

May 15, 1995

Chair and Members
U.S. Senate Rules Committee
Russell Bldg, Rm 305
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Committee Members:

As an individual, longtime member of the World War II Studies Association--formerly the American Committee on the History of the Second World War--I was deeply concerned by the implications of the Smithsonian Institution's intended, distorted depiction of the Asian Pacific War and our dropping of the atom bombs. (For an excellent article on Hirohima and the historical battles about it, please see Penn State professor Robert J. Maddox's "The Biggest Decision: Why We Had to Drop the Atomic Bomb," in the May-June 1995 issue of American Heritage magazine.) The exhibit text's intimation that Japanese militarism was simply a reaction to the racism of European colonialism would have been utterly ludicrous, considering the even worse racism the Japanese aggressors exhibited toward the Chinese and other Asian peoples they were supposedly "liberating"--to say nothing of the ruthless sexism demonstrated by their enslavement of Asian and European "comfort women."

The Japanese' barbaric treatment of prisoners (and, on occasion, of their own would-be rescuers/captors) and their penchant for suicide established the savage, no-mercy tone of the entire war. Their Pearl Harbor "sneak attack," on a Sunday morning even while they were conducting peace negotiations in Washington, revealed a dimension of viciousness and treachery by the Japanese' governing militarists which earned the profound--if not permanent--rage and distrust of the American people and their leaders.

Travesties like the Smithsonian's intended omission of these essential facts are not only bad history: coming from a governmental agency, they have additional weight and credibility. A distortion of the motives for our use of the atom bombs by an "official" historian/agency, like this, can lead many Japanese people to consider themselves victims of the Allies rather than of their own militarists. This could relieve much of the Japanese people's postwar recrimination against militarism which has so far stifled any resurrection of that evil.

Unfortunately, this kind of "omissive history" is becoming all too typical of the historical profession in the United States. At the American Historical Association convention in Chicago in January, I stood up to challenge the "one-sided, hind-sighted, and all too 'academic'" panel presentation on Hiroshima, chaired by Dartmouth professor, Dr. Marty Sherwin. (The panel's presenters abetted various "revisionist" claims: that the American people didn't support unconditional surrender, that a substantive Japanese peace overture had been made and was known to President Truman, that a primary reason the bombs were dropped was that their creators simply wanted to see if they worked--ergo, regardless of the human grief/consequences--etc.)

While "liberal" professors probably outnumber "conservative" in academia, they have generally respected and encouraged a diversity of opinion in their classes, to judge by my own experience as a graduate student at Western Illinois University in Macomb. However, the new generation of historians taking over the profession exhibits far less perspective, balance, and tolerance, and "politically correct" history is proliferating throughout American education and bureaucracies. This cancer to truth will require decisive measures to monitor and remedy.

Even on a few of the Internet discussion groups for academic historians, I have seen (and experienced) editorial bias/censorship against conservative viewpoints, on occasion--despite the efforts of people (like "H-Net" organizer Richard Jensen of the University of Illinois, for example) to make sure issues like Hiroshima are being addressed in a balanced and tolerant manner. (The power of Internet is inestimable!, and it has moved the United States to the position of ultimate leadership of international academic/intellectual life. Congress would do well to support it fully, as a public works institution, while making sure that the open and balanced freedom of ideas and expression is maintained.)

To AHA's credit, I was given fair opportunity to raise questions and participate from the floor. However, it is easy for some of the more extreme /outrageous "academic exercises" being held there to be given undue credence in the media, at home and abroad. Indeed, Dr. Sherwin has made trips to Japan, presumably to publicize and coordinate his Hiroshima "teach-ins" being held on campuses over here.

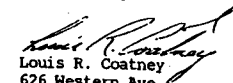
Not to AHA's credit, exasperation was expressed at our meeting of the World War II Studies Association--attended by such military history luminaries as Dr. Gerhard Weinberg and Marine Corps historian Ben Frank--about the contemptuous way our request for a "50th anniversary" military history panel (on amphibious warfare) was denied by the AHA. (The "unofficial" panel put on by the World War II Studies Association itself, then, was excellent--including presentations on Carlson's "Marine Raiders," Tarawa, and other topics.)

It is very easy for other countries and peoples to become confused and misled by the contradictory dialogues of our country's "open forum" approach to academic and political discourse and debate. Congress' passage of the prewar Draft by only one vote was a key factor which led Japanese militarists to believe that Americans wouldn't have the stomach to wage war in the Pacific and would capitulate to Japanese demands after a knockout blow at our Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

This is why I have proposed an International Historical Commission on the Asian Pacific War. (Please see the attachment.) It is important that Pacific nations achieve a final "official" resolution and reconciliation of the truth about that tragic war and its various issues. Japan is on the verge of strategic superpower status, and it is vital that the Japanese people understand that it is not just Americans who need them to acknowledge and forswear--in their educational programs, as well as the rest of their society--the evil of their World War II militarism. Any veto by Japan of the historical findings of this commission (or of the educational dissemination of those findings) should directly impact any consideration of Japan for U.N. Security Council status.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my concerns.

