

A Narrative for Our Time

The *Enola Gay* “and after that, period”

ROBERT C. POST

To say that a thing happened the way it did is not at all illuminating. We can understand the significance of what did happen only if we contrast it with what might have happened.

— Morris Raphael Cohen

Any historical object can sustain a number of equally plausible descriptions or narratives of its processes.

— Hayden White

For a little while in the fall of 2003, during the run-up to the centennial of flight on 17 December and the opening of the National Air and Space Museum’s satellite in Virginia, the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, historians whose names have often graced the pages of *Technology and Culture* began to turn up with unusual regularity on television and radio and in the popular press: among others, Roger Bilstein, Robert van der Linden, Richard Hallion, Bayla Singer, Joe Corn, John Anderson, Peter Jakab, and, perhaps most ubiquitous, Tom Crouch. Several had written books whose publication coincided with the centennial—Hallion’s *Taking Flight: Inventing the Aerial Age from Antiquity through the First World War*, for example, and Crouch’s *Wings: A History of Aviation from Kites to the Space Age*. A feature article in the December *Smithsonian*, “Taking Wing: A Century of Flight,”

Bob Post was involved in about two dozen exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution. One of the first was *1876: A Centennial Exhibition*, whose “Victorian wonders” were applauded in *Smithsonian* by an unsung freelancer, Lynne Vincent Cheney, whose husband Richard was President Gerald Ford’s chief of staff at the time and who also plays a role in this narrative. For help with the form and content, Post thanks Alex Roland, Art Molella, Dian Post, Dick Kohn, Joanne Gernstein London, Joe Corn, Joe Schultz, John Staudenmaier, Matt Roth, Rosalind Williams, and especially Tom Crouch. He also expresses appreciation for the dialogue with audiences at the Dibner Institute, Stevens Institute, Colby College, and the University of Pennsylvania.

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quoted a half-dozen historians on the significance of Kitty Hawk but gave pride of place to Crouch: "Aviation is the definitive technology of the 20th century," he said. "Flight symbolized our deepest aspirations, like freedom and control of our destiny."

Foremost among many biographers of the Wright brothers and chair of the First Flight Centennial Federal Advisory Board (a presidential appointment), Crouch clearly deserved first say about 17 December. Yet one wonders how many people browsing in *Smithsonian* connected the dots to a paragraph in a second feature article, on the new Udvar-Hazy Center, that began "Probably the best known—and most controversial—artifact on display is the *Enola Gay*" and alluded to a notorious conflict in the mid-1990s which had made the plane that delivered the atomic bomb that devastated Hiroshima into the most famous museum artifact in the world.¹ At the heart of that conflict was the question of how this plane was to be "interpreted" in the accompanying narrative—the script, in museological idiom—and for many people it was Crouch who came to personify attempts to infect the Smithsonian with "counterculture morality pageants." As a rhetorical firestorm raged on the op-ed pages of newspapers nationwide, Tom Crouch might have felt like he was losing control of *his* destiny.

In a remark that seemed tailored to confirm Hayden White's dictum about narrative as "intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality," Crouch had once asked his NASM boss, Martin Harwit: "Do you want to do an exhibition intended to make veterans feel good, or do you want an exhibition that will lead our visitors to think about the consequences of the atomic bombing of Japan?"² Crouch thought that combining the two was impossible. But Harwit disagreed, arguing that NASM could deal with the mission of the *Enola Gay* and at the same time honor Americans who had fought and died in the Pacific, and eventually Crouch decided to go along with an effort that cultural commentator Tom Engelhardt, writing in *Harper's*, termed "a kind of inspired folly."³

Which is not to trivialize Engelhardt's choice of the word inspired. How, indeed, could a national museum *not* address "the mission," which a poll conducted by *USA Today* and the Newseum had denominated the number-one news story of the twentieth century? (Invention of the airplane ranked fourth, after Pearl Harbor and the moon landing.) The work of writing the script for the planned exhibit was distributed among several

1. William Triplett, "Hold Everything!" *Smithsonian*, December 2003, 58–63, quote on 60.

2. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987), 14; Crouch to Harwit, 21 July 1993. This memo is reproduced in *The Enola Gay Debate*, one of several bound volumes of documents, articles, and manifestoes available from the Air Force Association in Arlington, Virginia.

