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The Smithsonian and the Enola Gay: *A Retrospective on the Controversy 10 Years Later* April 2004

By John T. Correll



On **AUG. 6, 1945**, the B-29 Enola Gay dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. A second bomb fell on Nagasaki Aug. 9. Japan surrendered Aug. 15.

At Hiroshima, more than half the city was destroyed in a flash, and 80,000 were killed instantly. The Nagasaki bomb killed 40,000.¹

However, these missions brought an end to a war in which 17 million people had died at the hands of the Japanese empire between 1931 and 1945.² Until the atomic bombs fell, Japan had not been ready to end the war.

By eliminating the need for an invasion of the Japanese home islands, the atomic bombs prevented casualties, both American and Japanese, that would have exceeded the death tolls at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.

The bombing of Hiroshima was a famous event, a defining moment of the 20th century, but the aircraft that flew the mission was largely forgotten and left to deteriorate, until restoration finally began in 1984.

Fifty years after Hiroshima, the airplane flew into controversy of a different sort. In the 1990s, the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum laid plans to use the Enola Gay as a prop in a political horror show. It depicted the Japanese more as victims than as aggressors in World War II.

When the museum's plans were revealed, initially by an article in Air Force Magazine in 1994, a raging controversy ensued. The exhibition was canceled in 1995 in response to public and Congressional outrage, and the museum director was fired.

Under new management, the Air and Space Museum returned to its mission to collect, preserve, and display historic aircraft and spacecraft.

From 1995 to 1998, the museum displayed the forward fuselage of the Enola Gay in a depoliticized exhibit that drew four million visitors, the most in the museum's history for a

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special exhibition. Visitor comments were overwhelmingly favorable.

In December 2003, the museum put the Enola Gay, fully assembled, on permanent exhibition at its new Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, adjacent to Dulles Airport at Chantilly, Va.

The controversy never died. In recent years, a host of books and articles have been written about it by people who have not bothered to check the facts. Here is what really happened.

A Museum With a Message

The Smithsonian accepted the Enola Gay in good condition July 3, 1949, at the Air Force Association Convention in Chicago. It was moved temporarily to a base in Texas and then, from 1953 to 1960, was stored outside, unlocked, at Andrews AFB, Md. In 1960, it was disassembled and stored at the Smithsonian's restoration facility in Suitland, Md.

Bockscar, the B-29 that flew the Nagasaki mission, has been displayed at the US Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio, since 1961. But even when the Smithsonian opened the National Air and Space Museum in Washington in 1976, there was no move to exhibit the Enola Gay.

In part, the Smithsonian's reluctance to display the Enola Gay was because it was controversial, but another consideration was that the airplane was too big—99 feet long, with a wingspan of 141 feet—to fit, fully assembled, into the museum.

Restoration of Enola Gay finally began in December 1984 and plans to display it, or part of it, followed in 1987. By then, new political winds were blowing at the Smithsonian Institution.

In the 1980s, the National Air and Space Museum veered away from its mission to collect, preserve, and display aviation and space artifacts. It was part of broader cultural change at the Smithsonian, which the Washington Post described as a "move away from the traditional heroes, politicians, and objects in glass cases and toward a wide, fluid, social-history approach."³

"From an ideological point of view," said Wilcomb E. Washburn, the Smithsonian's director of American Studies since 1965, the shift "usually meant moving to the political left and to a view of the United States as more often than not as the cause of the world's problems."⁴

The museum was influenced significantly by historians of the so-called "Revisionist" persuasion, who disputed the conventional interpretation of the Cold War and cast doubt on actions, statements, and motives of the United States.⁵ In the case of the Enola Gay, the Revisionists held that the bombing of Hiroshima was unnecessary and immoral.

Martin O. Harwit became director of the Air and Space Museum Aug. 17, 1987. Previously, he had been a professor of astronomy at Cornell University. Harwit was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, grew up in Istanbul, Turkey, and came to the United States at age 15 in 1946. While serving in the US Army, 1955-57, Harwit was assigned to the nuclear weapons tests at Eniwetok and Bikini Atolls in the Marshall Islands.

He acknowledged that the experience “inevitably” influenced his thoughts about the Enola Gay exhibit. “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,” he said.⁶

Plans for showing the Enola Gay began shortly after Harwit’s arrival. “In October 1987, I assembled a distinguished external advisory committee and first examined the anticipated complexities surrounding a serious exhibition of the Enola Gay,” Harwit said in his 1996 book, *An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of the Enola Gay*.⁷⁷

In a 1988 interview with the Washington Post, Harwit described plans for a series of programs on strategic bombing “as a counterpoint to the World War II gallery we have now, which portrays the heroism of the airmen but neglects to mention in any real sense the misery of war. ... I think we just can’t afford to make war a heroic event where people could prove their manliness and then come home to woo the fair damsel.”⁸

Harwit’s thoughts were in harmony with those of Robert McCormick Adams, who had been secretary of the Smithsonian Institution since 1984. “Take the Air and Space Museum,” Adams told Washingtonian magazine in 1987.⁹ “What are the responsibilities of a museum to deal with the destruction caused by airpower?”

Assembling a Team

Harwit began to assemble his team for the Enola Gay exhibit. It would be headed by Tom D. Crouch, chairman of the Aeronautics Department, who sent Harwit a preliminary plan for an exhibition that would “draw national and international attention to our museum and would avoid the impression that we are only ‘celebrating’ Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”¹⁰

The next member of the team, and the official curator, was Michael J. Neufeld. “When the museum sought in 1990 to hire a lead curator for the exhibition of the Enola Gay we followed federal procedures and first approached numerous senior American scholars, but none of them were willing or available to take on this complex task,” Harwit said. “Finding none, we offered the position to Mike Neufeld, a Canadian citizen who clearly had the required credentials.”¹¹

In a letter quoted by Harwit, the historian of the Air Force, Richard P. Hallion, described Neufeld as “a Canadian with strong antiwar/anti-AF prejudice.” Harwit said, “On what basis

Hallion should have labeled Neufeld in this fashion I do not know.”¹²

With that, the museum's three main figures in the controversy—Harwit, Crouch, and Neufeld—were in place.

Neufeld, as lead curator, coordinated the script, assisted by Crouch, “who acted as manager of the curatorial team,” and by two “young curators,” Thomas Dietz and Joanne M. Gernstein. Work on the script began when the planning document was approved in July 1993.¹³

Dietz and Gernstein were assistant curators on another exhibition, “Legend, Memory, and the Great War in the Air,” which opened in 1991. It was another indication of the cultural drift at the museum. It emphasized the horrors of World War I and took a hostile view toward airpower in that conflict.

The curators expanded on their views in a companion book to the exhibit in which they said that World War I had cast “the long shadow of strategic bombing” on events ever since. They gave credence to speculation that “70,000 civilians were killed as an aftermath of the bombing campaign in the recent Gulf War.” They said, “wherever the truth lies, the fact remains that innocent civilians died as a result of the bombing and that governments on all sides, in their eagerness to demonstrate the latest developments in military technology, are unrepentant.”¹⁴

Harwit, responding to questions about the “Legend, Memory” exhibit, said it was important to include the perspective that, “in many cases, what had started out as a military tool escalated into destroying very large segments of the civilian population.”¹⁵

Crouch said the museum had to make a basic choice on how to exhibit the Enola Gay. In a memo to Harwit, he said, “Do you want to do an exhibition intended to make veterans feel good, or do you want an exhibition that will lead our visitors to think about the consequences of the atomic bombing of Japan? Frankly, I don’t think we can do both.”¹⁶ What the curators had in mind, both in terms of message and shock value, was clear from the 16-page July 1993 planning document.¹⁷

- “The [Combat in the Pacific] subunit’s purpose will be to show how different the Pacific war was for Americans—no quarter was given and few prisoners were taken—as well as for the Japanese, who increasingly felt compelled to make the ultimate sacrifice to defend the emperor and nation.”
- “Neither the atomic bomb nor an invasion was probably needed to end the Pacific war, but this is more obvious in hindsight than it was at the time.”
- The “emotional center” of the exhibition would be Unit 4 on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- “When visitors go from Unit 3 to Unit 4, they will be

immediately hit by a drastic change of mood and perspective: from well-lit and airy to gloomy and oppressive.”

