

HC Historians'
Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima

Co-Chairs
Kai Bird
Martin J. Sherwin

May 18, 1995

Executive Director
Laura C. Yamhure

Gar Alperovitz
Joyce Appleby
Scott Armstrong
Barton J. Bernstein
Douglas Brinkley
Noam Chomsky
Bruce Cumings
John Dover
Carolyn Elsenberg
Thomas Ferguson
Eric Foner
Catherine Foranhd
Carola Gallagher
Irene Gendzier
Todd Gitlin
Stanley Goldberg
Fraser Harbutt
James Hershberg
Walter L. Hixson
Joan Hoff
Stanley Hoffman
Michael J. Hogan
Richard Immerman
Michael Kammen
Stanley N. Katz
Michael Kazin
Linda K. Kerber
Walter LaFeber
William Lanouette
Melvyn P. Laffler
Robert Jay Lifton
Edward T. Linenthal
Leon F. Litwack
Priscilla Johnson McMillan
Robert L. Messer
Greg Mitchell
Gary B. Nash
Tom Powers
Richard Rhodes
Leo Ribuffo
Ruth Rosen
Emily F. Rosenberg
Norman L. Rosenberg
Michael Schaller
Deborah Shapley
Caddis Smith
Anders Stephanson
Charles Weiner
Jon Wiener
Blanche Wiesen Cook
Alfred Young
Marilyn B. Young
et al


Sen. Ted Stevens
Chairman
Committee on Rules & Administration
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sen. Stevens,

With the understanding that the Committee has agreed to accept written statements for the record, we wish to submit the enclosed memo and several published articles. The memo is a chronological analysis of the Washington Post's coverage of the Enola Gay/Smithsonian controversy. The memo demonstrates how the media in general has inappropriately framed the debate over the Smithsonian's planned exhibit on the Enola Gay. It was recently sent to the Washington Post, whose editorial director, Meg Greenfield, replied to us in a letter dated May 10, 1995 defending her newspaper's editorials. (Since then, this copy of the memo has been slightly edited for two minor factual errors.)

Given the fact that you have found time for only one historian to testify in proceedings which are of a major concern to professional historians, we request that these materials be printed together with any other testimony pertaining to this Senate hearing.

Sincerely,



Kai Bird & Martin Sherwin
Co-Chairs

May 18, 1995

Washington Post Coverage of the Enola Gay Controversy

(Submitted by the Historians' Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima to the Senate Rules and Administrative Committee Hearings on the Smithsonian Institution.)

Summary:

The Post's coverage of the Enola Gay was unbalanced: the newspaper reported the controversy as a dispute between thousands of veterans--armed with their irrefutably authentic memories--and a handful of woolly-headed curators. The Smithsonian's curators are described as men of a younger generation who never saw combat, and in some cases were not even American-born or citizens of America. The curators, according to the Post, were influenced by left-wing revisionists, the anti-Vietnam war movement and a latent anti-Americanism. The script they produced was sympathetic to the Japanese and painted the Americans as villains in a "war of vengeance." In the Post's coverage, historians were rarely quoted, and the historical evidence was rarely cited. (See the attached quotes from various archival documents and memoirs which are well known to any university student studying the end of the Pacific war, but which were never quoted in the Post's reporting on this controversy over a contentious historical event.) In stark contrast to the Post, the New York Times editorialized that the curators should be left alone to do their job, and the Times reporters frequently quoted both historians about the controversy and quoted from some of the key archival documents.

Chronology of Articles with Commentary

May 31, 1994: Guy Gugliotta reports that "curators also are contending with skeptical veterans..." The basis of the story is the fact that the editor of Air Force Magazine, John T. Correll, has accused the museum of "politically correct curating." Gugliotta interviews Martin Harwit, the director of the museum and one of the curators, Tom Crouch. But no historian of the Hiroshima decision is quoted. Gugliotta concludes his reporting by saying, "...it is clear the museum will continue to have difficult and perhaps impossible time presenting any atom bomb display that will satisfy the vets. This is probably understandable. A sizable percentage of American males spent nearly four years of their youth getting frightened out of their wits in horribly unpleasant places because of Imperial Japan. Forgive, maybe. Forget, never. On the other hand, for the United States a nation that has never been fire-bombed, strafed,

napalmed, rocketed or mini-gunned in anger, there is something to be said for an exhibit that suggests that warplanes are not simply expensive sporting devices to be used for movie props or flyovers at presidential funerals."

July 21, 1994: Eugene L. Meyer writes in his lead sentence, "The Smithsonian Institution has failed to mollify critics of its controversial exhibit..." Correll, Harwit and Crouch are again quoted. Richard Hallion, an Air Force historian is quoted as being critical of the planned exhibit. But Meyer fails to report that Hallion, who was a member of the exhibit advisory board of historians, had previously approved the museum's basic draft script of January 1994. In written remarks given to the museum, Hallion actually wrote of the script, "Overall, this is a most impressive piece of work, comprehensive and dramatic, obviously based upon a great deal of sound research, primary and secondary."