3. Tom Engelhardt, "Fifty Years Under a Cloud: The Uneasy Search for Our Atomic History," *Harper's*, January 1996, 72.

members of the NASM staff, but everyone knew, as Crouch put it without a hint of conceit, that “I was the smart guy.” Crouch focused on the unspeakable extent of death and destruction, while his younger colleague Michael Neufeld analyzed the expansive historiography on the decision to drop the bomb. Overall, the script portrayed 6 August 1945 as both an end and a beginning, and one is reminded of Hayden White’s remarks about contriving “proper beginnings, middles, and ends” and the “illusory coherence” of historical narratives.⁴

What I have written here is an essay for early 2004 and so can have no “proper end,” but there are several possible beginnings, depending on one’s choice of context. If the context is strategic bombing, the beginning could be Guernica, Spain, in 1937, which was Harwit’s initial idea.⁵ If nuclear weaponry, then Soldier Field, Chicago, in 1942. If political intentionality, then the White House in 1945. If just a story of the museum’s relationship with the contested airplane, perhaps the fall of 1953, when the *Enola Gay* made its last flight, from Pyote Air Force Base in Texas to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, where people assumed (wrongly) that the Smithsonian was prepared to give it immediate attention. But rather than going back a half-century or more, for my purposes here a single decade is sufficient—to a fall day in 1993, when five men sat down to lunch in the dining room at NASM.

Three were from the museum: Crouch, who had joined the staff of NASM’s director Michael Collins with a new Ohio State University doctorate in 1974, even before the building was finished, and was now chair of the Department of Aeronautics; Harwit, a professor and historian of astronomy who had left Cornell University to become NASM’s director in 1987; and Neufeld, who had come to the museum from the University of Calgary as a fellow in 1988 and, after finishing a manuscript on German rocketry, was tapped by Harwit as curator for an exhibit slated to open on the fiftieth anniversary of VJ Day, *The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War*. Also on hand were General Monroe Hatch Jr., head of the Air Force Association—an organization founded by General H. H. “Hap” Arnold, who had commanded the Army

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4. Thirty-six thousand readers and an unspecified number of journalists responded to the poll; results are available at www.newseum.org/century/finalresults.htm. White, 24.

5. Aside from Zeppelin raids during World War I, the devastation of the Basque town of Guernica by Franco’s Nazi allies on 27 April 1937 is regarded as the first deliberate targeting of civilian populations from the air in order to “break the spirit” of resistance. A reproduction of Picasso’s mural *Guernica* that hangs outside the entrance to the United Nations Security Council often provides the backdrop for diplomats speaking to television reporters—but not always; it was covered up in February 2003 when Colin Powell went to the UN to make the case for invading Iraq. As to proper endings, I assume that a great many historical outcomes will be contingent on whether neoconservative unilateralism is as misconceived as it seems as I write.

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Air Forces during World War II and was responsible for the *Enola Gay* becoming Smithsonian property in the first place (indeed, was responsible for persuading Congress to authorize a National Air Museum in 1946)—and John Correll, editor of the AFA's *Air Force* magazine, the voice of the military aviation community, a formidable presence on Capitol Hill.

The artifacts slated for display in *The Crossroads* included a Japanese *Ohka*, a so-called piloted suicide bomb; a plutonium implosion bomb called "Fat Man"; and the forward cockpit of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress from the 509th Composite Group that President Truman deployed to drop a "Little Boy" uranium bomb on Hiroshima, the *Enola Gay*. In addition to such "engines of destruction"—a phrase coined by President Roosevelt seventy years ago—there were items like ruined timepieces and lunch boxes borrowed from museums in Japan. And there were many disturbing photos. Hatch and Correll had seen an outline, and, as Harwit later recalled, "they immediately lit into us." Too much about the devastation at ground zero, they said, too much about alleged moral ambiguities, too much that seemed to cast a shadow over the heroism of the American armed forces. General Paul Tibbets, who commanded the Hiroshima mission and had named his airplane in honor of his mother, would be widely quoted as denouncing NASM's "package of insults."⁶

After a tense two hours, Hatch and Correll were introduced to Neufeld's assistant, Joanne Gernstein, who told them that she had been in contact with several veterans of the 509th, including the *Enola Gay*'s navigator, radio operator, and tail gunner, all of whom had been supportive. Only slightly mollified, they told Harwit and Crouch that they wanted a role in planning the exhibit. Harwit was dubious about that, but promised that when a draft of the script was done he would send them a copy. It was a fateful moment; outside parties with axes to grind had rarely been given such a privilege, but afterward it would become a commonplace demand by self-proclaimed "stakeholders."⁷ As for the people who worked at NASM, they would soon learn what it meant to have run afoul of adversaries whose tentacles of power reached throughout the Pentagon and Congress, and, perhaps most important, to get branded as disrespectful (or worse) by veterans of the war in the Pacific.

The draft went to Correll's office in Virginia in February 1994. For a document that would need to be scissored into fragments and then silk-

6. Tibbets made this remark, though not for the first time, in an article titled "Our Job Was to Win," *American Legion*, November 1994, 68.