- “Photos of victims, enlarged to life size, stare out at the visitor.”
- Artifacts would be borrowed from Hiroshima and Nagasaki: burned watches, broken wall clocks, “stark pictures of burned-in shadows.”
- “A schoolgirl’s lunch box with completely burned contents, burned and shredded clothing, and melted and broken religious objects. Where possible, photos of the persons who owned or wore these artifacts”

A Letter From Burr Bennett

In the 1980s, former B-29 crew members and other World War II veterans began campaigning for restoration of the Enola Gay. The Smithsonian and Congress were bombarded with letters from “five old men,” as they described themselves, calling for “proud display of the Enola Gay.”

The “five old men,” active throughout the controversy, were William A. Rooney of Wilmette, Ill., W. Burr Bennett Jr., of Northbrook, Ill., Donald C. Rehl of Fountaintown, Ind., Ben Nicks of Shawnee, Kan., and Frank Stewart of Indianapolis.

Other voices, military veterans and aviation enthusiasts, also complained about the social drift at the museum, but such opinions were of limited interest to the curators.

The Air Force Association (AFA) entered the picture in August 1993, when the association’s journal, *Air Force Magazine*, published “In Aviation’s Attic,” a pictorial feature on aircraft restoration by the Air and Space Museum. The Enola Gay was on the cover. That drew a letter from Bennett, one of the five old men.

“I am one of a small group of B-29 veterans of World War II engaged in a struggle with the Smithsonian Institution to display the Enola Gay proudly,” he wrote. “Our committee has collected over 5,000 signatures from around the world asking the Smithsonian to display the plane proudly, or give it to a museum that will.”¹⁸ (By the summer of 1995, Bennett and his colleagues would collect almost 25,000 signatures on their petition.)

Bennett’s letter came to me, as editor in chief of *Air Force Magazine*. As he asked, I gave copies of it to AFA officials, but I was not very impressed. “My quick take is that the Air & Space Museum isn’t quite as guilty as it’s said to be,” I said in an Aug. 10 note to AFA Executive Director Monroe W. Hatch Jr.

We soon discovered that Bennett was right, and the situation at the museum was much worse than he knew.

As chance would have it, and unrelated to the Bennett correspondence, AFA heard from the museum shortly

thereafter. Harwit, having been told by one of his advisors that AFA might be a source of financial support for the exhibit,¹⁹ called Executive Director Hatch on Aug. 20 and sent him a copy of the July planning document.

AFA was open to the idea of critical, even controversial, treatment of the subject. As Air Force Magazine had reported more than once, Gen. Henry H. “Hap” Arnold—wartime leader of the Army Air Forces and founding father of AFA—had not believed it was necessary to use the atomic bombs to win the war.

However, what the museum was putting together was not a critical analysis. It was a one-sided, antinuclear rant.

Hatch replied to Harwit by letter on Sept. 12. “The paper says the Smithsonian is non-partisan, taking no position on the ‘difficult moral and political questions’, but the full text does not bear out that statement,” Hatch said. “Similarly, you assure me that the exhibition will ‘honor the bravery of the veterans,’ but that theme is virtually nonexistent in the proposal as drafted.”

Furthermore, Hatch said, “the concept paper treats Japan and the United States in the war as if their participation were morally equivalent. If anything, incredibly, it gives the benefit of opinion to Japan, which was the aggressor.”

Hatch and I met with Harwit, Crouch, and Neufeld at the museum Nov. 19. We found them willing to talk, but they were not responsive. Harwit, buoyed by his curators, his convictions, and his advisory panel of scholars and historians, put little importance on AFA’s concerns.

The “Crossroads” Script

On Jan. 31, 1994, Harwit sent Hatch a copy of the just-completed script for the exhibition. The title was “The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb, and the Origins of the Cold War.”

Over the years, Harwit has made much of his allegation that AFA used this copy of the script for the Air Force Magazine article in April 1994 and released it to Congress and the news media. We did not. Unbeknown to Harwit, Air Force Magazine had received a copy two weeks earlier—no strings attached—from sources, which are not disclosed. That was the copy, not the one Harwit sent to Hatch, that we used for the article and which we later reproduced and passed out.

The “Crossroads” exhibition was scheduled to run from May 1995 to January 1996, overlapping the 50th anniversary in August 1995 of the mission of the Enola Gay.

Despite some hedging, the script said the atomic bomb “played a crucial role in ending the Pacific war quickly.”

The script also contained two lines that were about to become

infamous: “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.” If that seemed to suggest that the Japanese were the victims rather than the aggressors in World War II, there was more to come.

In Section 1 of the exhibit, “A Fight to the Finish,” the suicide kamikaze bombers were portrayed as valiant defenders of the homeland, embodying the samurai values of self-sacrifice and devotion to the emperor, carrying along with them “dolls belonging to their daughters or family photographs to insure the success of their crash dives.”

There was no comparable recognition of American bravery or sacrifice. Instead, there was Frank Sinatra. The script minimized the impact of the war on the American home front. “For many Americans,” it said, “combat in the Pacific remained a distant series of events.” But, with stunning understatement, it noted that “the cost of victory in American lives” was “a very real concern for all with loved ones in the Pacific.”

A few pages later, the script said that “American youngsters with time on their hands and money in their pockets transformed a New Jersey band singer named Frank Sinatra into the first teen entertainment idol.” There was a photo of Sinatra. Visitors were not likely to miss the counterpoint with grim images of the Japanese home front: death, hunger, privation.

Section 2 of the exhibition, “The Decision to Drop the Bomb,” was laden with one-sided speculation. Japan’s peace initiatives were said to have been frustrated by “die-hard militarists who wished to fight on.” By contrast, the script depicted the US and its leaders as unswervingly belligerent. “Most Americans despised the Japanese and it was difficult to back away from the policy of ‘unconditional surrender’ laid down by the Allied leaders in 1943,” it said.

The curators cast doubt on the prospect of high casualties in an invasion of Japan (which was the alternative to dropping the bomb). The script said it “appears likely that post-war estimates of a half-million deaths were too high, but many tens of thousands of dead were a real possibility.”

Section 3, “Delivering the Bomb,” was to be built around the forward fuselage of the Enola Gay, and contained less political baggage than the other sections. But Section 4, “Ground Zero: Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” had enough politics for several exhibitions. The theatrical lighting, “from well-lit and airy to gloomy and oppressive,” set the stage. No opportunity was missed to tug at the heartstrings. A kitten could not simply be dead. It had to glare “with eternally locked eyes.”

There was Reiko Watanabe’s lunch box. “Inside are the carbonized remains of sweet green peas and polished rice, a rare wartime luxury.” And Miyoko Osugi’s shoe. Her body was

not found, but one discolored clog was recovered. "The blast of heat from the initial explosion apparently darkened the outer portion of the clog not covered by her foot."

There were some 40 photos and artifacts related to women, children, and mutilated religious objects. There was also graphic emphasis on survivors with flash burns, scars, and disfiguring.

In Section 5, "The Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," the main display labels delivered the message. Among them: "The Cold War and the Arms Race"; "The Failure of International Control"; "More Bombs and Bigger Bombs"; "A World Gone 'M.A.D.'"

Little attention was given to the years of Japanese aggression and atrocities that led to the circumstances of 1945. The script focused on the last six months of the war, when the people Japan had attacked were hitting back and closing in.

The curators never lost sight of the Japanese perspective. Harwit acknowledged that museum officials had talked with the Japanese while developing the exhibition plan "because we wanted to make sure we also included the point of view of the vanquished as well as the point of view of the victors."²⁰

The Plan Exposed

Martin Harwit and his curators were attuned only to others on the same political wavelength. We decided it was time for the public to know what was going on.

