in a responsible manner, it is in the best interest of that larger community that they be protected from intimidation.

If and when drafters get around to hammering out principles defending freedom of historical enquiry, they might consider four sentences from a *New York Times* editorial of January 30 1995, responding to attacks on the Smithsonian. "To reduce the complexities or

painful ambiguities of the issue to slogans or historical shorthand is wrong....To let politicians and groups with a particular interest frame the discussion and determine the conclusion is worse....The real betrayal of American tradition would be to insist on a single version of history or to make it the property of the state or any group....Historians and museums of history need to be insulated from any attempt to make history conform to a narrow ideological or political interest."

The existence of such a public historical charter might well bolster the position of beleaguered institutions. But then again, it might not. Paper rights are one thing, power realities another. What could a museum do if it played by the rules and still came under attack?

In part, it would have to take responsibility for its own self-defense. It should have analyzed in advance who an exhibit's potential allies and enemies were likely to be, and thought through a contingency plan for enlisting the former and fending off the latter. Such a blueprint should include an agenda for action, right on down to identifying the media experts and friendly politicians who could be enlisted at short notice to help explain the institution's position to press and public alike.

But isolated institutions can do only so much. There must be a commitment by the larger museum community to help out. An attack on one museum's freedom of expression should be seen as an attack on all. Most Americans believe museums are dedicated to the pursuit and display of truth. They enjoy a rare reputation among our cultural and political establishments. Any capitulation to political or commercial pressures tarnishes that image. If one institution yields to noisy minorities, or even perceived majorities, the hard-won credibility of all museums will quickly unravel, for who can sustain confidence in institutions whose exhibitions have been purchased or imposed?

In the event of future *Enola Gays*, professional bodies should launch their own investigations. If such inquiries find that an institution has operated in compliance with generally accepted standards, and been subjected to unwarranted harassment, then the entire community should speak out vigorously on its behalf. The museum world should also forge alliances with other cultural institutions -- like public libraries, schools, universities, email networks, and publishers of print and electronic media -- who now routinely come under fire. Jane Alexander, head of the National Endowment for the Arts, has set a splendid example by travelling to all fifty states and mobilizing grass roots arts groups. If, as I believe, museums have developed and retain a substantial reservoir of popular support, they might consider mobilizing their constituents in defense of freedom of expression.

If all this fails, and we are faced with more shuttered galleries, we may have to consider borrowing methods other dissidents have found useful. The Air & Space story will not end with the opening of the amputated exhibit. An alliance of scholars, curators and peace activists is planning demonstrations, teach-ins, and perhaps a counter-exhibition, a sort of *musée de refusé*. If the shutdown galvanizes the public historical community into concerted action, then perhaps the battle of the *Enola Gay*, which now seems a setback, may prove in the end to have been a victory.

FOOTNOTES

1. Leahy's judgement in 1950 was: "It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material success in our war against Japan," as "the Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons." Eisenhower asserted in 1963 that Japan "was seeking some way to surrender with a minimum loss of 'face'" and that "It wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing."

2. Arnold, Spaatz and LeMay opposed dropping the atomic bomb except as part of an invasion. Arnold pressed these views as late as the Potsdam Conference in late July 1945, but in the end deferred to General Marshall. After the war, Arnold said that "atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse," and LeMay believed that "even without the atomic bomb and the Russian entry into the war, Japan would have surrendered in two weeks." Some think these judgements stemmed from fear that superbombs would torpedo the Generals' dreams of a postwar independent Air Force with seventy wings and thousands of fliers.

3. The group included: Barton J. Bernstein of Stanford, a student of nuclear policy; Stanley Goldberg, a scholar studying General Groves and his Manhattan Project; Akira Iriye of Harvard, a historian of Japanese-American relations; Richard Rhodes, author of The Making of the Atomic Bomb; Martin Sherwin, Dartmouth historian and author of A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance; Victor Bond, a doctor at Brookhaven National Laboratory; Edward T. Linenthal, student of American attitudes to war memorials; Dr. Richard Hallion, Air Force Historian; and, contrary to claims that curators consulted no one with actual wartime experience, Edwin Bearss, Chief Historian of National Park Service, decorated Marine veteran, at Pearl Harbor, wounded at Guadalcanal, and a strong supporter of the script.

This group met only once, though they were also consulted, over succeeding months, on a seriatim basis.

4. Newt's immobilized past stands in stark contrast to his vision of a flexible future. He seems oblivious to the contradiction, perhaps because he thinks he needs a fixed base from which to launch his Third Wave revolution. But this is to deprive himself of the historical tools which might help him understand (and shape) the way a society moves from one era to another.

5. It's hard to imagine that if Newt had ever actually stepped foot in National Air & Space he wouldn't have been pleased with the WWI exhibition his allies so detested. Gingrich claims as a transformational defining moment his visit, at age 15, to the Verdun battlefield. There he peered through the windows of an ossuary containing the bones of 100,000 unidentified bodies. "I can still feel the sense of horror and reality which overcame me then," he wrote in his 1984 book Window of Opportunity. "It is the driving force which pushed me into history and politics and molded my life." The WWI exhibition features a giant photograph of the Verdun Ossuary. Pity he's intent on denying others even an echo of the experience he found so moving and instructive.

6. President Clinton, whose past and present relations with the military left him in no position to challenge the decision, observed with his usual caution that while "academic freedom" was an issue here, he "nonetheless felt that some of the concerns expressed by veterans groups and others had merit."

7. Not surprisingly, after previewing the exhibition on June 21, Tibbets wrote Heyman he was "pleased and proud" of it. It simply presented the "basic facts," he argued preposterously, without any "attempt to persuade anyone about anything." This happy outcome, Tibbets added, "demonstrates the merits and the positive influences of management" -- whose firm hand was

again in evidence on opening day, when twenty-one demonstrators with the *Enola Gay* Action Coalition were hauled away by a U.S. Park Police SWAT team.

