

JOHN T. CORRELL
Editor in Chief

December 12, 1994

Prof. Robert L. Beisner
American University
Department of History
4400 Mass Avenue NW
Washington DC 20016

Dear Professor Beisner:

Mr. Burr Bennett of Northbrook, Ill., sent me copies of his exchange of correspondence with you. Given the experience of "debating" at American University last week with two of the other persons who signed the "historical cleansing" letter, I don't know why I'm bothering to write -- except that (a) you say that you don't know the details of what happened and (b) it's difficult for me to believe that nobody in academia gives a damn for the truth anymore. I hope you will read the enclosed materials. No reply necessary or expected.

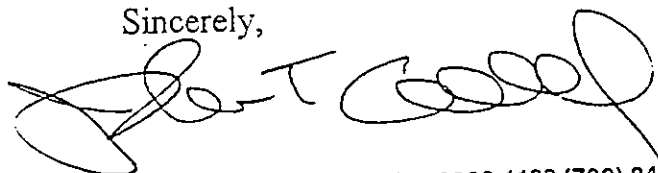
The second half of my report clearly acknowledges -- as we have always acknowledged -- variance in casualty estimates, differences of opinion among President Truman's military advisors, etc. I'm surprised that "historians" now claim we are trying to suppress this material.

Our argument all along has been balance, context, and fairness, not glorification of the *Enola Gay*. Check what we said -- not what Kai Bird, Martin Sherwin, and others say that we said.

It was not "political pressure" from me that led Martin Harwit to write his internal memo April 16 saying the criticism was valid. We were not meant to see this memo. Neither was anyone else outside the museum, apparently, since Dr. Harwit and others continued to tell a different story in public.

I wonder if the research that you and your colleagues did on the controversy before declaring your flamboyant opinion was any example of the care and scholarship you give to researching other matters.

Sincerely,





THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

4 December 1994

W. Burr Bennett, Jr.
02 Techny Court
Northbrook, IL 60062

Dear Mr. Bennett:

I realize you did not write your recent letter to me *personally*, but I thought I'd briefly respond anyway. As you say you chuckled at the letter of the 50 historians, I found myself smiling while reading yours, for you seem to have little understanding of scholars in general and historians in particular. I assure you we're not all on the same cookie cutter; few of us are much given to the excesses of what you call "political correctness" which, of course, you never define: it seems to mean whatever you don't like; all my friends would laugh at the thought of this nearly 59-year-old middle of the road Democrat finding it impossible to get untangled from the biblical cord to Woodstock (I'm *still* laughing; my favorite music is Mozart and Ellington).

The whole Enola Gay business has been unfortunate. I didn't like the first scripts, either, partly for reasons you and (some) other veterans objected to them, and partly because I thought they oversimplified the complex understandings researchers have of both the end of the war and the reasons Truman decided to use the bomb, and specifically because they failed to account for why so many Americans (at home as well as in uniform abroad) felt Hiroshima was something like a reprieve. But you *do* misunderstand history if you think it's simply what you remember, or, more to the point, that there is a cluster of "hard facts" about which there can be no dispute and those make up "history." In fact, historians argue among themselves all the time, these fifty *included* can think of some very sharp disagreements I have with at least a dozen of them, including on the subject of Hiroshima). I joined these other historians because of how the Smithsonian caved in to pure political pressure from your allies and in so doing corrupted what scholarship is supposed to be about, which *isn't* let's-decide-it-happened-this-way-because-that's-what-these-well-organized-old-fellows-who-vote want. That's no different from an army general, reacting to pressure from uninformed Washington politicians, sending his battalions into the face of certain peril, substituting the emotional judgment of vote-conscious politicians for his own professional, military understanding of the situation.

Frankly, I was on the fringe of this whole business and don't know the details of all the meetings at the Smithsonian. I'm certain, however, that one kind of meeting that did *not* take place *should* have, namely, between veterans and historians. I urge you seriously to take advantage of the organization the veterans have now put together in response to the Enola Gay fracas to move beyond it and bid for a chance for the two groups to offer understanding to one another. What do you think?

Sincerely yours,

Robert L. Beisner
Professor of History

W. Burr Bennett, Jr.
1902 Techny Court
Northbrook, IL 60062

December 11, 1994

Professor Robert L. Beisner
The American University
College of Arts & Science, Dept. of History
4400 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.
Washington, DC 20016

My Dear Professor Beisner:

You found me out! I did send the same computer letter to those SPS¹ members prominent enough to be listed in reference books available to me. (If you'll send Kai Bird's address, I'll send him the copy of Stimson's 1947 article in Harper's that he needs).

All our group seeks is the proper display of the Enola Gay as suggested in my last letter. Move the rest of this flawed exhibit to a more appropriate Smithsonian museum. It would be a perfect replacement for the existing Japanese-funded exhibit that Crouch designed to celebrate the 200th birthday of our constitution.

May I pick a nit, or two?

1. Your reference to "political correctness" is confusing. Did you misread my letter which does not include that term, or did you assume that I was thinking this term, or did your "you" include all veterans? All three are insupportable assumptions. My letter is of no importance, but writing about history is important. Napoleon never should have defined your² work as "agreed upon fable". His endorsement opened the door wide for those who prefer the easier task of rewriting history to fit their own theories.

2. On your proffered olive branch, our group of seven, disorganized, old men have clearly understood the "historians" in the Smithsonian since at least 1965. In that year Smithsonian officials told a Life magazine reporter that the Enola Gay was not on display because of their reluctance to put it next to planes intended to engender pride. That same attitude permeates the current exhibit. If my recent exposure to "historians" is typical, your profession is not excessively concerned with objectivity.

Incidentally are there minimum requirements to be met before assuming the title of "historian"?

Warmest regards,



¹ Smithsonian Protective Society

² Meaning all historians.