I wrote "War Stories at Air and Space" and a companion article, "The Mission That Launched the Enola Gay," for the April 1994 issue of Air Force Magazine. Longer, fully documented versions of these articles were circulated in advance to the news media and others on March 15 by Stephen P. Aubin, AFA director of communications.

Up to then, the museum's plan was known only to a few people, mostly curators and advisors. The Air Force Magazine article revealed it to the public and the news media.

The first notice by the press was "Rewriting History," a segment in the "Inside the Beltway" column in the March 28 Washington Times. It paraphrased me (accurately) as saying the exhibit was "skewed toward the Japanese victims of the bomb, with little regard for the context of the times in which the bomb was dropped."

Harwit's response, published in "Inside the Beltway," March 31, said my accusations were "simply not true." He said, "The exhibition describes the 'naked brutality' of Japanese forces in concrete terms, calling attention to the rape of Nanking, the treatment of POWs, the use of Chinese and Koreans as slave laborers, and the conduct of biological and chemical experiments on human victims."

On April 4, AFA's Aubin delivered a copy of the exhibition script to the newspaper "so that you may judge for yourself."²¹

On April 5, AFA representatives met with Ron Stroman, majority staff director, and Marty Morgan, minority staff director, of the House Government Operations Committee on Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations to give them materials and discuss the controversy. They asked for more detailed information.

On April 7, Air Force Magazine produced a content analysis of the script, which we sent to Stroman and Morgan the next day. We also made a broader release. The content analysis found ample evidence of imbalance.²²

- 49 photos of Japanese casualties.
- 3 photos of American casualties.



- 302 total text pages in script.
- 3 text pages with references to Japanese atrocities.
- 66 text pages on ground zero at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- 13 text pages on Japanese casualties, suffering, damage from earlier B-29 missions.



- 2 text pages on Japan's search for a diplomatic solution.
- 4 text pages on US avoidance of a diplomatic solution.



- 1 aggressive, anti-American statement by Japanese.
- 11 aggressive, anti-Japanese statements by Americans.

In the 559-page script (302 pages of text, 257 pages of graphics), there were only four text references to Japanese atrocities (the longest of them 16 lines) and one supporting photo. One of the four text references was a peripheral reference within an item about US internment of Japanese-Americans.

The script avoided showing members of the Japanese armed services in military roles. (There were five photos of Japanese military members in military roles; 65 photos of US military members in military roles.) Thus, it emphasized the military aggressiveness of the US, minimized aggressiveness of Japan.

Thereafter, AFA content analyses of each successive script became a regular element in the controversy. Air Force Magazine did the analysis and communications director Aubin circulated copies to Congress, the news media, other veterans groups, and anyone else who showed an interest.

Internal Admissions

One of the most astounding developments in the entire controversy was an April 16 internal memo from Harwit to his exhibition staff, explicitly agreeing with many of the points that Air Force Magazine had made (Harwit's numerical references are to script pages):²³

- "Though I carefully read the exhibition script a month ago, I evidently paid greater attention to accuracy than to balance. ... 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."
- "We talk of the heavy bombing of Tokyo (100-32, 33), show great empathy for Japanese mothers (100-34), but are strangely quiet about similar losses to Americans and our own Allies in Europe and Asia."
- "We show terrible pictures of human suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Section 400, without earlier, in Section 100, showing pictures of the suffering the Japanese had inflicted in China, in the camps they set up for Dutch and British civilians and military, and US prisoners of war."
- "We do not note that conditions in the American internment camps were far more favorable than in Japanese internment camps, where slave labor conditions prevailed."
- "The alternatives to the atomic bomb are stated more as 'probabilities' than as 'speculations' and are dwelled on more than they should be."
- "Section 400 has far too many explicit, horrible pictures."

"When AFA obtained and circulated copies of the memo, Harwit, who had been caught saying one thing in public and an opposite thing in private, was outraged and indignant. He complained that "a unique aspect of the Enola Gay exhibit was the substantial volume of privileged correspondence released by one of the lobbying organizations, the Air Force Association, even before the debate had fully subsided. These letters and memoranda dramatically reveal how much those who aggressively lobby Congress can gain for themselves."²⁴

Despite his admissions in the memo, Harwit continued publicly to insist that AFA was wrong. Typical of this was a

letter to a veteran, in which Harwit said, "After having read the article in Air Force Magazine myself, I can certainly understand your concerns. I welcome this opportunity to set the record straight. ... It should not come as a surprise to anyone that the Air Force Association ... was able to find clumsy or unrefined label text among the several hundred pages which compromise the total script."²⁵

On April 20, 1994, Harwit appointed an internal "Tiger Team"—headed by a museum volunteer, retired Air Force Brig. Gen. William M. Constantine—to review the script and "look for any signs of imbalance."

A month later, the Tiger Team turned in a stinging report.²⁶ The findings were remarkably similar to the Air Force Magazine criticisms. The report cited numerous imbalances, including "depictions of Japanese as victims" and "insufficient development of Japan's extensive pre-war aggression."

The Tiger Team said, "The kamikaze and their sacred rites are given too much coverage," and they are "characterized as brave defenders of their homeland and as heroes treated with reverence," while there "is much less coverage accorded to the devastating consequences of the kamikaze attacks, including the thousands of Americans killed, wounded, or missing."

The script, the Tiger Team said, appeared "to convey the impression that Japan was seeking peace, while the US was seeking to obstruct means for a negotiated settlement." Whereas B-29 missions were characterized in the script as "burning cities," "attacking cities," and "razing cities," there was "no reference to industrial complexes, war-producing industries, or other 'targets' of military value in and around those cities." There were many artifacts belonging to children, but none belonging to soldiers, factory workers, or government officials.

The Tiger Team report was kept under wraps until August, when the museum finally provided a copy to Air Force Magazine in voluntary response to a Freedom of Information Act request.²⁷

The museum's own docents, or volunteer tour guides, also thought the exhibition was going wrong. After meeting with the docents in March, Crouch sent a memo to Harwit on March 31: "It did not go well with the docents last night. Many of them have now read the script, and the majority of those in attendance were very angry about the exhibition."²⁸

Harwit managed to make his relations with the docents worse by firing a volunteer, Frank Rabbitt, whom Harwit "permanently dismissed" for actively and publicly opposing the exhibit. "I felt that volunteers joined the museum to help, not oppose us, in our work."²⁹

Rabbitt's fellow docents took to wearing "Free Frank Rabbitt"

signs as they conducted tours at the museum's Garber facility in Suitland, Md.³⁰ (In January 1995, after the exhibition had been canceled, Harwit reinstated Rabbitt in a spirit of "reconciliation.")

The Curators Dig in

To Harwit's displeasure, AFA was not easy to shrug off. The Air Force Association "had not been content just to offer advice; they insisted on seeing their wishes carried out," he said. "Each change the museum made evoked a triumphant cry from the AFA and a howl of dismay from academic historians."³¹

In hopes of neutralizing AFA, the museum devised a bizarre strategy.

"Given the unyielding attitudes of the AFA," the Smithsonian decided in May to seek support from the American Legion on the assumption that "the AFA, whose membership was only about 180,000, would have to defer to such giants as the American Legion, with its 3.1 million members."³²

This made no sense. Did museum officials imagine the American Legion would agree with their distorted view of World War II? The American Legion had already adopted a resolution objecting "vehemently" to the exhibition plan as "politically biased."³³ In any case, why would AFA "have to defer" to the American Legion?

In June, retired Brig. Gen. Paul W. Tibbets Jr., pilot of the Enola Gay and commander of the 509th Composite Bomb Group, which flew the atomic bomb missions, called the proposed display "a package of insults."³⁴

Harwit said, "I was convinced that General Tibbets had never read our script and knew about it only through newspapers or the warnings of close associates."³⁵ One reason Harwit may have thought this was that the museum had not sent Tibbets a copy of the script. But AFA had.

