

PETER BLUTE

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2103

August 10, 1994

PLEASE RESPOND TO:

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Secretary Robert McCormick Adams
Smithsonian Institution
1000 Jefferson Drive SW
Washington, D.C. 20560

Dear Secretary Adams:

We write to express our concern and dismay about the National Air and Space Museum's intended exhibit on the fiftieth anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." scheduled to open in May 1995, which will feature the Enola Gay.

As you are aware, there has been much controversy about this exhibit based on the fact that many respected military historians and veterans organizations found the original exhibit and accompanying script to be lacking in balance and context. It portrayed Japan more as an innocent victim than a ruthless aggressor, and cast Americans as being driven to drop the bomb out of revenge and for political reasons rather than out of concern for the hundreds of thousands of American lives that would have been lost during an invasion of Japan.

Air and Space tried to quell the criticism by revising the exhibit and script after consultation with veterans, historians, and representatives of the armed forces. However, after review we have found that the revised script is still biased, lacking in context, and therefore unacceptable. It seems that the planners of this exhibit ignored many of the constructive criticisms provided, for while it contains several positive changes from the original script, the revised version still does not give a balanced perspective of the events surrounding the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Examples of the anti-American prejudice and imbalance of the exhibit are many. There are 32 photographs of Japanese casualties during the war for the Pacific, but only 7 photographs of American casualties. Attention to the fact that the atomic bombs prevented an invasion of Japan and an estimated one million American casualties is limited to one small wall label at the end of the exhibit. There are 84 pages of text and 97 photographs relating to Japanese suffering, but less than one page and 8 photographs relating to the suffering caused by the fierce Japanese aggression between 1930 and 1945.

There are many other examples, far too many to write about in this letter. Our overriding concern is the lack of context in this exhibit and the unwillingness of the Air and Space Museum to consider major revisions to the script. Indeed, judging from recent public statements by museum officials it seems that Air and Space is digging its heels in to defend an indefensible position rather than working during the nine months remaining before the exhibit opens to make it better and more historically accurate.

We request that you immediately look into this situation. Specifically, we ask that you:

- 1) Evaluate the revised script and inform us of your conclusions and the Smithsonian Institution's position on the exhibit, taking into consideration the many opposing views expressed and not just those of the staff at the Smithsonian and the Air and Space Museum.
- 2) Provide us with a complete copy of all of the so-called "Tiger Team" comments and critiques of the script. The "Tiger Team" was formed by Air and Space to review the first script but apparently few of their suggestions were incorporated into the revised edition and their report has not been made public.

Defending the exhibit in Sunday's Washington Post, Air and Space Museum Director Dr. Martin Harwit wrote that, "the museum has chosen to provide not an opinion piece but rather the basic information that visitors will need to draw their own conclusions. This is our responsibility..." Well, thus far the museum has chosen to provide an opinion piece but, yes, it is your responsibility to provide proper perspective without bias. It is our hope, especially this week as we mark the 49th anniversary of the end of the war with Japan, that you will act to balance this exhibit and provide the American people with an objective account of the Enola Gay and her mission rather than the historically narrow, revisionist view contained in the revised script.

We look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Beta Blute

Scatley Quasha

Jack Quinn

Tim Holden

Mike Cypert

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cc: Board of Regents

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