7. A facetious remark of mine—about a line-by-line review of the script by the American Legion perhaps leading, in another context, to a similar review by the Christian Coalition ("A Museum in Crisis," *U.S. News and World Report*, 13 February 1996, 74)—brought quite a few letters, one of them informing me that it would be God's will if the Christian Coalition "had the exclusive privilege of deciding what is exhibited and how."

screened on dozens of separate plaques and panels, it was remarkably hefty, on the order of fifty thousand words; including xeroxed photos, it ran to several hundred pages and may have taken time for Correll and his AFA colleagues to digest. But they could get the drift within a few paragraphs. In March, Correll published a report accusing NASM of betraying an official mandate to portray “the valor and sacrificial service of the men and women of the Armed Forces . . . as an inspiration to the present and future generations of America.” Much of this report would have jibed with the evolving perceptions of Harwit, Crouch, and Neufeld; they now understood that it was one thing for Paul Fussell to write that a dead Japanese soldier “had glorified his family and his Emperor” and that “for most Americans, the war was about revenge against the Japanese,” but needlessly inflammatory for NASM to tell of Americans fighting “a war of vengeance” and Japanese fighting “to preserve their unique culture against Western imperialism.”⁸ Even with a caveat about “graphic photographs about the horrors of war”—a sort of PG rating that could be interpreted as gratuitous—they understood that the ghastly scenes at ground zero were excessive. But the part about NASM’s mandate was simply wrong. Among other things, its mission was educational (hence the validity of Crouch’s remark about asking visitors “to think about the consequences of the atomic bombing of Japan”), and what Correll quoted about “valor and sacrificial service” was actually from the charter for a National Armed Forces Museum that had been authorized by Congress in 1961 but never funded.⁹

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Reference to the purpose of a nonexistent museum was immaterial, for *The Crossroads* could be read as “tendentious and moralizing” even by a historian who fully agreed about the obligation to address “consequences,” Richard Kohn, chair of the Curriculum in Peace, War, and Defense at the University of North Carolina. The weight of horrific descriptions and graphics, said Kohn, was “clearly on the Japanese side.”¹⁰ Some of the writing was quite awkward, as well, and in its remarks about what “scholars

8. Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York, 1989), 133, 138. The first iteration of the script, minus photo captions, is printed in Philip Nobile, ed., *Judgement at the Smithsonian* (New York, 1995), with the quoted phrases—which did unending damage to NASM despite being edited out of subsequent revisions—on page 3.

9. See Joanne M. Gernstein London, “A Modest Show of Arms: Exhibiting the Armed Forces and the Smithsonian Institution, 1945–1976” (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 2000). The tone of NASM’s formal authorization, which includes a phrase about “provid[ing] educational material for the historical study of aviation and space flight,” is entirely different from the authorization of the aborted armed forces museum, which concludes thus: “the sacrifice demanded in our constant search for world peace shall be clearly demonstrated.”

10. Richard H. Kohn, “History and the Culture Wars: The Case of the Smithsonian Institution’s *Enola Gay* Exhibition,” *Journal of American History* 82 (1995): 1044. Before going to Chapel Hill, Kohn had been chief of air force history from 1981 to 1991.

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have argued” the script repeatedly violated a truism about museum visitors not framing “their observations according to historiographical discourses.”¹¹ It should never have gone out the door without a ferocious review and rewrite. If it had had one, and if critiques such as Kohn’s had been given due weight, a far different series of events might have ensued. NASM might have produced a “powerful interpretive exhibit,” a landmark.¹² What happened instead was that Correll launched a campaign that brought the *Enola Gay* to the forefront of national consciousness, induced a congressional vote of censure, and finally left NASM—a shrine visited by ten million people a year—in sackcloth and ashes, charged with importing what pundit John Leo called “the familiar ideology of campus political correctness . . . into our national museum structure.”¹³

By the spring of 1995, Robert McCormick Adams, the Smithsonian Secretary who had taken office aiming to stage exhibits “that make people feel uncomfortable”—and had hired Harwit with that in mind—was resettled far away.¹⁴ Seemingly never comfortable in a job he held for ten years, Adams was now finishing his magnum opus, *Paths of Fire: An Anthropologist’s Inquiry into Western Technology*. NASM’s planned exhibit had been canceled and replaced by something else, developed under the direct supervision of Adams’s successor, Ira Michael Heyman. Like Adams, Heyman’s roots were in academe—he had been chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley—and first indications were that he would support the besieged NASM staff. But when it became clear that he was in danger of having the Smithsonian’s federal budget “zeroed out,” Heyman confessed to what he called a basic error; it was *not* possible to achieve both purposes that Harwit and Crouch had discussed. Heyman’s sparse new narrative was acceptable to the Air Force Association, and to the American Legion, which had proved a far more formidable adversary. Hence it was also acceptable to the legislators who had threatened recrimination. It mentioned casualties only in passing and did not address alternative strategies for forcing Japanese surrender or any other topic that could be defined—in a term new to popular discourse—as “revisionist.”