8. Newt's a trailblazer here too. Of the wealthy donors who picked up the \$600,000 first year costs of his "Renewing American Civilization" lectures, those contributing over \$25,000 were "invited to participate in the course development process" -- giving a new twist to the notion of a "free market in ideas".

9. In June 1995, the Bradbury Science Museum in Los Alamos mounted an exhibition on the atomic bomb prepared by a Santa Fe peace group. In featuring photos of ground devastation it infuriated veterans and former Manhattan Project workers. Not having seen the exhibit, I can't comment on its interpretive perspective. But it's a chilling sign of NASM fallout that Harold Agnew, former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (which owns the museum), wrote a veterans' group that if the show was not changed, staff members' jobs might be at risk. "We got rid of the Smithsonian curator over the *Enola Gay* fiasco," he said. "Hopefully the Bradbury staff will understand."

10. "They are bending over backwards it looks like to accommodate the Japanese," said Sam Johnson. Ironically, curator Tom Crouch was on record as being "really bothered, angered, by the way that the Japanese find it so difficult to put wartime issues in real context. Their view is to portray themselves as victims." Crouch, however, saw parallels in this country. "As I listen to the folks who criticize this [exhibit], I hear something similar to that. There's real discomfort about looking at destruction on the ground....I hear critics saying, 'Don't tell part of the story.'" "They want to stop the story when the bomb leaves the bomb bay."

11. A "Japan Committee to Appeal for World Peace '95," composed of scholars and cultural workers, called for an "apology and compensation for damages to the Asian peoples whom we

victimized," and urged the Japanese government and Diet to "clearly articulate the government's self-reflection on Japan's responsibility for past colonial rule as well as the Asia-Pacific War"

The political establishment teetered back and forth on this issue. Prime Minister Murayama went to Beijing in the Spring of 1995 and said: "I recognize anew that Japan's actions, including aggression and colonial rule, at one time in our history caused unbearable suffering and sorrow for many people in your country and other Asian neighbors." He also wrote a scroll: "I face up to history."

The Japanese nationalist right did not. Shigeto Nagano, Justice Minister and former chief of staff of the army, insisted in May 1995 that the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Chinese at Nanking in 1937 was a "fabrication," and he reaffirmed that Japan, in invading Asian countries, had been "liberating" them from Western colonial powers.

On May 12, 1995, however, a Tokyo High Court ruling of the previous October was affirmed, thus sanctioning Japanese historian Saburo Ienaga's thirty-one year struggle against the Education Ministry for whitewashing schoolbook accounts of the massacre. The Court also revoked the Ministry's theretofore accepted right to determine historical "truth."

On June 6, 1995, the right wing Liberal Democratic Party forced a compromise on the Parliamentary apology front. A resolution carried the lower house expressing remorse for causing "unbearable pain to people abroad, particularly in Asian countries." But the wording was ambiguous enough to allow for varying interpretations (thus "Hansei" could mean "remorse," or merely "reflection"). The upper house refused even to consider such a resolution.

A week later, on June 14, the Government responded by establishing a fund to provide medical and social welfare assistance to former comfort women. Although it fell short of what some of the women had demanded, it was accompanied by a statement of remorse and apology.

Finally, Prime Minister Murayama, on August 15th, during fiftieth anniversary commemorations of the war's end, made the most explicit declaration yet. Noting that Japan's "colonial rule and aggression caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations," he said: "I regard, in a spirit of humility, these irrefutable facts of history, and express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology." "Our task," he added, "is to convey to the younger generations the horrors of war, so that we never repeat the errors in our history."

12. Similarly, Tokyo's Metropolitan Edo-Tokyo Museum mounted a major exhibition for the March 1995 50th anniversary of the city's being firebombed. Though retaining a focus on domestic suffering, it included information on 1930s and '40s militarism. (Video clips showed Japanese bombers attacking Chongqing.)

13. More irony: A small industry has sprung up in Japan which caters to youth "searching for heroes in an uncertain world," by producing books, comics, and computer games (like Commander's Decision) which rewrite World War II history in Japan's favor, granting it retroactive victory, while omitting all mention of wartime atrocities.

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I found two electronic bulletin boards extremely useful. The MUSEUM-L list (reachable at this address: LISTSERV@UNMVMA.UNM.EDU) allowed me to listen in to the interesting debate over the exhibition among museum professionals. And the WWII-L list (LISTSERV@UBVM.CC.BUFFALO.EDU) put me in touch with an extensive community of

World War II veterans and buffs. (Mike Fetters of National Air & Space's Office of Public Affairs joined the list at one point, engaging critics in ongoing conversation, down in the electronic trenches). These discussion groups, like many others, archive their exchanges, and I was able to retrieve material from those months when conversations were most energetic.

ENDNOTE

This essay was originally undertaken in late 1994, at the behest of *Museum News*, and, shortly thereafter, *Museums Journal* (its English counterpart). Once I discovered the dimensions of the affair I decided to write it as a chapter for this book. Though it subsequently grew too large for either magazine, both have printed excerpts from it, and the *Radical Historians' Newsletter* reproduced virtually the entire piece.

My thanks to those who agreed to be interviewed: Barton J. Bernstein, Kai Bird, Tom Crouch, Stanley Goldberg, Richard Hallion, Martin Harwit, Akira Iriye, Robert Lifton, Arthur Molella, Gary Nash, Michael Neufeld, Michael Sherry, Martin Sherwin, Barbara Clark Smith, and several former colleagues of Professor Gingrich at West Georgia College.

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