Respectfully,


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January 5, 1995

PROPOSAL: An International Historical Commission on the Asian Pacific War

Fifty years ago, the soldiers and civilians of many nations died in the Pacific War. The peoples of China, the Philippines, and Japan suffered especially. The battles were many and reflected the bitter antipathy of the adversaries. Regrettably, much of that bitter antipathy remains as a poison to Pacific nations' relations and future.

The Japanese government and educational system has frequently refused to acknowledge responsibility for the initiation of the Pacific War or for atrocities perpetrated by Japanese militarists against not only Allied servicepeople but also against civilians in Asian lands. Filipino deaths alone, due to Japanese atrocities and the war, have been estimated as high as one million. Instructional omission or misrepresentation by Japanese educators of important Pacific War events like "The Rape of Nanking" (1937) have raised international concerns.

Meanwhile, some people believe the American dropping of the atom bombs to have been unjustified and to have been crimes against humanity as serious in principle as any others in the Pacific War. In the United States, the intellectual Left is marshalling its forces to prove Hiroshima was an unnecessary and possibly racist tragedy. This may lead Japanese to consider themselves victims of the Allies rather than of their own militarists, and it could relieve much of the postwar public feeling and pressure against militarism in Japan which has so far stifled any resurrection of that monster.

Similarly, rumors of Allied atrocities--against Okinawan civilians in 1945, for example--should be investigated objectively and resolved fairly.

In general, the German people and government have done far more to remember and condemn the aggression and atrocities of the Nazis, than the Japanese have done in regard to Imperial Japanese militarism. Recent revelations in Russia about the Soviet Union's aggression and atrocities during World War II have shown a willingness by Russians to face some unpleasant truths about Soviet conduct and its consequences.

In 1991, lingering bitterness led some American veterans to refuse Mitsuo Fuchida--the strike commander of the Japanese naval air squadrons which attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941--direct participation in the 50th year memorial service. This happened despite Fuchida's postwar conversion to Christianity and his repentance for his role in that massacre of 3,000 young American servicemen and civilians. An important opportunity for reconciliation was lost.

In America, the World War II generation rightly takes great pride in having won "The Just War"--sometimes even overlooking credit due to the World War I generation for its leadership and planning. However, the "blood, sweat, toil and tears" of the actual battles and victories will all be lost, if their cruelly earned lessons are distorted and/or forgotten. The true history of war is the most important memorial to those who have suffered the ultimate price for it. As survivors of the Jewish Holocaust would tell us, "Never again!" means "Never forget!" Thus we are now engaged in a second World World War II: for the Truth.

The Proposed Commission

I therefore suggest that an international historical commission be convened to investigate the basic facts and issues of the Asian Pacific War, to achieve a final resolution of those, and to produce a basic position paper and video presentation for continuing dissemination to students of all the participating countries by their governments. A similar commission constructively addressed historical differences between the Polish and Soviet peoples in the mid-1980s.

With regard to war efforts, roles, and losses, the commission should be composed of five major, voting blocs: China, Japan, Pacific Rim Allies, other nations/peoples of Asia and Oceania, and European Allies. Each bloc could exercise veto power against any final consensus. However, in view of the United Nations' birth from the struggle against Axis militarism and aggression, Japan's exercise of its veto power on this historical commission should directly and decisively impact any present or future consideration of it for membership on the UN Security Council.

Although, logically, historians should make up most of the delegations' membership, room should be allowed for actual veterans, journalists, etc. Members should be truly representative of their countries and selected by their national legislatures. Decisions within the blocs could be by simple or two-thirds majority. The blocs' membership could be composed as follows:

China:	15	members
People's Republic of China and Hong Kong	10	
Republic of China	5	
Japan and Okinawa	12	
Pacific Rim Allies	12	
Canada	1	
Russia/Commonwealth of Independent States	1	
United States	10	
Other Asian and Pacific nations:	16	
Australia	2	
Philippines:	3	
Burma	1	
India	1	
Indochina	1	
Indonesia	1	
Malasia	1	
New Zealand	1	
North and South Korea	1	
Oceania	1	
Pakistan/Bengladesh	1	
Singapore	1	
Thailand	1	
European Allies	7	
France	1	
Great Britain	4	
Netherlands	2	
	62	

A country could request membership in a different bloc. For membership in the United States delegation, for example, I would expect Congress to draw heavily from a professional association like the World War II Studies Association.

Questions, criticisms, and comments on this proposal are welcome.