NASM had given its proposed exhibit various titles—*The Last Act* was one that superseded *The Crossroads*—but the title had never included the name of the *Enola Gay* and Harwit had initially outlined his plans for an address to strategic bombing without even mentioning the airplane itself.¹⁵

11. Matthew W. Roth, “Face Value: Objects of Industry and the Visitor Experience,” *Public Historian* 22 (summer 2000): 33–48, quote on 35.

12. Kohn to Alex Roland, 8 March 2004, copy in author’s possession.

13. John Leo, “The National Museums of PC,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 10 October 1994, 21.

14. Howard Means, “The Quiet Revolutionary,” *Washingtonian*, August 1987. Adams spent thirty-seven years at the University of Chicago before coming to the Smithsonian.

15. See, for example, Harwit, “Our Reputation Is Not for Rent,” *Washington Post*, 23

But the name of Heyman's 1995 exhibit was *The Enola Gay*. In the words of General Tibbets, it addressed "the ultimate development of the B-29 as the first airplane to strike an enemy with an atomic weapon, and after that, period."¹⁶

In his *Harper's* essay, Engelhardt termed *The Enola Gay* "a technician's exhibit."¹⁷ Richard Hallion, a NASM curator during its early years but by 1995 chief of air force history (and notable in the annals of the controversy for having first lauded NASM's scripting as needing "only a bit of 'tweaking'" and then condemning it unequivocally) called it "a beer can with a label." Where one might have found much more than that, a view of the "strike" from the ground as well as from the air, was in a book that included the final version of NASM's script, already being advertised by the Smithsonian Institution Press. But Heyman had told a Texas congressman newly appointed to the Smithsonian's Board of Regents, Sam Johnson—a decorated Air Force veteran who had spent seven years as a POW in Hanoi—that it would never see the light of day, and it never did.¹⁸ And, after swinging in the breeze for several months, Harwit had been told by Heyman to submit his resignation and had now set to work on a book of his own, to be published by a commercial press.

Harwit titled his book *An Exhibit Denied*, and it recounted what he called "the most violent dispute ever witnessed by a museum." Considering his humiliation, it seemed oddly restrained in its analysis of what happened and what might have happened. But Harwit left no doubt about his own sensibilities. At the beginning of the book, he declared that "for whatever it costs to buy influence, you can now have your own version of our nation's history displayed and opposing views suppressed at the Smithsonian Institution." At the end, he sounded an alarm about the Smithsonian becoming

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December 1989, and, for the attitude of curators toward including such a "highly controversial object," the exchange of correspondence in the *Journal of American History* 83 (1996): 305–18, among Von Hardesty, Harwit, and others.

16. Quoted in J. Lynn Lunsford and George E. Hicks, "Interview—Paul W. Tibbets," *Dallas Morning News*, 5 February 1995.

17. Engelhardt (n. 3 above), 76.

18. Johnson had been informed by the press that ten thousand copies were already in print, and presumably these were shredded. In 1989 and 1990, the museum had hosted a series of talks and discussions on strategic bombing, with a stellar array of speakers ranging from Kurt Vonnegut to Curtis LeMay, and Harwit repeatedly announced that the Smithsonian would publish a volume titled *The Legacy of Strategic Bombing*. It never appeared either. Still, rather than bearing out Eugene Emme's 1982 lament that NASM "has spent more of its energy on the circus and newsworthy things rather than becoming the center for world research as might have been hoped for" (Emme to the author, 13 June 1982), staffers have left a remarkable legacy of scholarship during the past twenty years, including Michael Neufeld's *The Rocket and the Reich: Peenemunde and the Coming of the Ballistic Missile Era* (New York, 1995), which won SHOT's Dexter Prize in 1997.

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“the government’s organ for disseminating propaganda,” and wrote this about the man who had spearheaded the demand for his dismissal: “Once a Congressman Johnson tells the National Air and Space Museum that it has no business teaching history, or orders one of its exhibitions to be shut down, or bans the publication of [the] catalogue, it becomes difficult to see where his concern for patriotism and national self-image will stop. It becomes a dangerous game.”¹⁹