Several other veterans are quoted, including Col. Paul W. Tibbets. Retiring Smithsonian Secretary Robert McC. Adams, is reported as raising questions about the exhibits balance. But no other historians are quoted. Meyer flatly asserts, "In fact, some military planners estimated upwards of 800,000 American casualties would result from a planned two-stage invasion in the fall of 1945 and spring of 1946." When queried over the phone about where this figure came from, Meyer said it came from an Air Force document. But a phone call to the Air Force historian who provided the document revealed that the document in question was written in 1994 and was merely this Air Force historian's personal estimate, extrapolated from casualty rates suffered during the battles of Okinawa and Iwo Jima. Kai Bird sent a letter to the editor correcting this "fact" but it was never published. Shortly after Meyer's piece was published, Kai Bird sent him a copy of J. Samuel Walker's survey of the scholarly literature on the Hiroshima bombings, published in Diplomatic History. Meyer never referred to the Walker essay in any of his subsequent reporting. As chief historian for the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Walker is certainly not a revisionist, but he concluded in his survey of the scholarly literature, "Careful scholarly treatment of the records and manuscripts opened over the past few years has greatly enhanced our understanding of why the Truman administration used atomic weapons against Japan. Experts continue to disagree on some issues, but critical questions have been answered. The consensus among scholars is that the bomb was not needed to avoid an invasion of Japan and to end the war within a relatively short time. It is clear that alternatives to the bomb existed and that Truman and his advisers, knew it. . . It is certain that the hoary claim that the bomb prevented one-half million American combat deaths is unsupported." Meyer decided this expert opinion was not newsworthy, even to provide a context for the debate taking place between the veterans and the museum's curators.

August 7, 1994: Martin Harwit Op Ed piece.

August 14, 1994: Washington Post Editorial attacks Harwit, the Smithsonian and "fashionable and wrong academic notion that all presentations of complex issues must be politically tendentious."

August 14, 1994: Five letters to the editor are published, including one by John T. Correll, the editor of Air Force Magazine. All five letters are critical of the exhibit.

August 19, 1994: Charles Krauthammer, columnist, charges that the museum has "fallen to the forces of political correctness and historical revisionism."

August 23, 1994: Chalmers M Roberts, retired Post reporter, publishes Op Ed, justifying atomic bombing based on casualty estimates given Truman in the event of an American invasion.

August 30, 1994: Ken Ringle reports Smithsonian acts to "defuse criticism." Ringle quotes Congressman Peter Blute, a critic of the museum, the Wall Street Journal, Smithsonian Secretary Adams--and not a single historian. Worse, he repeats a factual error published by a Wall Street Journal editorial of the previous day. The Journal editorial found it "especially curious to note the oozing romanticism with which the [exhibit's] writers describe the kamikaze...suicide pilots [as] 'youths, their bodies overflowing with life.'" Ringle reproduces this quote from the Journal in its entirety. The quote "youths, their bodies overflowing with life" is attributed to the curators, when actually this is a quote from a written Japanese source, which the curators were using in an attempt to explain how the Japanese militarists motivated such young men to volunteer for these suicide missions. It is an outrageous distortion to attribute this quote to the curators, and clearly demonstrates that Ringle once again has not read the script.

Sept. 30, 1994: Eugene Meyer reports "Smithsonian Bows to Critics..." Quotes Harwit, American Legion internal affairs director Hubert R. Dagley II, Air & Space Museum spokesman Mike Fetters, an aide to Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.), Rep. Peter Blute, Stephen P. Aubin (communications director of the Air Force Association---and one historian, Gar Alperovitz. The historian quoted, Gar Alperovitz, is the author of Atomic Diplomacy, one of the major critical studies of the Hiroshima decision. But Meyer did not bother to identify Alperovitz and merely quoted him innocuously saying that the Smithsonian was bowing to "a great deal of pressure." Meyer also reports as fact, "Earlier scripts had glossed over the estimated losses from a two-stage invasion of the Japanese home islands..." This was incorrect. Meyer's report leaves the impression that the Smithsonian was merely correcting an historical script which "some critics believed would portray the Japanese as innocent, even noble victims of

Americans hellbent on revenge for Pearl Harbor." Again, no reading of the first, second or third scripts could possibly leave any one with this impression. Meyer does not seem to have read the scripts, and has instead relied on the Air Force Association's and American Legion's characterization of the scripts as sympathetic to the Japanese.

Sept. 20, 1994: Colman McCarthy, columnist, says that while he is of the opinion that the United States "committed unprovoked war crimes that caused the slaughter of 200,000 Japanese, mostly civilians...But I hold with deep regard the feelings of those who see Hiroshima and Nagasaki differently." Paraphrasing David McReynolds from the War Resisters League, McCarthy then suggests that "debating the history of 1945 is futile."

Sept. 26, 1994: Ken Ringle reports in a front-page story that "2 Views of History Collide Over Smithsonian A-Bomb Exhibit." Ringle says that for the curators who designed the exhibit the Hiroshima decision is "old history, a scholarly abstraction composed of archival records, argumentative books and the fading, flickering images on black and white film. For veterans like Grayford C. Payne, 74, of Annandale, who survived the Bataan death march...and slave labor in five Japanese prison camps, it was something else." Ringle then quotes Payne on how there was a notice posted in his POW camp signed by Japanese Prime Minister Hideki Tojo. The notice announced that all POWs would be shot the moment American forces landed in Japan. Payne is then quoted as saying that is why "all of us who were prisoners of war in Japan...revere the Enola Gay. It saved our lives." Powerful reporting, you might say, except for the fact that by the time the Enola Gay dropped its weapon on Hiroshima, Tojo had been ousted as prime minister for nearly four months. Ringle doesn't report this fact, or the fact that the Truman Administration's Japanese experts, including Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew, had characterized the new Japanese government as being led by a moderate faction opposed by the hardline militarists. For Ringle, the only history that counts is the view from the foxhole (or the POW camp); what the President of the United States might be saying in his diary or what his aides might be telling the president about how to end the Japanese war is "old history, a scholarly abstraction composed of archival records, argumentative books..." And certainly for Ringle there is no space in his reporting for any description of that archival evidence.