Tom Crouch and I appeared on a live radio debate June 2. During the course of it, Crouch mentioned a revised script. He agreed on the air that we could have a copy.³⁶

The revised script was dated May 31, but AFA did not receive the promised copy until June 23. There were a number of changes. For example, it removed 11 of the 75 Ground Zero photos and two of the 26 Ground Zero" artifacts. Creditably, the script added a photo of a kneeling Australian airman, about to be beheaded in August 1945 after Japan had surrendered.³⁷

The "Crossroads" title was gone. The new title was "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II."

Overall, though, the extent of the revision was far less than we

had expected, and the changes consisted of point additions and deletions that did not, in the aggregate, shift the balance or the context appreciably.

The script was still interspersed with a series of “Historical Controversies”: Would the Bomb Have Been Dropped on the Germans? Did the Demand for Unconditional Surrender Prolong the War? How Important was the Soviet Factor in the Decision to Drop the Bomb?³⁸ Was a Warning Demonstration Possible? Was an Invasion Inevitable Without the Bomb? Was the Decision to Drop the Bomb Justified?

Nearly all of the doubts and suspicions in the Historical Controversies were aimed at the United States.

The imbalance remained. Script No. 2, which had 295 text pages, devoted less than one page and only eight visual images to Japanese military activity prior to 1945. The emphasis was still on Japanese suffering.

The notorious “War of Vengeance” lines had been modified and now read: “For most Americans, this war was different from the one waged against Germany and Italy: It was a war to defeat a vicious aggressor but also a war to punish Japan for Pearl Harbor and for the brutal treatment of Allied prisoners. For most Japanese, what had begun as a war of imperial conquest had become a battle to save their nation from destruction.”

AFA urged more emphasis in the script on the mobilized force waiting in the Japanese home islands to throw back an invasion: 2.3 million military troops and four million civilians—not counting the women, old men, and boys trained to resist by such means as strapping explosives to their bodies and throwing themselves under advancing tanks; about 7,700 combat aircraft, thousands of them kamikaze; tunnels, bunkers, and barbed wire in place along the shore.³⁹

Something else was different about this script. The cover page carried a copyright notice. Photocopying of the document was forbidden without written permission from the Smithsonian Institution. Obviously, this was intended to prevent AFA from giving copies to Congress, the press, or other veterans groups. It worked. We did not copy or distribute Script No. 2 or any of the subsequent revisions.

At a hearing a year later, Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), chairman of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, which had oversight responsibility for the Smithsonian, questioned the legality of the Smithsonian copyrighting a script written for the government by federal employees.⁴⁰

Leaking Like a Sieve

AFA collected documents—ours, theirs, letters from and to veterans, papers of various activists. Aubin provided copies to anyone who wanted them: press, Congress, other veterans groups, the Revisionists themselves. In 1994 and 1995, we sent out hundreds of copies of these collected documents,

including the first version of the script, which the museum had not managed to copyright.

As an article in Washingtonian magazine would later note, AFA “kept track of every piece of paper—official, unofficial, and private—that flew during the debacle, compiling them all in thick, green-covered books and distributing them around Washington.”⁴¹

We often received the same document from more than one source. I. Michael Heyman, who would become secretary of the Smithsonian in September, told Harwit that “your museum is like a sieve.” Harwit himself used the documents from AFA in writing his book, *An Exhibit Denied*. “The information contained in these files was invaluable,” he said in the preface.⁴²

Meanwhile, Harwit continued to stridently denounce Air Force Magazine and AFA. In a letter to the Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, on July 15, Harwit said, “Let me assure you that we at the museum share your dismay at the outcry generated by the article in Air Force Magazine’s April issue. ... I sent in a forceful rejection of the article’s allegations in the May issue. ...

“All this [the articles and other AFA activity] has only increased the number of bitter letters from veterans and their families. Without wishing to argue over whether this arousal of passions was necessary, I am convinced that, if it continues, it will work against the best interests of all concerned.”

There was much talk, then and later, about the script being a work in progress and about how the curators were open to change if only we would get off their backs. Thus, it was another embarrassment for the museum when we obtained and circulated a June 21 memo from Neufeld, telling his advisors that the revisions were essentially over.

“If you find any factual errors or if you object strongly to certain formulations in the revised script, I would be happy to hear them,” Neufeld wrote.⁴³ “But, if the exhibit is to be opened in late May 1995, as planned, we must now move on to the production and construction phase. This script therefore must be considered a finished product, minor wording changes aside.”

In early August, the museum was still claiming that the exhibition script had strong backing from service historians. In an Aug. 8, 1994, letter, for example, Crouch wrote, “The members of the advisory committee were very generous in their praise of the document. Dr. Hallion [the Air Force historian] congratulated the curators on an ‘impressive job’ and ‘a great script.’”⁴⁴

Hallion had been expressing concerns about the script for months,⁴⁵ and in July had told the Washington Post that “the overall impression, even from this revised script, is that the

Japanese, despite 15 years of aggression, atrocities, and brutality, were the victims. ... The curators who wrote the script are still pushing the thesis that the atomic bomb shouldn't have been dropped."⁴⁶

In April, Hallion had written to the director of the 50th Anniversary of World War II Commemoration Committee that "our colleagues—professional military historians from all the services—have reviewed the NASM's script. They, too, unanimously consider it a poor script, lacking balance and context."⁴⁷

Furthermore, in his charge to the Tiger Team in April, Harwit said that "a team of historians from different branches of the military" had "expressed dissatisfaction with the script's overall balance. In their opinion, it was flawed in its portrayal of Japanese and American history, activities, and customs."⁴⁸

By late summer, other veterans groups had joined the fray. In addition to the American Legion, they included the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the 20th Air Force Association (in 1945, the Enola Gay was part of 20th Air Force), the Jewish War Veterans, Bombardiers, Inc., the Retired Officers Association, the Military Order of the World Wars, the Retired Enlisted Association, and the Daedalians. Burr Bennett and the "five old men" kept writing letters and collecting names on their petition.

Martin Harwit didn't know it, but the landslide was about to begin.

The Controversy Explodes

Twenty-four members of Congress sent a letter Aug. 10 to Robert McCormick Adams, then in his last days as secretary of the Smithsonian, expressing "concern and dismay" about the intended exhibit. They said the "revised script is still biased, lacking context," and that "judging from recent public statements by museum officials, it seems that Air and Space is digging its heels in to defend an indefensible position."⁴⁹

Harwit interpreted this as manipulation by AFA. "The hand of the Air Force Association could not have been clearer if the letter had been written on AFA stationery," he said.⁵⁰

Adams offered the usual defenses. In an Aug. 16 letter to Rep. Peter Blute (R-Mass.), Adams described the script as "a work in progress" and "still only at an intermediate stage in an ongoing, iterative process."

Letters from Congress kept coming. Rep. Ike Skelton (D-Mo.) wrote to Harwit Sept. 8, 1994, to say he was "outraged by the sympathetic manner in which Japanese imperialism is portrayed in the Enola Gay exhibit" and that "it is a sad day when the Smithsonian Institution must be urged to accurately report American history."

On Sept. 23, a Sense of the Senate resolution on the Enola

Gay exhibition, sponsored by Sen. Nancy L. Kassebaum (R-Kan.), passed unanimously on a voice vote. It declared the latest version of the script to be "Revisionist and offensive."⁵¹

Again, Harwit laid the Congressional action to machinations by AFA. "To appreciate the magnitude of the Air Force Association's influence, one needs to note that they had first used John Correll's articles in Air Force Magazine, as well as their appearances on radio talk shows and on television, to alarm veterans' organizations and the public," Harwit said. "They had then used the 'Special Report' Correll had produced to provide an 'analysis' of the museum's script, as in Aubin's letter to Congressional staffers Stroman and Morgan on April 8. Having gained credibility in this way, they had been able to write the text that, with minor editing, became Senator Kassebaum's resolution."⁵²

In August, Executive Director Hatch had written to Harwit, explaining AFA's position. "The Air Force Association has made a good faith effort over a number of months to work with the museum before it became clear that your curators are not interested in taking our suggestions seriously, or those from other veterans," Hatch said. "Once it became clear that these concerns were going to be largely ignored, we felt it necessary to make interested parties aware of your plans. Our approach to the media and Congress has been to tell them to 'judge for themselves.' "

Intermittently, Harwit seemed to understand. On Aug. 23, he told Air Force historian Herman S. Wolk that he had taken another look at the script, as recommended by service historians, to see whether his curators had made changes proposed by the historians.