Crouch had once told Father John Dear of Pax Christi, “You have no idea of the forces opposing this exhibit, not in your wildest dreams—jobs are at stake, the Smithsonian is at stake.” The Smithsonian suffered badly, no doubt; an institution with a reputation for exhibits prepared by curators who were omniscient as well as anonymous had been, in common perception, subverted by revisionism. The public came to equate this term, therefore as unknown beyond the halls of academe as “deconstruction” and “postmodernism,” with the tactics of a self-anointed cultural elite with a leftist political agenda. Those who knew Crouch from his scholarship on aeronautical pioneers would have thought, rightly, that the shoe did not fit. But it was only against many expectations that he escaped demands for his dismissal, as did Neufeld, especially vicious in his case after word got around that he was not a U.S. citizen and Johnson began making insinuations about “his philosophical and political underpinnings.”²⁰

The one who did not escape, of course, was Harwit, who before coming to NASM had achieved distinction as an astrophysicist, as the author of a well-reviewed book titled *Cosmic Discovery*, and in several other realms. However, he was also one of only two directors who had never flown warplanes, and it is not likely there will be another any time soon. His successor was a retired naval aviator, Vice Admiral Donald Engen, who, fortunately, had a gracious manner.²¹ Engen closed *The Enola Gay* in 1998, none too soon from the perspective of people like Father Dear, who decried its historical emasculation. But it was none too soon from another standpoint as well. The only parts of the plane actually on display were the front fuse-

19. Martin Harwit, *An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of the Enola Gay* (New York, 1996), xiv, viii, 429.

20. Sam Johnson to Heyman, 22 March 1995, copy in *The Enola Gay Debate* (n. 2 above); John T. Correll, “The Three Doctors and the *Enola Gay*,” *Air Force*, November 1994, 8–11. Correll claimed “that Smithsonian as a whole and Air and Space curators in particular . . . sometimes took a skeptical or disparaging attitude toward aviation, flight, air power, space exploration, even science and technology per se” (“War Stories at Air and Space,” *Air Force*, April 1994, 26). In fact, such curators were in a distinct minority. At the 1994 SHOT business meeting in Lowell, Massachusetts, an NMAH curator sought a resolution arguing a breach of academic freedom, but by the end of the meeting that had been reduced to an innocuous comment about “professional integrity.”

21. Like Harwit, Engen had spent a term as a NASM fellow, during which time he wrote an engaging memoir, *Wings and Warriors: My Life as a Naval Aviator* (Washington, D.C., 1997).



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FIG. 1 The *Enola Gay* is seen here as one of the first arrivals at the Udvar-Hazy Center, while the building was still under construction in the summer of 2003. *American Heritage* (November/December 2003) characterized this image somewhat questionably as “apolitical,” the aim being “to avoid the controversy that thwarted its planned showing in the main museum in 1995.” (Smithsonian Institution photo by Eric Long.)

lage, two engines, a propeller, and other odds and ends that were fatally decontextualized in terms of aeronautical design and engineering; the rest lay in pieces at NASM’s restoration facility in Silver Hill, Maryland, and that situation demanded immediate attention—hundreds of thousands of man-hours—if the plane were to be available in 2003 for the opening of the new satellite facility, roomy enough to display it fully assembled, as NASM was not (fig. 1).

Transfer of the 176-acre site near Dulles airport had been approved in 1986 by the Federal Aviation Administration, headed at the time by Donald Engen. In the summer of 1998, Engen, now serving as NASM’s director, kicked off the capital campaign that eventuated five years later in the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. The buzz surrounding the opening of the center in the fall of 2003 was a welcome respite for Heyman’s successor as Smithsonian Secretary, Lawrence Small, who had been enduring a barrage of bad press, no longer about revisionist exhibits—that was a dead issue—but rather about misguided ventures into downsizing, vexed donations from vain parvenus, and episodes of fatal malfeasance at the National Zoo.²² In

22. In January 2004 Small was sentenced to two years probation for violating a fed-

addition, he had almost totally lost the confidence of his professional staff. So, one can imagine a rare mood of elation in the Smithsonian Castle when the opening of the new facility hit the headlines. "A visual, spatial, and architectural thrill," proclaimed the *Post's* architectural critic. "Let the romance begin!"²³ "A colossal structure for a spectacular collection," said Peter Jakab, now chair of NASM's Department of Aeronautics. Nearly 1,000 feet long and ten stories high, with an adjacent IMAX theater and a soaring observation tower named in memory of Engen (who lost his life in a 1999 glider accident in Nevada), the Udvar-Hazy Center was surely "a testament to aviation's power to move the imagination and the checkbook."²⁴ Its benefactor, an emigre who as a boy in Budapest thought about airplanes as "the sudden spirit of freedom . . . the only way to reach into a bigger world, a world representing his future" (he certainly would have affirmed Crouch's remark about "control of our destiny") donated sixty-five million dollars to get the center up and running. Other checkbooks had opened, too, and Smithsonian officials expressed confidence that still others would cover the total cost of \$311 million to enable the display of more than twice as many airplanes as the present eighty-odd.²⁵