Ringle reports, "The first script...laid heavy emphasis on the horrors of the atomic bombing, little on the Japanese aggression and atrocities that produced it." This is stated as fact when it is clearly Ringle's opinion. Again, any one who has read the entire script would be hard put to come to this conclusion, which suggests that Ringle, like Meyer, probably relied on the veterans' characterization of the script. Recall that even Air Force historians Richard Hallion and Herman Wolk initially praised the early script.

Ringle's long piece quotes Harwit, the various curators, Secretary Adams, Harry Truman's memoirs (but not his contemporaneous diary), Air Force historian Richard Hallion, the Air Force Association and---David McCullough. The author of a highly admiring biography of Harry Truman, McCullough is quoted at length. Martin Sherwin, the author of the critically acclaimed A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance, is not quoted, but is referred to by curator Tom Crouch as having thought that "any display whatever of the Enola Gay was obscene because it would amount to a celebration of the bombing." Ringle does not bother to identify Sherwin as the author of a book which Time magazine called "definitive" and which is used in many college courses on the end of the war. (Sherwin was a member of the museum's historical board of advisors.)

Instead, Ringle chooses to quote McCullough at length justifying the bombing based on the argument that Truman was given high casualty estimates which persuaded him that the bomb would save lives. Ringle does not report in this story or any where else that McCullough has gone on the record to retract a crucial footnote in his book which wrongly suggested that Truman was given a military estimate of 500,000 to one million lives saved if an invasion was avoided. McCullough incorrectly attributes this archival document to say that it "shows that figures of such magnitude were then in use at the highest levels" when in fact the document in question actually shows that military leaders at the highest levels labeled such figures as exaggerations. Since the veterans groups often relied on McCullough's book to sustain their critique of the Smithsonian, this is no small matter. Ringle never addresses it in his reporting. (Note, however, that a reporter for Defense Week, Tony Capaccio, published a piece which reported all of the above facts about McCullough's retraction.)

Neither can Ringle claim ignorance. Like Meyer, he too was sent a copy of the J. Samuel Walker survey of the scholarly literature. He neither responded to a letter from Kai Bird nor referred to any of the scholarly literature cited by Walker in his reporting.

Ringle's piece also contains basic errors of logic: he reports for instance that the initial script "devotes many pages to academic speculation about whether the bomb was really necessary to force a Japanese surrender." Logically, however, the same word--"speculation"--can be used to describe the entire argument of those veterans who say there would have been an invasion if the bomb had not been dropped. Both arguments rest on a "what if." The invasion of the Japanese home islands never happened. But historians have documented that many of Truman's aides were telling him that the Japanese were ready to surrender. That did happen, and should have been treated by Ringle as part of the historical evidence and part of any historical context for an exhibit attempting to depict what happened at Hiroshima.

Ringle further suggests that the first script failed to note that the Strategic Bombing Survey--which concluded that the

Japanese would have surrendered without the atomic bomb, without the Soviet entry into the war, and without an invasion--was "based" on the "escalation of massive conventional firebombing..." This is simplistic. A decision was made to end the firebombing of cities late in the summer of 1945, partly because the U.S. Army Air Force was running out of suitable targets, and partly because military planners has concluded that it would be more effective to target railroads. (see USSBS report, "The Effects of Strategic Bombing on Japan's War Economy" released in December 1946, p. 65, footnote 13.)

Instead of reporting the controversy as a debate over historical evidence, Ringle chooses to report it as a "generational" conflict between veterans who have authentic memories and a younger generation motivated by their anti-Vietnam war sentiments and their fear of atomic holocaust.

In short, Ringle is clearly biased in his reporting; he is determined to portray what the veterans remember as historical "fact" and what the historians write as "scholarly abstraction" at best and "left-wing", "anti-American" and "historical revisionism" at its worst. Again, why is your reporter ostensibly reporting on an event of historical controversy, refusing to interview and quote the historians who have studied this issue?

October 16, 1994: Gar Alperovitz, op ed on the "historians' new consensus." The first piece published in the Washington Post which gives their readers any sense of the historical scholarship on this issue. Notice, however, that the editors of the Outlook Section decide to package the Alperovitz piece with another Op Ed by Chalmers Roberts, entitled, "Our Boys or the Bomb?" (This is Roberts' second op ed piece on the subject.)

October 21, 1994: Eugene Meyer reports that "anti-war activists" are now weighing in on the controversy. He reports, "Until now, the anti-war counter-attack has been mainly in the form of letters to the editor and Op-Ed page pieces that have appeared in recent weeks in the New York Times and the Washington Post." Here, Meyer is vaguely referring to Op-Eds written by Kai Bird in the Times and Alperovitz in the Washington Post? These are the only Op Eds published on this issue and Meyer labels them "anti-war." Why? Why are either historians--who happen to have written important books in the field that deal with these issues--labeled as "anti-war"? Like Ringle, Meyer clearly wants to suggest that critics of the Hiroshima bombing, even if they be historians, are nevertheless motivated by some kind of generational, 1960s anti-war sentiments. (For the record, Alperovitz's book was written in the early 1960s and published in 1965, long before the anti-Vietnam war movement was more than blip on the horizon. In 1965-66, Alperovitz was an official in the State Department.)

November/December issue of Bulletin of Atomic Scientists: Eugene Meyer writes a signed opinion piece on the Enola Gay controversy.

Meyer says the veterans groups were right, the museum's script needed to be rewritten.