"Harwit told me that his weekend review showed that, in fact, the curators had failed to take those recommendations, especially those of AF/HO," Wolk said in his memo for the record. "Dr. Harwit emphasized that he had been 'taken aback at how little had been done.' There were some 'word changes here and there' Harwit said, but clearly the curators had failed to follow through. As he put it, this 'had fallen through the cracks.' "⁵³ (Emphasis in original.)

However, Harwit soon resumed his regular message, telling the Washington Post Sept. 23 that "We could have handled all this internally" if the first script had not been made public. The controversy since then "hasn't forced on us any [script] changes we wouldn't have made ourselves."⁵⁴

The new secretary of the Smithsonian, I. Michael Heyman, who took office Sept. 19, saw and acknowledged the problem right away. He told the Washington Post, "Our first script for the exhibition was deficient."⁵⁵

Scholars and Activists

Harwit resisted involvement in the exhibit by veterans, but he welcomed participation from the left. Peace groups and activists, alarmed that the message about the Enola Gay was

changing, met with Harwit Sept. 20. Father John Dear, a Jesuit priest and the spokesman for the activists, described Harwit as “exasperated.” He quoted Harwit as saying, “Where have you been? You are too late. Why haven’t you been in before? Why haven’t you talked to the media?” Harwit later said Father Dear’s account of the meeting was “fairly accurate.”⁵⁶

A group of 48 “historians and scholars” wrote to Secretary Heyman Nov. 16, saying that “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.”

Among those signing was Noam Chomsky, who subsequently had this to say about Pearl Harbor and the Philippines: “Japan did commit a crime on Dec. 7-8, 1941, bombing bases in two US colonies that had been stolen from their inhabitants, in one case by deceit and treachery, in another by slaughter of hundreds of thousands of defenseless people in the traditional style. But these Japanese crimes, though real enough, rank so low in the scale of those we have regularly committed, before and since, that no honest person could take them very seriously as a justification for invasion.”⁵⁷

There were six themes in the Revisionist spiel. There were some differences among individual Revisionists, but the central ideas of the movement were these:

- Japan was on the verge of surrender.
- The war would have been over soon without the atomic bomb.
- The US prolonged the war by insist-ing on unconditional surrender.
- The US dropped the bomb mainly to impress the Russians.
- The decision to use the bomb was driven by domestic political considerations.
- Even had an invasion of the Japanese home islands been necessary, the casualties would not have been that severe.

A low estimate of casualties was critical to the Revisionists’ position. They argued that Truman dropped the bomb for other reasons than avoiding heavy US casualties. They rejected Truman’s assertions, in his memoirs and elsewhere, that the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, had told him the invasion would cost a quarter-million to a million US casualties and an equal number of the enemy.⁵⁸

The Revisionists sneered at these statements as self-serving, after-the-fact inventions by Truman. To shore up their position, the Revisionists gave credence to low casualty estimates and attacked higher estimates. The Revisionists arrogantly

disparaged the recollections of World War II veterans, saying that such memories were not to be trusted after 50 years, especially on emotional issues. Yet, the same Revisionists gave full credence to the memories of the hibakusha, the scarred and disfigured survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who were invited to appear at Revisionist programs in the United States.

Activism by the Revisionist historians and the pacifists put pressure on Harwit from another direction. He felt they “had not been helpful” in this regard. However, the views Harwit expressed were similar to those of the Revisionists, and he seemed to regard them as an important constituency.

In an op-ed column Aug. 7, Harwit wrote, “Two divergent but widely held views define the dilemma.” One view, he said, “appeals to our national self-image. The other point of view, slower in coming to the fore, is more analytical, critical in its acceptance of facts concerned with historical context. It is complex, and in the eyes of some, discomfiting.”⁵⁹

To columnist Charley Reese, Harwit’s message was both clear and condescending. “In other words, there is the dumb, patriotic view and the smart, sophisticated, anti-American view,” Reese wrote in a King Features column, Aug. 24.

At a strategy meeting in January 1995, Heyman suggested that perhaps the exhibition should be shut down. “I was aghast,” Harwit said. “We would have lost our last hope of support from like-minded people who also stood for education as an important national goal. I said I understood his fears, but our supporters, and particularly the academic community, would be outraged and accuse us of capitulating. In the long term, these were the groups on whom we would need to rely for help.”⁶⁰

The Japanese Connection

Another constituency important to Harwit was the Japanese. On Dec. 19, 1994—almost six months after the fact—Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Tex.) obtained and released the minutes of the Air and Space Museum’s July 5, 1994, senior staff meeting.

The May script revision had been translated into Japanese and was sent by Federal Express to Japan, with a note “asking for a quick response,” the minutes said. A museum spokesman acknowledged that at least three of the five full versions of the script were sent to city officials in Nagasaki and Hiroshima for comment.⁶¹

These were the same scripts that the museum had sought to keep out of the hands of veterans groups and the American press. A former Smithsonian staff member told Johnson that the museum had spent more than \$30,000 translating the scripts and express mailing them to Japan.⁶²

The early and continuing involvement of the Japanese was

recounted by Harwit in his book, *An Exhibit Denied*.⁶³ In 1992, Harwit wrote to the director general of the Japan Foundation saying that “it is of great concern to our museum to make sure this exhibition does not strain relations between our two countries.”

In April 1993, Harwit and Crouch visited Japan. Harwit chose Crouch to accompany him because “his presence might reassure the Japanese.” Crouch had been the curator in 1986 of “A More Perfect Union,” an exhibition at the Museum of American History that observed the 200th anniversary of the US Constitution by focusing on the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. At Hiroshima, Harwit and Crouch promised to “make a powerful exhibition of the catastrophic effects of the bombing.” Their visit was regarded as a success, and two more visits to Japan by museum officials followed.

Japanese sensitivities were a fundamental consideration for Harwit, who wanted to avoid reviving “hard feelings between the US and Japan.” It was regrettable that “Such concerns never seemed to have occurred to the five old men and other veterans. ... To men like Burr Bennett, Donald Rehl, and William Rooney, there were no moral dilemmas at all,” Harwit said. “Truman had merely chosen to save their lives instead of those of some Japanese. To them this made obvious sense. ... It was Japanese lives or American. Nothing could be simpler. Where was the moral dilemma?”

Meddling by the Air Force Association threatened the relationship with Japan. “I knew that the AFA’s ideas about an exhibition would be totally unacceptable to Japan and would precipitate an international incident if followed through,” Harwit said.

In a letter to Secretary of the Air Force Sheila E. Widnall on July 18, 1994, Harwit wrote, “I am most seriously concerned that the changes in the exhibition demanded by the Air Force Association would, if accepted, cause an uproar in Japan when the exhibition opens.”

Indeed, the Japanese were alarmed by criticism of the exhibition plans, and Harwit felt a need to visit Japan “to reassure the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in person.” Unfortunately, “the Senate resolution, the continuing onslaught from the veterans organizations and the media, and the increasingly conservative attitude in the United States soon made such a trip doubtful, at least until after the November elections.”

The Japanese decided that if Harwit could not come to them, they would send a delegation to Washington to express their dismay face to face. How to explain to the Japanese that such a visit would be a political disaster? “We all agreed that I could not go to Japan now and that we could not have the Japanese come, either. But we could not put this in writing,” Harwit said. It was important not to get caught. “Heyman adamantly wanted to avoid a ‘paper trail.’ Whatever we did needed to be

done verbally to leave no trace,” Harwit said.

After a visit to the Japanese Embassy in Washington failed to turn off the visit, the idea arose that Harwit could “call the Hiroshima and Nagasaki museum directors, directly and confidentially, to tell them of the situation and to see whether I could dissuade a visit and arrange for the artifact loans and the videos without one. The important thing was not to leave a paper trail that might be leaked.”

