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Excerpts from Smithsonian Secretary I. Michael Heyman's Statement at the opening of the Enola Gay exhibit at the National Air & Space Museum

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"This display commemorates the end of World War II and the role of the B-29 Enola Gay in the atomic mission that destroyed Hiroshima and, along with the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, led to the surrender of Japan to the United States on August 14, 1945.

"The National Air and Space Museum originally planned a much larger exhibition, which concentrated attention on the devastation caused by the atomic bombs and on differing interpretations of the history surrounding President Truman's decision to drop them. That planned exhibition provoked intense criticism from World War II veterans and others, who stated that it portrayed the United States as the aggressor and the Japanese as victims and reflected unfavorably on the valor and courage of American veterans.

"The Museum changed its plan substantially, but the criticism persisted and led to my decision to replace that exhibition with a simpler one. In a statement I issued at that time I said the following:

"I have concluded that we made a basic error in attempting to couple a historical treatment of the use of the atomic weapons with the 50th anniversary commemoration of the end of the war. Exhibitions have many purposes, equally worthwhile. But we need to know which of many goals is paramount, and not to confuse them....

"...the new exhibition should be a much simpler one, essentially a display, permitting the Enola Gay and its crew to speak for themselves. The focal point of the display would be the Enola Gay. Along with the plane would be a video about its crew. It is particularly important in this commemorative year that veterans and other Americans have the opportunity to see the restored portion of the fuselage of the Enola Gay.

"The exhibition you are entering does what I intended, with a few changes. We have added material on the Smithsonian's restoration of the Enola Gay and some explanatory material on the B-29 aircraft and the 509th Composite Group, which was led by then-Col. Paul Tibbets, who piloted the Enola Gay on the Hiroshima mission. We also have a section at the end where we ask for your reactions to the exhibition. We welcome your comments."

I. Michael Heyman
Secretary
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