The *Enola Gay* is situated off to the left of the entrance to the center, where the first thing one encounters is an SR-71 Blackbird, "the fastest, highest flying operational jet-powered aircraft ever built." Even though rendered obsolete by reconnaissance satellites, it "still looks like the aviation future that small boys dream of"—or so says the *Post's* Ken Ringle, who calls the *Enola Gay* "a coldly beautiful technological marvel," and whose affection for the Udvar-Hazy "fantasy factory" and for John R. "Jack" Dailey, Engen's successor, matches the contempt he felt for NASM a decade ago, for Harwit, Crouch, and Neufeld, and for Robert Adams.²⁶

Udvar-Hazy press kits describe the mode of display in modest terms, as "enhanced open storage." Topical groupings provide a simple thematic

eral law by purchasing for his personal collection South American tribal artifacts made with the feathers of protected species such as the great egret, and in February the director of the zoo, Lucy Spelman, one of Small's first appointments, announced her resignation. For just a sampling of the devastating criticism levied at Small, see Bob Thompson, "History for Sale," *Washington Post Sunday Magazine*, 20 January 2002; Larry Van Dyne, "Money Man," *Washingtonian*, March 2002; and Joanna Neuman, "The Storm at the Smithsonian," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 2002.

23. Benjamin Forgey, "Lots of Air, and Plenty of Space," *Washington Post*, 16 December 2003.

24. Matthew L. Wald, "A Museum Increases Its Wingspan," *New York Times*, 16 November 2003. In March 2004 the theater was featuring IMAX NASCAR, "thrills, spills, and white-knuckle chills" (per the *Dallas Morning News*), narrated by Kiefer Sutherland. Go figure.

25. Udvar-Hazy quoted in Jacqueline Trescott, "The Gift that Got an Air Museum Off the Ground," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1999; also *Smithsonian Today* 1 (fall 1999): 1.

26. Ringle, "Ready for Takeoff," *Washington Post*, 14 December 2003.

coherence. The Blackbird is the focal point of “The Cold War,” which falls between “Korea and Vietnam War” and “World War II,” which in turn abuts “Commercial Aviation.” Because of this arrangement, the *Enola Gay* lies at one end of a long row of warplanes that begins with a McDonnell Phantom, a Grumman Intruder, and a prototype Lockheed-Martin Joint Strike Fighter. Where warplanes finally merge into airliners, the *Enola Gay* is almost nose-to-nose with another Boeing plane, the Dash-80, the prototype of the 707 jetliner.²⁷ That juxtaposition may jar certain sensibilities, but for Secretary Small it is simply the place where “two eras meet, each with a legacy of momentous consequence.”²⁸ As with all the other aircraft, both the B-29 and the 707 are accompanied by plaques with a checklist of technical specifications and a brief narrative. The *Enola Gay*’s notes that this airplane “dropped the first atomic weapon used in combat on Hiroshima, Japan.” About “what might have happened” had the bomb not been dropped it is altogether silent, and it is also silent about what did happen when it was.

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Although the *Enola Gay* is likely to stay just where it is for years to come, it may or may not keep the abbreviated description that General Tibbets would see as sufficient: *and after that, period*. A narrative for today, yes, but for how long? That depends in part on whether our nation is headed somewhere similar to where we were taken by the best and the brightest of the 1960s. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Smithsonian’s primary advisory body, the Smithsonian Council, repeatedly called for exhibits with a “non-celebratory attitude,” and it is worth remembering that veterans groups were by no means of a single mind about the tenor of the NASM display in the 1990s. It is also worth remembering that Senator Barry Goldwater, NASM’s patron saint, once said that he did not want the *Enola Gay* exhibited *at all*. During budget hearings on Capitol Hill in July 1970—just weeks after the last U.S. troops had been withdrawn from Cambodia—a congressman remarked that he would be offended by this and Goldwater concurred: “What we are interested in here are the truly historic aircraft. I wouldn’t consider the one that dropped the bomb on Japan as

27. The 707 was restored by its manufacturer, probably NASM’s most reliable corporate angel. On 7 December 2003, Boeing placed a dramatic spread in a twenty-page Udvar-Hazy “advertorial” supplement in the *Washington Post Sunday Magazine*, which mentioned “commercial aviation, space exploration, and unmanned flight,” but not military aviation. This was perhaps understandable in view of a current scandal involving Pentagon procurement of Boeing tankers. Joe Corn emphasizes a crucial factor in NASM’s history, namely that “aerospace probably generates a larger community of interest between those who interpret it and those who manufacture and use the artifacts than any other technological subject.” “Tools, Technologies, and Contexts,” in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Chicago, 1989), 244.