In January, Harwit was still struggling to explain to the Japanese why their visit would be unwise. At that point, the issue would be resolved in a different way.

Backing and Filling

Another revision—Script No. 3—appeared Aug. 31. The curators continued to retreat, word by word, and line by line, but the structural, contextual, and ideological problems remained.

As before, the museum seemed eager to explain away anything that questioned the sincerity of Japan’s quest for peace: For example, the emperor “hoped that one final victory would force the Allies to offer better peace terms.”

There was no serious effort to reduce the speculation about American actions and motives. The “Historical Controversies” had been removed per se, but most of the “eliminated” material showed up elsewhere. For example, the question “Was an Invasion Inevitable Without the Bomb?” was now preceded by the introductory word “Hindsight” instead of “Historical Controversies.”

Two more revisions followed, Script No. 4 on Oct. 3 and No. 5 on Oct. 26. They reduced the number of grisly photos and artifacts, but the emotional punches and the imbalances were still there. A new section—labeled “Section 000,” entitled “The War in the Pacific”—was added Dec. 6. Museum officials tried to create an illusion of balance by allotting 4,000 square feet of floor space to this added section, but most of the new space was taken up by a Grumman F6F Hellcat carrier-based fighter. The rest of the section was a collection of pictures, some of them pulled from other parts of the exhibit. It did little to improve the overall balance.

AFA declined to participate in line-by-line negotiations and said it would base its assessment on the overall message visitors took away with them. AFA said consistently⁶⁴ that the exhibition would not be acceptable if it fostered any of the following impressions:

- That the Japanese were victims in World War II, defending their nation and culture against Western aggression.
- That the Americans were ruthless invaders, driven by racism, revenge, and blood lust.

- That the death, suffering, and horrors of war were borne unilaterally or unfairly by a passive Japan.
- That the roles of Japan and the US in World War II were morally equivalent.
- That the United States acted dishonestly, dishonorably, or immorally in its decision to use the atomic bomb.

The solution could be either subtractive or additive. The curators could resolve the imbalance either by taking out some of the material that cast speculative doubt on actions and motives of the United States—or they could add that kind of material about Japan.

Thus far, the speculation was one-sided. AFA pointed out several subjects on the other side that were ripe for similar questioning: Japan's alleged quest for peace in 1945; the emperor's role in wartime policy and planning; why Japan did not move sooner to end the war, it being evident that the cause was lost; popular Japanese support, before the war turned sour, for military aggression to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The museum pegged its strategy on dealing with the American Legion to the exclusion of AFA and others. The curators opened script negotiations with the Legion Sept. 21 and announced the arrangement at a news conference Sept. 22.⁶⁵

The news release said the museum had "expanded the exhibition review process beyond its original advisory committee, to include additional scholars, military historians, and representatives of the American Legion."⁶⁶ Others were pointedly not mentioned.

So far as we could tell, the Legion's views were about the same as ours. We wished them well. But when the arrangement did not work out as expected, Harwit knew where the fault lay.

By November, Harwit said, "The pressure on the American Legion leadership was mounting. They could not stay entirely aloof from their own membership, which had long been stirred up by the AFA's and even the Legion's own earlier propaganda, and they could not entirely defy the assembled strength of the other veterans organizations."⁶⁷

The idea of using the American Legion to neutralize AFA had backfired. The Legion was now leading the charge, while AFA continued to analyze and distribute information about the museum's plans and scripts.

By the beginning of 1995, "pressures on the Legion from other veterans groups and individual veterans who had been aroused by the AFA's and the Legion's media campaigns, appeared now to be leading to a tougher stance," Harwit said.⁶⁸

The Legion had run out of patience with Harwit. On Jan 4, 1995, National Commander William M. Detweiler recommended that the organization “actively oppose” the exhibit, which he said was “suspect from all perspectives.”⁶⁹

Spin, Crash, and Burn

On Jan. 9, 1995, Harwit struck again. Heyman had promised there would be no more uncoordinated changes. Without authorization—and to the horror of Smithsonian officials—Harwit wrote to the American Legion, saying he had been persuaded by academic advice that the casualty estimates for invasion of Japan in the script were too high, so he was changing the script.⁷⁰

Among his other adjustments, Harwit deleted the part of the script that said US “casualties conceivably could have risen to as many as a million (including a quarter of a million deaths). Added to the American losses would have been perhaps five times as many Japanese casualties—military and civilian.”

The replacement words made a different point: “After the war, Truman often said that the invasion could have cost half a million or a million American casualties.” The new script then discounted Truman’s statement with a dismissive tag line, “The origin of these figures is uncertain.”

Whatever his motivation was, Harwit must have realized that he was advancing a major—and disputed—theme of the Revisionist dogma.

The American Legion issued a position statement Jan. 18 calling for the exhibit to be “canceled immediately” and for Congress “to conduct hearings into how the nation’s most visited and revered museum could mount such an exhibit.” The Legion said that “this exhibit, in our opinion, so closely parallels the design, content, and conclusions of the Nagasaki Peace Museum as to defy coincidence.”

Heyman initially stood by Harwit in the face of the Legion demands,⁷¹ but soon had new reason to be exasperated. On Jan. 20, with Harwit’s letter to the Legion public knowledge and with pressure mounting from veterans groups, Congress, and the news media, Harwit said he “thought [he] could use some dispassionate advice” and began placing telephone calls to Smithsonian regents. Heyman—perhaps suspecting that the calls sought more than “advice”—was furious. He had Smithsonian Undersecretary Constance Newman call Harwit and tell him to cease and desist.⁷²

Eighty-one members of Congress called, on Jan. 24, for “the immediate resignation or termination of Mr. Martin Harwit,” citing his “continuing defiance and disregard for needed improvements to the exhibit.”⁷³ Twenty thousand subscribers to Smithsonian Magazine had also complained about the exhibit.⁷⁴ The museum was losing critical support.

On Jan. 30, the Smithsonian canceled the exhibition. Heyman

said the failed program would be replaced with “a much simpler one, essentially a display, allowing the Enola Gay and its crew to speak for themselves. Along with the plane would be a video about the crew. It is particularly important in this commemorative year that veterans and other Americans have the opportunity to see the restored portion of the fuselage of the Enola Gay.”⁷⁵

Harwit had one more surprise left. In April, the Smithsonian abruptly canceled a reception—planned by Harwit without notifying Smithsonian leaders—to honor the curators of the original, failed exhibition. Heyman learned about the event, scheduled for April 18, when the Washington Times called for comment.⁷⁶

Time had finally run out for Harwit.

Harwit wrote in his book that on Thursday, April 20, “I was asked to come to Newman’s office. When I arrived, she and [Acting Provost Robert] Hoffmann were already there. Newman began, saying she was sorry it had come to this: The secretary wanted my resignation by next Monday or at the latest Tuesday—giving me four days to resign. I mentioned that I was scheduled to leave town the next hour and would not be back until Saturday. That made it a little tight. Newman explained Heyman was in a hurry. ... By the afternoon of Monday, May 1, the Castle [the Smithsonian headquarters] and I had agreed that I would officially resign the next day.”⁷⁷

Martin Harwit resigned on May 2. The fact that he had been fired would not be disclosed until the publication of his book the following year.

The News Media

Between March 1994 and August 1995, we collected 602 news clippings. We were limited in capability to keep track of radio and television reports, but broadcast coverage was extensive.

News reports were generally deep and balanced, but the museum did not fare well in the commentaries. Many, if not most, of the columns and editorials interpreted the situation much the same way that we did. This was intolerable to the curators and their supporters, who sought to explain it away with a “Bamboozled Media” theory.