Nov. 18, 1994 - Eugene Meyer: "Academics Blast Revised Script" / Meyer reports on news conference organized by historians critical of the museum's cave in to "historical cleansing." Here is Meyer's opportunity to give the other side, but his reporting is brief and perfunctory. He does not bother to report the news--contained in the letter released at the press conference--that the Executive Board of the Organization of American Historians has issued a forceful condemnation of the Smithsonian's action. He doesn't report that even conservative historians--including historians like John Lewis Gaddis who believe the Hiroshima bombing was probably necessary--signed the letter protesting the museum's censorship. No effort is made to report any of historical evidence used by critics of the Hiroshima bombing: Eisenhower is not quoted, Admiral Leahy is not quoted, Truman's diary is not quoted. All these quotes were referred to by the historians at this press conference. But in the judgment of Meyer, this was not news.

Nov. 30, 1994: Robert P. Newman, Op Ed, "What New Consensus?" attacks Gar Alperovitz's previous op ed, taking up a full half-page.

Dec. 16, 1994: Eugene Meyer / reports on "peace activists" meeting with Air & Space Museum officials and their disappointment with the results of the meeting.

Jan. 19, 1995: Eugene Meyer, reports "veterans asked museum to cancel the Enola Gay exhibit." Meyer reports: "But in the months since, critics of the early exhibit scripts have grown increasingly restive as some historians and anti-war groups have mounted a counter-attack, meeting with curators and holding news conferences to denounce what they termed 'historical cleansing.'" At least one of those contacts bore fruit when Barton Bernstein, a Stanford University academician, convinced Martin Harwit, director of the Air and Space Museum, that the anticipated casualty figures in the revised exhibit text were too high."

Jan 20, 1995: Washington Post editorial: describes the Smithsonian becoming "bogged down from the first in denunciations of its incredibly propagandistic and intellectually shabby early drafts and then in denunciations of the denunciations from defenders of those drafts on the other side." The editorial goes on to describe the initial drafts as "tendentiously anti-nuclear and anti-American."

"...Never mind how a museum of the Smithsonian's stature and seriousness could have slipped into the absurdity of negotiating its labels. What it needs to do now is clear this mess off its screen...Get a couple of respected historians of the period, a military expert or two and some people who know about mounting

good exhibits , and charge them with getting a reasonable commemorative exhibit to the museum."

The editorial writers seem unaware that what they are proposing actually happened: initially, the museum had a few knowledgeable curators write a script in consultation with a board of historical advisors representing a broad range of views and institutional constituencies.

Jan 20, 1995: Ken Ringle and Eugene Meyer: report that three congressmen are calling for Harwit to resign, calling the exhibit script an "insult" to veterans. The story casts Harwit's predicament entirely from the perspective of the veterans groups: "For more than a year, veterans groups and others have charged that the Enola Gay script written by Harwit and other Air and Space Museum curators tends to present the Japanese as hapless victims of American aggression and racism in World War II instead of as militarists who brought on the atomic bomb by starting the war." This characterization of the script, and the debate, is factually inaccurate and slanderous. But since it is what the veterans organizations think, perhaps it should be reported. But why didn't Ringle and Meyer report what other parties to this dispute think? Why was no effort made to balance this statement by quoting a historian? If they had picked up the phone and asked Martin Sherwin, who sat on the museum's advisory board for the script, they could have easily obtained a quote which would have provided some balance. Or any of a dozen other historians who have written on this subject and followed the Enola Gay controversy. But this is typical of Ringle's and Meyer's reporting. They could have reported that from the perspective of a great many knowledgeable individuals, Dr. Harwit was clearly being hounded by a biased interest group (the American Legionnaires) and several right-wing, know-nothing Congressmen who haven't read any books on the subject and have no idea what they are talking about. But they preferred to report what these politicians said as fact.

Jan 26, 1995: George Will, columnist, praises the Washington Post's coverage of the Enola Gay controversy, which should be prime evidence of bias: "Washington knows what the Smithsonian is up to, thanks to the reporting of the Post's Ken Ringle and The Post's editorials."

Jan 27, 1995: Eugene Meyer: "Smithsonian May Drop A-Bomb Exhibit" Meyer reports, "When Harwit lowered the number [the casualty estimate number], based on a single historian's interpretation of one document, the American Legion last week demanded cancellation of the entire exhibit." Meyer is suggesting that Harwit capriciously amended the casualty estimate, and did so based on the advice of merely one historian. He fails to report that Harwit really had no choice unless he wished to consciously include in the exhibit a "fact" which he now knew to be untrue. Meyer fails to report that the historian in question, Barton

Bernstein, is the author of the single most authoritative journal article on this rather narrow and obscure question: what was Harry Truman told about casualty estimates and when? His work on this question has been thoroughly debated and inspected and still is considered the authoritative judgment on the matter. Meyer completely misses a great story here. He could have reported how Bernstein persuaded Harwit. It was in fact quite dramatic. Bernstein turned to Harwit in the November meeting with the delegation of historians and said, "We have our documents [on this casualty estimate question], where are yours to justify your figure?" Harwit had to admit he didn't have any documents. To suggest, in this context, that Harwit was caving in to the opinion of merely "one historian" is an outrageous distortion of what happened.