28. Lawrence M. Small, “A Century’s Roar and Buzz,” *Smithsonian*, December 2003, 20.

belonging in that category.”²⁹ No secretary prior to the 1980s was interested in displaying the *Enola Gay* either, nor were any of the men who were put in charge of the museum. Then Michal McMahon posed a provocative question in *T&C*—“Why not the *Enola Gay*?”—and it caught the attention of Robert Adams.³⁰ Adams had no interest in “fantasy factories,” but he was deeply concerned about the relationship of technology and culture, and so was the man he installed as NASM’s director; Harwit, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology Ph.D., was cofounder of Cornell University’s STS program. He had also lived in Czechoslovakia during the Third Reich and had been present, with the U.S. Army’s radiological warfare unit, during hydrogen bomb tests in the Pacific.

Whatever else may be said about the “folly” of Harwit’s vision for transforming the very essence of NASM, he *did* have a vision; the *Enola Gay* exhibit, Crouch remarked, “was really Harwit’s baby.”³¹ He knew, of course, about the admonitions of the Smithsonian Council, and a 1993 fund-raising proposal expressed a hope that the museum could attract “under-served audiences . . . who may believe the museum only offers an uncritical examination of the difficult aspects of aerospace technology.” This latter hope was partially fulfilled during the early years of Harwit’s tenure, notably in an exhibit that de-romanticized aerial combat during World War I, but “difficult aspects” have rarely been glimpsed in NASM since his departure, and they are altogether unexamined at the Udvar-Hazy Center.³²

Accounts of the opening almost always included a remark about the *Enola Gay* display having an “apolitical” or “objective” tone. People who read *T&C* may understand that what is portrayed as apolitical or objective is rarely anything of the sort. They may also understand Harwit’s concerns about the dangerous game begun when NASM is made, in essence, a vehicle for official history. But judging from editorial opinion and numerous letters to editors, many others are unlikely to understand, nor to see where E. L. Doctorow and Barry Commoner are coming from when they (along with dozens of academics) endorse a petition declaring that the new display of the *Enola Gay* reflects “extraordinary callousness.” Any such perception

29. House Subcommittee on Libraries and Memorials, *Smithsonian Institution: General Background—Policies and Goals from 1846 to Present*, 91 Cong., 2d sess., 21 July 1970, 185.

30. Michal McMahon, “The Romance of Technological Progress: A Critical Review of the National Air and Space Museum,” *Technology and Culture* 22 (1981): 296.

31. Quoted in Ken Ringle, “Enola Gay, at Ground Zero: Smithsonian Exhibit Plans Produce a Fallout of Controversy,” *Washington Post*, 26 September 1994. On Harwit’s aim “to come to terms with the societal significance of technologies,” see Sam Batzli, “From Heroes to Hiroshima: The National Air and Space Museum Adjusts Its Point of View,” *Technology and Culture* 31 (1990): 830–37.

32. As for the audience at Udvar-Hazy, when I visited in January and spent time in the vicinity of the *Enola Gay*, it was white, 90 percent male, at least 50 percent older than fifty.

seems far beyond the concerns of Jack Dailey, who spent thirty-six years as a Marine aviator, flew hundreds of missions in Vietnam, and retired as a four-star general. Dailey believes that NASM's purpose is "to stimulate interest in technology and science," not to address the "political aspects of artifacts on display," and he also believes that the *Enola Gay* is most plausibly described as "a magnificent technological achievement."³³ Which is not to say that he fails to understand that others address it in quite different terms. To members of the Committee for a National Discussion of Nuclear History and Current Policy, for example, its high polish and apparent functional perfection—everything about it that bespeaks explicit veneration—serves essentially to "lower the threshold for future use of nuclear weapons."³⁴

NASM has taken a hit in *T&C* on several occasions, though never quite anything with the power of Ada Louise Huxtable's in the *New York Times* the day it opened: "a cross between Disneyworld and the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari."³⁵ To lay into its new satellite here would amount to piling on, and yet there is something important to be said about the displays. While the Wright Flyer, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, and the *Gossamer Condor* remain at NASM, at least two-thirds of the Udvar-Hazy Center, including the entire right wing, is dominated by warplanes and cruise missiles.³⁶ No matter how often we may hear that artifacts "do not speak for themselves," these airplanes and missiles *do* speak. The *Enola Gay* speaks. Though elevated so as to be more visible from an overhead walkway, it is otherwise displayed, just as Tibbets had once said he wanted, the way the Smithsonian "displays any other airplane."³⁷ Nearly every account of the opening lumped it willy-nilly with artifacts significant in entirely different ways: "the *Enola Gay*, the *Enterprise* space shuttle, the Concorde . . . and various rockets, missiles, satellites, fighters and jetliners," ran an Associated Press lead.³⁸

In what may have been a small measure of vindication to Robert Adams, some people were uncomfortable. Several survivors of Hiroshima were present on 17 December, and Minoru Nishino wondered "why the

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33. Dailey quoted in Matthew L. Wald, "A Big Museum Opens, to Jeers as Well as Cheers," *New York Times*, 16 December 2003.