“The media largely spoke with one voice,” Harwit wrote in Japan Quarterly in 1997. “It seemed that hardly any of the journalists had read the 500-page exhibition script that the museum had completed in January 1994. They preferred instead to take their cue from Air Force Association press releases.”⁷⁸

In Hiroshima in America (1995), Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell claimed that “reporters rarely took the trouble to examine one of the widely available scripts to determine if the veterans complaints were valid. Instead, they accepted at face

value the Air Force Association's interpretation."⁷⁹

The source from which the script was "widely available," of course, was the Air Force Association, which distributed hundreds of copies, many of them to reporters, whose follow-up questions indicated they had, indeed, read the scripts they received. The people whose comments most often indicated they had not read the script were activists and academics, who had also gotten their copies from AFA.

Edward T. Linenthal—professor of religious studies at the University of Wisconsin and a member of Harwit's advisory panel—said that "after AFA put its clout behind a campaign against the exhibit, with the exception of several sympathetic editorials in the New York Times, influential editorial comment almost uniformly attacked the museum."⁸⁰

Linenthal pursued the same notion as Lifton and Mitchell: "Clearly few of those writing about the exhibit had read the first script in its entirety, not to mention the following drafts." Linenthal was right about one thing: Reporters and editorial writers had not read "the following drafts" of the script. The museum would not release copies to the press, and the copyright prohibitions it had stuck on them were intended to keep us from distributing copies.

Among those we allegedly bamboozled was the Washington Post, whose sympathies seldom lay on the conservative side of an issue. Two editorials were especially remarkable.

In January 1995, the Post said that early drafts of the script had been "incredibly propagandistic and intellectually shabby" and "had a tendentiously antinuclear and anti-American tone." The museum "repeatedly worsened" the controversy "by misplaced condescension and refusal to see the criticisms of bias as anything but the carping of the insufficiently sophisticated."⁸¹

In February, another Post editorial said, "It is important to be clear about what happened at the Smithsonian. It is not, as some have it, that benighted advocates of a special-interest or right-wing point of view brought political power to bear to crush and distort the historical truth. Quite the contrary. Narrow-minded representatives of a special-interest and Revisionist point of view attempted to use their inside track to appropriate and hollow out a historical event that large numbers of Americans alive at that time and engaged in the war had witnessed and understood in a very different—and authentic—way."⁸²

Among major newspapers and magazines, the bastion of support for the curators was the New York Times. "The Smithsonian would probably have worked its way to a more balanced exhibition without pressure from Congress," the Times said in a Sept. 5, 1994, editorial. "In fact, months before Congress intervened, Mr. Harwit wrote to his curators telling them that the exhibition was one-sided. That is how the process ought to work: Curators propose, review committees

advise, the exhibition gradually comes into focus. That process was short-circuited by the protests, but it is not too late to get it back on track.”⁸³

The editorial writer obviously did not check out the story behind Harwit’s memo to the curators and was a bit behind on how the process really worked.

“The Smithsonian effort, while not without its own missteps, is in danger of being hijacked by a band of Congressmen and veterans outraged that the exhibit does not tell just their side of the story,” said another Times editorial June 30, 1995.”⁸⁴

By Aug. 6, 1995, the 50th anniversary of Hiroshima mission, Times editorial writers were casting their disapproval in both directions: “At one extreme are veterans groups that strove to censor a Smithsonian exhibit about Hiroshima. Their intolerant zeal finds its match at the opposite end of the political pole. It turns history and reality upside down to imply that Hiroshima is America’s Auschwitz, that Harry Truman was somehow a war criminal because he grasped eagerly at a wonder weapon to end a war that the Axis powers had begun. One can imagine the clamor for his political skin if tens of thousands of Allied soldiers had died, in battle or in Japanese camps, because the bomb was never used, or used too late.”⁸⁵

The Revisionists got their big moment on prime-time television July 27 with a Peter Jennings ABC special, “Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped.”

As the Washington Post review said, Jennings was led along by “a largely stacked deck of Revisionist historians” to the assessment of President Harry Truman “as an intellectual dwarf, propelled by ambitious militarists and politicians to a nuclear slaughter of the innocents.”⁸⁶

Among other things, Jennings said, “It is unfortunate, we think, that some veterans organizations and some politicians felt the need to bully our most important national museum so the whole story of Hiroshima is not represented here.”

One of the few non-Revisionists interviewed for the Jennings special was Robert James Maddox, professor of American history at Pennsylvania State University. He said ABC misrepresented his views and ignored information he supplied. He called the show “the worst piece of garbage I’ve seen.”⁸⁷

The Controversy Lingers On

In March 1995, six weeks before Martin Harwit was fired, the activist “historians and scholars” reconstituted themselves as the “Historians’ Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima.” The co-chairmen were Martin J. Sherwin and Kai Bird.⁸⁸

Sherwin was a professor of history at Dartmouth and Tufts. In 1994, in his capacity as an advisor to the Air and Space Museum on the Enola Gay exhibit, Sherwin complained that

the crew had shown “no remorse” for the mission. Now he thundered that “the assault on the Enola Gay exhibit ... was orchestrated by John Correll, editor in chief of Air Force Magazine. ... The Air Force Association’s agenda, in my view, was not simply to tweak an exhibit into getting the story right. It was a blatant and ultimately successful attempt at getting Martin Harwit fired and regain [sic] control of Air and Space for Air Force-friendly, noncritical mis-exhibits.”⁸⁹

Bird was a journalist turned historian and author. In one of his op-ed pieces, Bird denounced the “humiliating spectacle” of “scholars being forced to recant the truth.”⁹⁰

In its long list of study and resource materials, the Committee for Open Debate did not mention the AFA reports and content analyses that had been central to the controversy. (By contrast, the collections of documents disseminated by AFA routinely included statements and materials from the Committee for Open Debate.)

Some of the artifacts originally planned for the “Crossroads” exhibition at Air and Space were shown at American University in Washington, D.C., July 8-28, 1995, as part of a program, “Constructing a Peaceful World: Beyond Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”⁹¹

On display were 27 artifacts from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. They included a schoolchild’s lunch box with charred remains of rice, barley, soy beans, and strips of radish. The program ran for 18 days and drew just over 1,000 visitors. The academic director of the program was Peter J. Kuznick, associate professor of history at American University, and one of the 48 signatories to the “historians and scholars” letter to Heyman the previous year. In 2003, he would re-emerge in a related role.

The Revisionists had not fared well in news media coverage of the controversy, but they found a more advantageous venue in book publishing, where the influence of scholars and academicians was strong and in which they got to write the material themselves, their way.

Some of the books were worse than others. Among the most strident in denouncing AFA and defending the curators was Philip Nobile, who billed his book, *Judgment at the Smithsonian*,⁹² as containing the “uncensored script of the Smithsonian’s 50th anniversary exhibit of the Enola Gay.” The press release promoting this book depicted Nobile as blowing the lid off a cover-up after he “obtained a rare copy of the 300-page document.”

As Nobile admitted in the “acknowledgments” section of his book, he got his “rare copy” of the script from AFA, the same as everybody else. What he did not say was that the document he obtained from AFA was 559 pages, not 300. He had reproduced the text of the script but ignored the visual content, on which much of the criticism had focused. (As AFA’s Aubin said, ignoring the graphic parts of an exhibition

that was primarily visual was like watching television without looking at the picture.)

Nobile's book hit a low point with its "mock war crimes trial of Harry Truman." According to the press release, "Nobile's fictional cross-examination of Truman leaves little doubt about the defendant's guilt."

Colman McCarthy, columnist for the Washington Post, included Judgment at the Smithsonian on a short list of "books of reliable scholarship and balanced analysis" to counteract the spin he attributed to "the easily peeved military lobby."⁹³

Gar Alperovitz, a leading proponent of Revisionist theory about Truman and the atomic bomb, argued that a "new consensus" had developed among historians and that it supported the curators and the Revisionists."⁹⁴ However, Alperovitz was stretching with his claim of consensus.

In 1994, for example, a survey by the Organization of American Historians asked historians to rank various events as "bright spots" and "dark spots" in American history. World War II ranked third from the top among 46 bright spots. The Atomic Bomb and Hiroshima tied (with the Mexican War) for 23rd place on the list of dark spots, being considered less dark than Watergate, the Great Depression, sexism, the Cold War, and the 1980s in general.⁹⁵

Furthermore, numerous books, articles, and statements from historians that appeared during the controversy ran contrary to the "new consensus" that Alperovitz imagined.⁹⁶

Four Million Visitors

For the most part, Secretary Heyman steered clear of ideology, concentrating instead on practical measures to extricate the Smithsonian from its troubles.