Jan 30, 1995: Eugene Meyer: an admiring profile of Paul Tibbets: "Target: Smithsonian / The Man who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima wants Exhibit scuttled." This piece is full of invective against "revisionist arguments" and makes no attempt to balance its admiring portrait of an admittedly likeable guy (Tibbets) with any questions about his obviously questionable view of historical events. It is a presentation of history from the perspective of the foxhole (or in this case, the cockpit) with no attempt to portray how the battle looked from the perspective of those making decisions in the White House. It is one-sided. For example, Meyer writes, "'It was a beautiful military target,' Tibbets says, referring to Hiroshima. It sounds harsh, but this is above all a military man speaking." A military man speaking? This is a great quote and Meyer is fully right to include it. But what are the facts? He quotes Tibbets saying Hiroshima was "the center of everything being done to resist an [Allied] invasion." Now is this true? What do historians think of this assertion? Well, if Meyer had called any of the historians who have written any of the books on this subject in the last twenty years, he would have been told that Tibbet's assertion was questionable, debatable at the very least, and probably an outright falsehood. Hiroshima did have some munitions factories on the outskirts of the city. But Tibbets was instructed to target the bomb on the center of the city. Hiroshima did contain one military headquarters for one of the home island armies. But its military significance can be judged by the fact that the city remained at the bottom of the Air Force's target list throughout the war. Hiroshima, in fact, became a target for the atomic bomb precisely because of its low military significance; it had been untouched by previous bombings and was therefore an ideal target on which to demonstrate the destructive force of the new weapon. Meyer is clearly ignorant of all of this. In his ignorance he is reduced to being a pure propagandist for an official version of history.

Jan 31, 1995: Eugene Meyer: "Smithsonian Scuttles Exhibit" Meyer quotes the reaction of one military historian, one

member of a "peace group" but no historians of the atomic bombings. They are clearly irrelevant.

Feb. 1, 1995: Washington Post editorial: "The Smithsonian Changes Course" This editorial begins by admitting that the cancellation "is an intellectual abdication..." But the edit then says, "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." In fact, the Post editorial writer got it backwards. The know-nothings did use political power to distort history, and worse to censor historical documents from a tax-payer funded museum. Why they did so with the support of The Washington Post's editorial board is a mystery.

Feb. 1, 1995: Joel Achenbach : "The Pabulum Museum" In an otherwise funny feature on the cancellation, this reporter writes, "For some reason academics have a natural lefty bent. They're intellectual southpaws: They throw left, catch left, teach left, think left. What is considered left by most people is considered orthodox in many academic circles. Gar Alperovitz, a historian who argues that it was unnecessary to drop the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, contended yesterday that his view is mainstream in academia." He then quotes Alperovitz, and concludes, "Regular people don't want to see America trashed at the Air and Space Museum." This is all very amusing. Unfortunately, its affect is Joe McCarthy doing a comic routine. The aim here is clearly to marginalize Alperovitz, label him as a lefty, anti-American, intellectual insanely bent on trashing America. It warns readers that anyone with such historical views risks being labeled in the same manner.

Feb. 4, 1995: Gar Alperovitz, op ed, "taking exception" replies two months later to the attack on him in Robert Newman's Nov. 30th op ed. It is certainly commendable that the Post found room to publish the author of one of the classic books on the decision to drop the bomb. But by using only Alperovitz, and by not soliciting op eds from Sherwin, Goldberg, Messer, et al. they make it easier for to suggest that Alperovitz is a party of one. (Why, for instance, didn't the editors or reporters of the Washington Post interview McGeorge Bundy or ask him for an op ed on? If they had, they would have learned that Bundy, the author of the first defense of the bombing decision, published in Harper's in 1947, now has retracted much of what he wrote nearly fifty years ago. That would have been interesting and news-

worthy. But it would not have fit into the perspective the Post editors obviously wanted to push on the Enola Gay controversy.)

This is hammered into the reader of Alperovitz's reply by the fact that the Post editors decided to package his piece with yet another Op Ed by Edwin Yoder, Jr. entitled, "...Or Hiroshima Cult?" Yoder's thesis is a continuation of Acherbach's comic McCarthyism. For Yoder, who is actually relying on Newman, those historians who are critical of the Hiroshima bombings are merely part of a "Hiroshima Cult." "Those who are content with cults, whether celebratory or derogatory, will worship as they like. Those who want history will read Newman." Yoder regurgitates Newman's thesis that "revisionist views of Harry Truman and the atomic bomb sprang from the tragic national division over Vietnam..." In fact, revisionist arguments about the bomb began much earlier and came directly as a consequence of the declassification or release from private archives of such critical pieces of archival evidence as Henry Stimson's diary (released by McGeorge Bundy in 1960) and Harry Truman's diary (discovered in 1978). Yoder's piece is merely a McCarthyite attempt to label critics of the Hiroshima decision as illegitimate. (Does Yoder believe Mac Bundy--or for that matter, Gen. Eisenhower--is part of this "Hiroshima Cult"?)

Feb. 7, 1995: Colman McCarthy, columnist, commenting on the cancellation, McCarthy writes, "Faced with posturing politicians and ranting militarists, the Smithsonian caved...Why this catering to American Legionnaires and similar groups who demand a one-sided version of history?"

Feb. 19, 1995: James Van de Velde, Op Ed, "Enola Gay Saved Lives, Period."

March 30, 1995: Eugene Meyer attends a panel discussion and press conference on the Enola Gay controversy at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians. But he publishes nothing. A tape-recording of this event is available and clearly demonstrates that this was an electrifying event attended by over three hundred historians who listened as a panel of historians lacerated the Smithsonian's censorship and the Washington Post's shoddy reporting. A letter with over a hundred signatories calling for a national teach-in on Hiroshim was released. Another letter was released by a delegation of Japanese historians which called for exhibits in Japan depicting Japanese atrocities during the war and exhibits in America depicting the tragic victims of the world's first atomic bombing. None of this was reported on by Meyer.

