

*Drafted by
Gregg Herken
for
Curators**

**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SMITHSONIAN SECRETARY AND
COUNCIL FROM THE CURATORS OF THE NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM**

Assoc.

We, the undersigned curators of the National Air and Space Museum, urge you to resist the mounting political pressures upon the Institution to cancel the scheduled opening of the exhibit, "The Last Act."

1/23/95

Tom +

As members of the Smithsonian's community of scholars, we believe the script of "The Last Act" to be accurate, balanced, and fair in its description of historical events, and in its depiction of the various contending interpretations of those events by historians.

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Contrary to a misperception resulting from the current controversy over the exhibit, the Museum and its curators did not "invent" the debate over the wartime use of the atomic bomb against Japan. That debate began in the weeks and months leading up to the decision, and has been the subject of attention by reputable scholars for nearly fifty years.

However, since no exhibit script, no matter how comprehensive, can hope to include all the facts, interpretations, and nuances behind a complex series of historical events, we suggest that you consider the possibility of the Museum sponsoring an actual debate, between responsible representatives of contending views, on the central historical questions at issue in the "The Last Act." The Smithsonian, by its charter as well as its unique place in the public trust, would seem to be an especially appropriate venue for such a debate.

Finally, we believe that a decision to cancel "The Last Act" would not only lend credence to the mistaken impression of bias in the exhibit, but it would, even more importantly, stifle the free expression of differing viewpoints on a critical episode in modern American history.

We believe "The Last Act" exhibit itself to be the product of such open and responsible inquiry, and thus in the best tradition of the Smithsonian's charter and mission, to "promote the increase and diffusion of knowledge."

[1] From: Gregg Herken 1/23/95 11:20AM (325 bytes: 3 ln)
To: Dom Pisano, Mike Neufeld, Tom Crouch
Subject:

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We have been, as they say, overtaken by events. Martin does not want the letter from curators to go out. Either add it to your scrapbook or burn it.