

November 16, 1994

Dr. Ira Michael Heyman  
Secretary - Room 205  
The Smithsonian Museum  
1000 Jefferson Drive  
Washington, D.C. 20560

To: YUP  
Correll  
7/11/62

Dear Dr. Heyman,

As historians and scholars who share a concern for the honest portrayal of important historical events, we are writing to raise certain questions occasioned by the controversy surrounding the Smithsonian National Air & Space Museum's planned exhibit on the Enola Gay and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The United States Senate recently adopted a resolution sponsored by Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum which reminded the Smithsonian of its "obligation under Federal law to portray history in the proper context of the times." The resolution went on to state that it was the "sense of the Senate that any exhibit displayed by the National Air and Space Museum with respect to the Enola Gay should reflect appropriate sensitivity toward the men and women who faithfully and selflessly served the United States during World War II and should avoid impugning the memory of those who gave their lives for freedom." We support this sentiment, and indeed, 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 problem now is that the current (fifth) script of the Enola Gay exhibit utterly fails to "portray history in the proper context of the times." Notwithstanding that some additions to the script do add to the historical context, certain irrevocable facts cannot be omitted without so corrupting the exhibit that it is reduced to mere propaganda, thus becoming an affront to "those who gave their lives for freedom."

One of these facts--the observation that there has been a debate from the very beginning over whether the atomic bombings were necessary to bring about an early end to the Pacific war without an invasion of Japan--was accurately reflected in the first few drafts of the exhibit's script. The existence of that debate is an historical fact, and the statement of that fact was removed from the planned exhibit in response to political pressure.

Historical documents essential to an understanding of the historical debate over the atomic bombings likewise have been removed from the exhibit. We refer here to such documents as the June 27th, 1945 memo from Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph Bard reporting his "feeling that before the bomb is actually used against Japan that Japan should have some preliminary warning...The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation and the fair play attitude of our people generally is responsible in the main for this feeling." In addition, the statements by General

Dwight D. Eisenhower and Admiral William D. Leahy which reflected their opinion that the bombings were unnecessary should also be re-inserted. One cannot understand the nature of the debate without the inclusion of such statements from prominent U.S. authorities. Nor can visitors understand the context of the debate without seeing at least some of the bombing artifacts--such as the remnants of the personal belongings of civilians killed--which have been removed from the exhibit.

It is most unfortunate that the Smithsonian is becoming associated with a transparent attempt at historical cleansing. That archival documents and artifacts have been removed from the planned exhibit under political pressure is an intellectual corruption. The Smithsonian is taking fastidious care to make sure that each bolt, each gauge and detail of the Enola Gay is a perfect reflection of the true artifact. This stands in extraordinary contrast to the disregard of historical documents and the scholarly literature on the atomic bombings.

It is unconscionable, first, that as a result of pressures from outside the museum, the exhibit will no longer attempt to present a balanced range of the historical scholarship on this issue; second, that a large body of important archival evidence on the Hiroshima decision will not even be mentioned; and third, that the exhibit will contain assertions of fact which have long been challenged by careful historical scholarship.

We wish to draw your attention to a resolution passed by the Executive Board of the Organization of American Historians on October 22, 1994: "The Organization of American Historians condemns threats by members of Congress to penalize the Smithsonian Institution because of the controversial exhibition on World War II and the dropping of the atomic bomb." The Organization of American Historians further deplores 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."

As historians and scholars, we urge you to reconsider the exhibit script that has been negotiated with the representatives of the Air Force Association, the American Legion and other special interest groups. We further urge you to restore archival documents removed from earlier exhibit scripts and restore to the exhibit the full range of the historical debate over the atomic bombings. Only by resisting pressures from political sources ill-informed about the relevant historical scholarship can you hope to defend the Smithsonian's credibility as a public institution that faithfully reflects the broad range of debate over our nation's history--and not just what is perceived at the moment as patriotically correct history.

Sincerely,

cc: Dr. Martin Harwit  
Director  
National Air & Space Museum

### Signatories

Martin Sherwin, Professor of History, Dartmouth College, and author of A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance

Kai Bird, Author of The Chairman: John J. McCloy / The Making of the American Establishment

✓ John Lewis Gaddis, Professor of History at Ohio University.

Douglas Brinkley, Director of the Eisenhower Center, University of New Orleans

✓ Walter LaFeber, Noll Professor of History, Cornell University.

Alan Brinkley, Professor of History, Columbia University.

Warren Kimball, Robert Treat Professor History, Rutgers University.

Marilyn B. Young, Chair, Department of History, New York University.

✓ Stanley Goldberg, Historian and author of a forthcoming biography of General Leslie Groves.

Gar Alperovitz, President of the National Center for Economic Alternatives, and author of Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima & Potsdam.

Greg Mitchell, author of The Campaign of the Century and co-author of the forthcoming Hiroshima and America.

Dr. Robert Jay Lifton, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology at the City University of New York, and co-author of the forthcoming Hiroshima and America.

✓ James Hershberg, Author of James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age

Richard Barnet, Senior Fellow, Institute for Policy Studies.

✓ Gaddis Smith, Learned Professor of History, Yale University.

Priscilla Johnson McMillan, Author and Fellow of the Russian Research Center, Harvard University.

Michael Hogan, Professor of History, Ohio State University.

John Dower, Professor of History at MIT and author of War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War

Thomas Paterson, Professor of History, University of Connecticut.

Charles Weiner, Professor of Science, Technology & Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Robert L. Messer, Professor of History, University of Illinois at Chicago, and author of The End of An Alliance: James F. Byrnes, Roosevelt, Truman, and the Origins of the Cold War.

Martin Walker, author of The Cold War: A History.

Todd Gitlin, Professor of Sociology, University of California, Berkley.

Michael Kazin, Professor of History, American University.

Peter Kuznick, Professor of History, American University.

Emily F. Rosenberg, Professor of History, Macalester College.

Norman L. Rosenberg, Professor of History, Macalester College.

Leo Ribuffo, Professor of History, George Washington University.

Irene Gendzier, Professor of Political Science, Boston University.

Carolyn Eisenberg, Department of History, Hofstra University, and author of the forthcoming Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-49.

Daniel B. Schirmer, Phd. History.

Joseph C. Gerson, Lecturer, Regis College and author of the forthcoming With Hiroshima Eyes: Atomic War, Nuclear Extortion and Moral Imagination.

Eric Alterman, Fellow, World Policy Institute.

Lawrence S. Wittner, Professor of History, State University of New York at Albany.

Fraser Harbutt, Professor of History, Emory University.

Robert K. Musil, Phd., is Project Director of Shadows of the Nuclear Age: American Culture and the Bomb, a 13-part N.E.H radio documentary series, and executive producer of Mushrooms: Nuclear War and the Imagination, a six part Pennsylvania Humanities Council documentary series.

Christopher Simpson, School of Communications, American University.

Anna Nelson, History Department, American University.

Michael Schaller, Professor of History, University of Arizona.

Nelson Lichtenstein, Professor of History, University of Virginia.

G.J. Barker-Benfield, History Department, State University of New York.

Robert McMahon, Professor of History, University of Florida.

Gerald Zahavi, Professor of History, State University of New York at Albany.

Noam Chomsky, University Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Howard Fredrick, Professor of Communications, Emerson College.

Robert Beisner, Professor of History, American University.

Norman Birnbaum, Professor of Law, Georgetown University.

Thomas Ferguson, Professor of Political Science, University of Massachusetts, Boston.

\* The institutional affiliations listed here are for purposes of identification only.