April 15, 1995: Washington Post editorial: "Apologies for Hiroshima?" The editorial writers assert without any evidence, "The chances of an early and voluntary surrender in the homeland were poor." They argue, "The nuclear bombs were a success in the crucial sense that they were followed by an immediate end to the

fighting with no further American deaths." No apologies are necessary and President Clinton need not have even added the "cautious qualification" that President Truman made the correct choice 'based on the facts he had before him.'" In other words, there should be no doubts raised about the decision.

Historians'
Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima

QUOTES FROM VARIOUS DOCUMENTS AND MEMOIRS ON HIROSHIMA

Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender...

My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children...¹

Joseph C. Grew, Undersecretary/Acting Secretary of State

The greatest obstacle to unconditional surrender by the Japanese is their belief that this would entail the destruction or permanent removal of the Emperor and the institution of the Throne. If some indication can now be given the Japanese that they themselves, when once thoroughly defeated and rendered impotent to wage war in future, will be permitted to determine their own future political structure, they will be afforded a method of saving face without which surrender will be highly unlikely.

The President said that he was interested in what I said because his own thoughts had been following the same line....²

Shunichi Kase, Japanese Minister to Switzerland

A May 12, 1945 memorandum from O.S.S. Chief "Wild Bill" Donovan to President Harry S Truman detailing an approach by the Japanese Minister to Switzerland, notes that Kase reportedly:

believes that one of the few provisions the Japanese would insist upon would be the retention of the Emperor as the only safeguard against Japan's conversion to Communism. Kase feels that Under Secretary of State Grew, whom he considers the best US authority on Japan, shares this opinion.³

General Dwight D. Eisenhower,

The first full public statement by Eisenhower (beyond the brief mention in *Crusade in Europe*) is contained in the book the president wrote immediately after leaving office, his 1963 *Mandate for Change*.¹ In it Eisenhower also recalled the meeting at which Stimson told him about plans to use the bomb—and added the following information:

During his recitation of the relevant facts, I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives. It was my belief that Japan was, at that very moment, seeking some way to surrender with a minimum loss of "face." The Secretary was deeply perturbed by my attitude, almost angrily refuting the reasons I gave for my quick conclusions.²

In an interview with *Newsweek* reporter Jacquin Sanders Eisenhower said:

We'd had a nice evening together at headquarters in Germany, nice dinner, everything was fine. Then [Secretary of War Henry L.] Stimson got this cable saying the bomb had been perfected and was ready to be dropped. The cable was in code, you know the way they do it, "The lamb is born" or some damn thing like that. So then he told me they were going to drop it on the Japanese. Well, I listened, and I didn't volunteer anything because, after all, my war was in Europe, and it wasn't up to me. But I was getting more and more depressed just thinking about it. Then he asked for my opinion, so I told him I was against it on two counts. First, the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing. Second, I hated to see our country be the first to use such a weapon. Well . . . the old gentleman got furious. And I can see how he would. After all, it had been his responsibility to push for all the huge expenditure to develop the bomb, which of course he had a right to do and was right to do. Still, it was an awful problem.³

Army Air Force General Henry H. Arnold

In his 1949 memoirs Gen. Arnold observed that
...it always appeared to us that, atomic bomb or no atomic bomb, the Japanese were already on the verge of collapse.⁴

Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War

Byrnes was opposed to a prompt and early warning to Japan...⁵

¹ Emphasis and ellipsis both in the original.

Harry S Truman, President

After his initial pre-conference meeting with Stalin on July 17—and after Stalin reported on his negotiations with Chinese Foreign Minister T.V. Soong on the Yalta understandings concerning the Far East—the president observed:

Most of the big points are settled...

Truman then went on to record Stalin's confirmation that:

He'll be in the Jap War on August 15.

Finally, the president noted his own judgment:

Fini Japs when that comes about.⁶

The next day Truman wrote in a private letter to his wife:

... I've gotten what I came for—Stalin goes to war August 15 with no strings on it. He wanted a Chinese settlement—and it is practically made—in a better form than I expected. Soong did better than I asked him....I'll say that we'll end the war a year sooner now, and think of the kids who won't be killed! That is the important thing.⁷

The president's journal entry of July 18, 1945:

P.M. [Churchill] & I ate alone. Discussed Manhattan (it is a success). Decided to tell Stalin about it. Stalin had told P.M. of telegram from Jap Emperor asking for peace. Stalin also read his answer to me. It was satisfactory. Believe Japs will fold up before Russia comes in.⁸

Ralph Bard, Undersecretary of the Navy

Ralph Bard is the only person known to have formally dissented from the use of the atomic bomb without advance warning. In a June 27, 1945 memorandum Bard declared:

Ever since I have been in touch with this program I have had a feeling that before the bomb is actually used against Japan that Japan should have some preliminary warning for say two or three days in advance of use. The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation and the fair play attitude of our people generally is responsible in the main for this feeling.