Heyman did, however, contribute an enduring misperception to the legend of the lost exhibit. Testifying to the Senate Rules Committee in May 1995, he said, "The fundamental flaw, in my view, lay in the concept of the exhibition itself. The basic error was attempting to couple an historical dialogue centering on the use of atomic weapons with the 50th commemoration of the end of the war."⁹⁷ The problem was never that history and commemoration would not mix.

The problem was distorted history. But Heyman had found a convenient rationale that gave him quick separation from the failed exhibit, and he repeated it often. It has since become an article of faith for activist scholars that the exhibition was canceled only because its critics could not tolerate historical analysis.

In June 1995, the museum opened a straightforward historical exhibition on the Enola Gay and its mission. The centerpiece was the forward fuselage of the airplane, a 53-foot section and just over half the total length, up on the nose wheel. Also

on display were a propeller, the tail, and two of the engines.

Part of the wall text in the exhibition gallery said that “the use of the [atomic] 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.”

At a press conference opening the new exhibition, Heyman was asked why he had given in to veterans and Congress. He said that objections had not come only from “a handful of people or simply a handful of legislators.” He had received 30,000 to 40,000 letters from citizens.⁹⁸

Comment cards filled out by exhibition visitors were overwhelmingly favorable. The only disruption came on July 2, when three anti-nuclear protesters closed down the exhibition for 90 minutes by pouring a pint of human blood and two bags of ashes on the aircraft.⁹⁹

Before the exhibition closed in May 1998 after a three-year run, it had drawn almost four million visitors, making it by far the most popular special exhibition in the history of the Air and Space Museum.

Heyman fiddled with the idea of hiring a British aviation expert to replace Harwit, but he was overruled by the Smithsonian regents.¹⁰⁰

Finally, a distinguished naval airman, retired Vice Adm. Donald D. Engen was chosen to head the Air and Space Museum. His first act was to reappoint Donald S. Lopez as deputy director, a position he had held from 1983 to 1990, before being moved out of the way by Martin Harwit. Engen and Lopez took the museum back to its charter to collect, preserve, and display historic aircraft and spacecraft.

Engen was killed in a glider accident in 1999, but his successor, retired Marine Corps Gen. John R. Dailey, appointed in January 2000, was of the same mold. The Revisionist historians no longer held sway at Air and Space.

When the museum opened its sprawling Udvar-Hazy annex at Dulles Airport in December 2003, the airplane in center position in the aviation hangar was the Enola Gay, completely restored and fully assembled for the first time since 1960. Like other aircraft at Udvar-Hazy, the Enola Gay was shown with a basic descriptive label. It said:

Boeing B-29 Superfortress

Enola Gay

“Boeing’s B-29 Superfortress was the most sophisticated propeller-driven bomber of World

War II and the first bomber to house its crew in pressurized compartments. Although designed to fight in the European theater, the B-29 found its niche on the other side of the globe. In the Pacific, B-29s delivered a variety of aerial weapons: conventional bombs, incendiary bombs, mines, and two nuclear weapons. On Aug. 6, 1945, this Martin-built B-29-45-MO dropped the first atomic weapon used in combat on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, Bockscar (on display at the US Air Force Museum near Dayton, Ohio) delivered a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan. Enola Gay flew as the advance weather reconnaissance aircraft that day. A third B-29, The Great Artiste, flew as an observation aircraft on both missions.”

Well before the Udvar-Hazy Center opened, the Revisionists began tuning up. On Oct. 23, 2003, the Committee for a National Discussion of Nuclear History and Current Policy—“a committee of scholars, veterans, clergy, activists, students, and other interested individuals”¹⁰¹ —formed to challenge the Udvar-Hazy exhibit.

The signatures on the committee's petition were familiar from the 1994 protest. The organizer this time was Peter Kuznick, who had been director of the American University exhibit of the Hiroshima artifacts in 1995. Among those signing the petition: Daniel Ellsberg, Noam Chomsky, Oliver Stone,¹⁰² and leading lights of the Revisionist movement.

To the Revisionists, it was intolerable that the Enola Gay was displayed without an antinuclear message attached. “You wouldn’t display a slave ship solely as a model of technological advancement,” said David Nasaw, a cultural historian at the City University of New York.¹⁰³

The Japanese connection was back as well. In a letter to museum director Dailey, the mayor of Hiroshima, Tadatashi Akiba, said, “I am writing today to request that you include with the exhibition a description of the damage inflicted by the bomb the Enola Gay dropped and the intense desire of the people of Hiroshima for the abolition of nuclear weapons and a world genuine peace. As you know, a special exhibition was planned by your institution in 1995 that would have been a sincere re-examination of the meaning of the atomic bombing. ... This balanced exhibition was stopped by a Congressional resolution at the insistence of veterans groups determined to protect their cherished belief that the atomic bombings were justified and indispensable.”¹⁰⁴

The museum acknowledged that it had received and reviewed the committee's petition but did not plan to change the exhibit.¹⁰⁵

Peace groups allied with the Committee for a National Discussion organized a demonstration for opening day at the Udvar-Hazy Center. About 75 protesters showed up. One of

them threw a bottle of red paint at the Enola Gay. It made a minor dent on the side of the aircraft, bounced off, and broke on the floor. The bottle thrower was arrested and the rest of the demonstrators were escorted out, chanting and singing "Down by the Riverside."

For the Revisionists and for many of the activists, the concerns have never been principally about World War II but rather about the nuclear politics of today: "Moral attacks on the Hiroshima decision, however, seem to have less to do with the Pacific war than with the dawn of the nuclear age," historian Jeffery Roberts, of Tennessee Technological University, wrote in 1998.¹⁰⁶ "For many people, to oppose the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is to oppose nuclear weapons generally, and the possibility of a third world war especially."

That was reflected in the comments of Kuznick, the protest committee leader. "Our greatest concern is that the disturbing issues raised by the atomic bombings in 1945 will not be addressed in the planned exhibit and that President Truman's use of atomic weapons will legitimize the Bush administration's current effort to lower the threshold for future use of nuclear weapons," he said.¹⁰⁷

Forces of Change

Over the years, myths about the controversy have taken root. One of them is that the museum was overwhelmed by impossible odds.

"You have no idea of the forces opposing this exhibit, not in your wildest dreams—jobs are at stake, the Smithsonian is at stake," curator Crouch told the peace group leader, Father John Dear.¹⁰⁸

"The Air Force Association must have had an incredibly well-oiled public relations machine," Harwit said. "To that was added the American Legion. We were kind of outgunned."¹⁰⁹

In another instance, Harwit said, "Defeat of a museum with a total of 280, by veterans' organizations whose summed membership stands at six million strong is not shameful. I like to believe we fought valiantly, but were badly outgunned."¹¹⁰

The "impossible odds" theory was more comforting to the curators than the actual explanation. They could not bear the thought that the public was intelligent enough to see the truth.

The curators were defeated principally by their own scripts, which revealed exactly what they were planning to do. They said one thing in public and a different thing in private. Incredibly, they were prone to putting their real views into papers, which were duly obtained and circulated by AFA.

The vast alliance, six million strong, was mostly in the minds of the curators.

The veterans groups cooperated, but they were not coordinated. We shared information and kept in touch, but there was no joint strategy, few meetings, and nobody telling anybody what to do. As for AFA, only three or four of us were significantly engaged, and part time at that.

Many organizations were involved, but in the Revisionist books and journal articles Air Force Magazine and AFA have become the demons of record. There is no particular reason for us to object to the blame (or credit), it being a good thing that the political plans for exhibition of the Enola Gay were stopped, but in truth, the people who brought down the exhibit and Martin Harwit were the curators and Martin Harwit.

Our contribution was to shine a light on what the museum was doing, and public outrage did the rest.



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