

November 17, 1994

To: Dr. Martin Harwit  
Director, National Air and Space Museum

From: Dr. Barton Bernstein  
Kai Bird  
Carole Gallagher  
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Dr. Robert Jay Lifton  
Greg Mitchell  
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Re: Recommendations regarding "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II":

As presently constituted, we find the exhibit unsatisfactory, often historically inaccurate, and an inadequate representation of events. As individuals, we come to these issues from different perspectives, however, as a group, we are agreed that *at a minimum*, the exhibition should:

- 1) **Clearly acknowledge the 50-year controversy regarding the use of the bomb and whether it was necessary to end World War II.** We urge that the text from the beginning paragraphs of the exhibition's first script – "To this day, controversy has raged about whether dropping this weapon on Japan was necessary to end the war quickly." – be restored.
  - 2) **Recognize evidence that Japan was near defeat before the bomb was dropped.** In addition to inclusion of the results of the 1946 Strategic Bombing Survey (200, page 53), more attention and space should be given to divisions within the Japanese government and the desire by some for surrender. The Truman diary entries that refer to intercepted intelligence, such as the cable from the "Jap emperor asking for peace", should also be acknowledged, as well as the fact that several of Truman's key advisors (including Grew, McCloy and Stimson) were recommending a public declaration urging the maintenance of the imperial system, arguing that such a guarantee could help end the war.
- Truman's July 17 diary entry (now Section 200, page 59) indicating that the Soviet Union would be in the war by August 15, and to "Fini Japs when that comes about" must be presented so that it is clear that many historians believe this notation – as well as Truman's letters to his wife – may indicate that the President was aware that the war would be over before the first stage of a US invasion of Japan could be mounted in November 1945.
- 3) **Include key statements from historical figures reflecting reservations about the use of the bomb.** At a minimum, section 200 of the exhibit should include and emphasize a) the excerpt from Eisenhower's memoirs expressing a belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was unnecessary; b) William Leahy's 1950 statement that using the bomb was "equivalent to adopting an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages"; c) Under Secretary of the Navy Ralph Bard's June 27, 1945 memo advising that Japan be warned before the bomb was dropped; d) General Marshall's May 29, 1945 statement that the bomb should not be dropped on a city, and that if such was the case, that Japan receive ample warning.

The exhibit should open and close with statements such as these (as well as others defending the use of the bomb) to accurately indicate the range of the debate. The letters

from veterans and others (received during preparation of the exhibition) at the end of the exhibition should be removed.

4) **Include an accurate assessment of the destruction caused by incendiary attacks against Japan.** The original script described the Tokyo raid as the "single most destructive non-nuclear attack in human history." This should be re-inserted (on page 33), along with the original script's comparison between the bombing of Japan and that of the Allies against Germany: "The five-month long USAAF incendiary campaign against Japan probably took more civilian lives than the half million killed during the Allied bombing of Germany." (page 34) It should also be mentioned that the bombing of Tokyo and other such indiscriminate bombings created a "slippery slope" that made the atomic bombings possible and that Stimson himself was very uneasy about Air Force bombing of Japanese cities and the massive killing of non-combatants.

5) **Revise the impression that Hiroshima and its civilian inhabitants constituted a legitimate and primarily military target.** Restore the accuracy of civilian casualties. Quote and display the minutes of the May 31 Interim Committee that the bomb be used on an area with "workers and workers houses" in order to display the power of the bomb.

6) **Revise the text related to expected American casualties in the event of a US invasion of Japan.** Any mention of up to a million casualties (fatalities and other injuries) cannot be included with making clear that historians have found no supporting evidence for such figures. The text should clearly state that military planning documents at the time showed no more than 46,000 expected U.S. deaths.

7) **Acknowledge the Japanese-American internment camps.** Descriptions in Section 100 of the US homefront must recognize the internment of 120,000 Japanese-Americans from the years 1942 to 1945. The conclusions of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (authorized by an act of Congress) should be included. In its report, the Commission stated that the causes of the evacuation were "...race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership."

Also include Truman's post-Hiroshima letter to Samuel McCrea Cavert, OF 596A, Truman Library, on Truman's justification for using the A-bomb.

8) **Restore deleted sections to Section 400: Ground Zero.** Additional photos of the dead and injured should be restored. The current presentation, emphasizing objects and rubble over human suffering, does not adequately represent the effects of the bombing. Particularly important is the fact that the bodies of those closest to Ground Zero were never recovered, having been vaporized. A statement from the original script should be restored to page 31: "Many individuals who were close to ground zero in the two cities were never found. Their bodies were consumed by the heat and blast of the explosion, or burned beyond recognition in the firestorms that followed."

9) **Revise the treatment of hibakusha:** The current section on hibakusha (Section 400, page 19) places undue emphasis on the prejudices of other Japanese against radiation victims, and minimizes the realities of emotional and physical scars, as well as the risks of leukemia and other cancers. At a minimum, the text from the original script (400, page 23) should be restored.

The text should also include more information about what was known about radiation, including segments of the Target Committee minutes on the subject, the May 31 Interim

Committee comments by Oppenheimer, as well as some of the post-Hiroshima reports about radiation.

The Sadako story should also be put into context. Make clear that it became an example for Japan of the terrible and unpredictable effects of radiation, and emerged when it did in significant measure because censorship had ended with the end of US occupation.

**10) Include historical documentation of contemporaneous religious, moral, and political protest over the dropping of the bomb.** Include statements by the Vatican, the Federal Council of Churches, John Foster Dulles, Norman Cousins and others.

**11) Include an adequate treatment of the legacy of the bombing (section 500).** The final section of the exhibition should include fuller discussion of the post-war nuclear arms race, five decades of nuclear weapons production and testing, radiation effects on both military personnel and civilians, consequent environmental destruction, and the bombing as a model for possible future use of nuclear weapons by the US or other countries. The exhibit should also depict the US and international disarmament movement, the post-war peace movement in Japan, and international commitments to the abolition of nuclear weapons, including the first resolution of the UN General Assembly and Article VI of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.