During recent weeks I have also had the feeling very definitely that the Japanese government may be searching for some opportunity which they could use as a medium of surrender. Following the three-power conference emissaries from this country could contact representatives from Japan somewhere on the China Coast and make representations with regard to Russia's position and at the same time give them some information regarding the proposed use of atomic power, together with whatever assurances the President might care to make with regard to the Emperor of Japan and

the treatment of the Japanese nation following unconditional surrender. It seems quite possible to me that this presents the opportunity which the Japanese are looking for.¹¹

John J. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War

At Potsdam, John J. McCloy heard of another Japanese peace feeler, this time delivered to Allen Dulles, the U.S. O.S.S. representative in Geneva. As Dulles reported it, Tokyo was hesitating only over the term "unconditional surrender":

They wanted to keep their emperor and the constitution, fearing that otherwise a military surrender would only mean the collapse of all order and of all discipline...¹²

John J. McCloy thought this report so significant that he had Dulles flown up to Potsdam to report personally on the peace feeler. He noted in his diary of July 27, 1945:

Maybe the Secretary's big bomb may not be dropped—the Japs had better hurry if they are to avoid it.¹³

On May 28, 1945 McCloy recommended that the phrase "unconditional surrender" be eliminated:

I feel that today Japan is struggling to find a way out of the horrible mess she has got herself into;...Unconditional surrender is a phrase which means loss of face and I wonder whether we cannot accomplish everything we want to accomplish in regard to Japan without the use of that term....¹⁴

McCloy later recalled that the day before the June 18, 1945 White House meeting:

I said, Mr. Stimson, it seemed to me that we were now at a point where our superiority was so vast over the Japanese; there were no more cities to bomb, no more carriers to sink or battleships to shell; we had difficulty finding targets; we had this tremendous moral and physical ascendancy which resulted from our win in Germany and our moving across the Pacific from the treachery of Pearl Harbor to the very doors of Japan; and I thought there must be some other means that ought to be explored in terminating the war without further bloodshed....he said he was inclined to think that this was right....¹⁵

McCloy expressed ethical concerns about the bomb:

God give us the intelligence and character to use it for good purpose.¹⁶

We should have given the Japs warning at least of what we had.¹⁷

General of the Army George C. Marshall

In a memo dated May 29, 1945, Marshall stated that the atomic bomb should: first be used against straight military objectives such as a large naval installation....¹⁸

And that if the Japanese still did not capitulate:

we ought to designate a number of large manufacturing areas from which people would be warned to leave—telling the Japanese that we intended to destroy such centers.... every effort should be made to keep our record of warning clear.... We must offset by such warning methods the opprobrium which might follow from ill-considered employment of such force...¹⁹

Leo Szilard, Manhattan Project Physicist

Mr. Byrnes did not argue that it was necessary to use the bomb against the cities of Japan in order to win the war...Mr. Byrnes's...view [was] that our possessing and demonstrating the bomb would make Russia more manageable in Europe...²⁰

ENDNOTES

1. Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, I Was There: The Personal Story of the Chief of Staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. Based on His Notes and Diaries Made at the Time (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950), p. 441.
2. Joseph C. Grew, Turbulent Era: A Diplomatic Record of Forty Years 1904-1945, Vol. II (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952), pp. 1429-1431.
3. Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, Vol. VI, p. 481.
4. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 1953-1956 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.), pp. 312-313.
5. "Ike on Ike," Newsweek, November 11, 1963, pp. 107-110, cited material on p. 107.
6. H.H. Arnold, Global Mission (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1949), p. 598.
7. Stimson Diary, July 17, 1945, Stimson Papers, Yale University.
8. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. 53.
9. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., Dear Bess: The Letters from Harry to Bess Truman, 1910-1959 (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), p. 519.
10. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman (New York: Penguin, 1982), pp. 53-54.
11. Memorandum on the use of S-1 bomb, Ralph A. Bard, June 27, 1945, File 77, Roll 6, H-B Files, M1108, National Archives; reprinted in Stoff, Fanton, Williams, The Manhattan Project, p. 162.
12. Allen Dulles's foreword to Per Jacobsson's pamphlet The Per Jacobsson Meditation, Balse Centre for Economic and Financial Research, ser. C, no. 4, published about 1967, on file in Allen Dulles Papers, box 22, folder John J. McCloy 1945, Princeton University.
13. McCloy Diary, July 27, 1945, McCloy Papers, Amherst College Archives.
14. Memorandum for Colonel Stimson, from John J. McCloy, May 28, 1945, Stimson Safe File, (Japan), Entry 74A, RG 107, National Archives.
15. John J. McCloy interview with Fred Freed for NBC White Paper, "The Decision to Drop the Bomb," (interview conducted sometime between May 1964 and February 1965), Roll 1, p. 11, File 50A, Box SP2, McCloy Papers, Amherst College Archives.
16. McCloy diary, 7/21/45, DY box 1, folder 18, John J. McCloy, Amherst College Archives.
17. "Dr. Freeman's Impressions," McCloy diary, box DY 1/3, folder 19, John J. McCloy; Amherst College Archives; McCloy interview with Kai Bird, Sept. 14, 1984.

18. John J. McCloy, "Memorandum of Conversation with General Marshall, May 29, 1945--11:45 a.m.," Stimson Safe File (S-1), RG 107, National Archives.
19. John J. McCloy, "Memorandum of Conversation with General Marshall, May 29, 1945--11:45 a.m.," Stimson Safe File (S-1), RG 107, National Archives.
20. Leo Szilard, "A Personal History of the Atomic Bomb," University of Chicago Roundtable, No. 601 (September 25, 1949), pp. 14-15. See also Gar Alperovitz, Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 290.

FORGETTING THE BOMB

The Assault On History

MARTIN J. SHERWIN

On January 30, I. Michael Heyman, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, bowing to pressure from veterans' organizations and Congressional critics, announced the drastic revision of a controversial exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum, "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II." Perhaps no other public controversy in recent times demonstrates so clearly how much influence the sensibilities of 1945 still have on the politics of 1995, and how fifty years of the cold war have kept the need alive for Americans to be defined by World War II and, in turn, to protect its reputation.

To Americans, the defining characteristic of World War II was its lack of ambiguity. It was not just "the good war," it was the model war, the ideal war, the unifying war. Most Americans, public opinion polls conclusively demonstrated, were happy about how it ended. The atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki seemed an appropriate and just

finale to a war against a vicious enemy that had launched a surprise attack on American territory.

But that atomic ending soon raised troubling questions. John Hersey's *Hiroshima* created sympathy for the victims. Reports that the Japanese had been seeking ways to surrender created doubts about the necessity of using atomic bombs. Hanson Baldwin, military editor of *The New York Times*, Norman Cousins, editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and David Lawrence, editor of *U.S. News*, discussed alternatives to both the atomic bombings and an invasion.

By the fall of 1946 questions about the atomic bombings had become so prevalent that James Conant, the president of Harvard University and the former senior science administrator of the Manhattan Project, urged former Secretary of War Henry Stimson to write an article explaining why the atomic bombings were both justified and necessary. Stimson's article, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," was published in the February 1947 issue of *Harper's Magazine*. Arguing that the bomb was used to end the war quickly in order to save American lives, Stimson neglected to make reference to the many notations in his diary—which he otherwise relied upon—that suggested the advantages of using the atomic bomb during the war in order to deal more effectively with the Soviet Union afterward. Nor did he comment in this article—as he did in his autobiography published a year later—on the option of ending the war just as quickly, without using the atomic bomb, by modifying the demand for unconditional surrender. "It is possible, in the light of the final surrender," Stimson wrote in *On Active Service in Peace and War*, "that a clearer and earlier exposition of American willingness to reinstate the Emperor would have produced an earlier ending to the war." [Emphasis added.] The suggestion that the war could have ended earlier, without the use of the atomic bomb, was as upsetting in 1947 as it is in 1995.

The ambiguities introduced into the discussion of the atomic bomb in 1946 by Hersey, Baldwin, Cousins, Lawrence and Stimson, among others, were quickly submerged by the rising tide of the cold war, McCarthyism and the Korean War. The cold war forced everything that questioned "the good war" into the far left corner of our political basement. The critical histories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that were written were either ignored by the mainstream press or tainted as leftist and revisionist. The natural discussion of this important issue was stifled. Thus the battle over the Enola Gay exhibit was not a debate over interpretations of history. It was, as Edward Linenthal has written, a struggle between popular memory and history, between the commemorative and the historical, cut off by fifty years of the cold war.

I was a member of the historical advisory board for the Enola Gay exhibit. My strong impression of the first draft of the script for the exhibition, which I shared with the other advisers, was that its historical section was inadequate. No one taking the trouble to study carefully the documents that were to be displayed would understand why so many historians challenge what President Truman and Secretary of War Stimson told the public about why the atomic bombs were used. The draft script offered only a glimpse into the declassified top-secret documents that have compelled historians to rewrite the wartime history of the atomic bomb project. To those of us familiar with those documents it appeared as if the curators were giving undue attention to established myths at the expense of historical research. In a word, the draft script was *cautious*, which explains why the Air Force historians on the committee inquiry praised it as "a most impressive piece of work."

This view of the exhibit was not shared by John Correll, the editor of *Air Force Magazine*. Furious at director Martin Harwit for presumably masterminding the transformation of the Air and Space Museum from an Air Force showcase into something more serious, he published a critical review of the exhibit, "War Stories at Air and Space." In the April 1994 issue of *AFM*, Counting pictures of dead Japanese versus dead Americans, and affirming that veterans believed that the museum had become "an unpatriotic institution," Correll condemned the exhibit as pro-Japanese. Editorials for *The Washington Star* and, astonishingly, for *The Washington Post* as well, swallowed Correll's bait, encouraging politicians running for re-election to join the attack.

The attack on the Enola Gay exhibit is part of the 'culture wars' raging through America.

By means of a Senate resolution, and a threatening letter from the relevant committee chairman and his colleagues, the two houses of Congress joined forces to threaten the curators' jobs and the museum's funding. In taking this action, Representative Peter Blute of the Committee on Public Works and Transportation, Senator Nancy Kassebaum and the other Congressional critics of the Enola Gay historical exhibit laid the foundations for a post-cold war form of McCarthyism

in which the Japanese were substituted for the Soviets. Old McCarthyite smears such as "unpatriotic," "left wing" and "anti-American" were recycled in this deceitful campaign to decree an official history of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

To say that this assault on a cautious presentation of the history of the debate over the atomic bombings is part of the turmoil within our political culture, or part of the "culture wars" that are raging through America, is to state the obvious. It is one with the general attack by the right on the news media, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National History Standards report. It is an assault on the professional standards of a new generation of curators, whose training (not their politics) in history and curatorial science obliges them to present new and competing scholarly perspectives along with the expected and familiar.

Conservatives have been attacking the Smithsonian's museums regularly since 1988, arguing that the museums are merely "the nation's attic," where artifacts should be displayed but not evaluated, interpreted or contextualized. Those who have followed this campaign will recall, perhaps with a touch of irony, that the first target was the 1988 exhibit, "Toward a More Perfect Union," which documented the forced removal of Japanese-Americans to relocation camps during World War II. Thus another objection of the museum's critics is the subjects themselves: America's dirty laundry should not be hung in Washington, they insist.

In light of the events surrounding the Enola Gay exhibit, we might want to consider revising Santayana's famous aphorism: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." A more appropriate formulation for the current state of affairs might read: "Those who insist only on their memories of the past are condemning the rest of us to avoid it." Of course, that is exactly the objective of the 1995 attacks on the history of 1945. □

Martin J. Sherwin is director of the John Sloan Dickey Center for International Understanding at Dartmouth College and Walter S. Dickson Professor of History at Tufts University. He is the author of A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and the Origins of the Arms Race (Random House).