34. Introductory letter, 23 August 2003, signed by Peter Kuznick, Kevin Martin, and Daniel Ellsberg, and "Statement of Principles," www.enola-gay.org.

35. Quoted in McMahon, 282.

36. It needs to be added that not all the engines of destruction are American built, but German, Japanese, British, French, and Soviet as well.

37. Engelhardt (n. 3 above), 76.

38. Even Crouch's superb book, *Wings* (New York, 2003), 14, simply includes the *Enola Gay* in the midst of a long list of NASM's well-known planes (" . . . Wiley Post's *Winnie Mae*, Howard Hughes's classic H-1 racing aircraft, the B-29 *Enola Gay*, the Bell X-1 . . ."). Of the aircraft shown in a picture book about Udvar-Hazy, *America's Hangar* (Washington, D.C., 2003), about three-fourths are warplanes. Some photos are shamelessly trivial, as when the Blackbird is posed with a red Corvette and is captioned "the Corvette of modern aircraft" (48).

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pilot would put his mother's name on such a plane?" "In Japan," he said, "mothers and sweethearts represent life and love, not war and death." Ceremonies were interrupted when a man stepped to the edge of the walkway and threw a bottle at the fuselage, which broke open and spilled a red liquid. Thomas K. Seimer, from Columbus, Ohio, was arrested and charged with felony destruction of property.³⁹ A large sheet of acrylic went up to protect against a repeat of the red liquid incident, and groups of mostly elderly protesters were kept on the margins (Nishino was seventy-one, Seimer seventy-three). When asked about "the lack of information on the number of victims," Dailey responded: "To be accurate, fair, and balanced, inclusion of casualty figures would require an overview of all casualties associated with the conflict, which would not be practical in this exhibit."⁴⁰ Even Heyman's sparsely scripted 1995 exhibit at NASM had mentioned "many tens of thousands of deaths," but Dailey could not be pressed about his evasive answer.⁴¹

Joanne Gernstein London attributes the failure to establish a military museum in the capitol during the postwar decades to concerns among the cultural elite about "foster[ing] the notion that the United States was a war-mongering nation."⁴² The fallback was the display of engines of destruction in two museums that were nonmilitary "in spirit." Congress funded the Museum of History and Technology (as the National Museum of American History was initially named) in 1955 in the shadow of the cold war, but the military exhibits never got past the Civil War. Though authorized in 1946, funds for the National Air Museum (reauthorized and renamed Air and Space in 1966) remained out of reach until the "public relations potential" provided by the availability of the *Apollo 11* command module started becoming apparent. Frank Taylor—the Smithsonian official who had found the key to funding for MHT in the 1950s—framed an appeal to Congress, but it took Goldwater to win the essential support of the Nixon White House.⁴³

39. Courtland Milloy, "The Enola Gay in a Truly Terrifying Light," *Washington Post*, 17 December 2004.

40. Dailey quoted in Jacqueline Trescott, "Enola Gay Exhibit Won't Be Changed," *Washington Post*, 11 November 2003.

41. One piece of the context of this remark is particularly worth noting: While the deaths of Americans in Iraq were making the news nearly every day, the media was largely mute about "all casualties associated with the conflict"—that is, *other* casualties. "We don't keep a list," said a Pentagon spokeswoman.

42. London (n. 9 above), 5.

43. See Robert C. Post, "A Very Special Relationship': SHOT and the Smithsonian's Museum of History and Technology," *Technology and Culture* 42 (2001): 401–35, and Alex Roland, "Celebration or Education? The Goals of the U.S. National Air and Space Museum," *History and Technology* 10 (1993): 77–89. In 2004, NMAH will open a military history exhibit that comes as close to the present as Iraq, funded by a donor intent on transforming what he decries (with baffling logic) as "a multiculture museum" into "an American history museum"; Kenneth Behring, quoted in Thompson, "History for \$ale" (n. 22 above), 25.

The United States was in perilous disequilibrium in the fall of 1972, when construction of NASM began—though most American ground forces in Vietnam had been withdrawn, the bombing continued, and on the very day that construction began on the Mall eleven Israeli Olympic athletes were killed by terrorists in Munich—but was on a more even keel when it opened on the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1976. Just the reverse might be said with regard to the Udvar-Hazy Center. When the capital campaign bore fruit in the fall of 1998, the stock market seemed destined to rise forever, Thomas Friedman and an army of fellow pundits were preaching the new religion of globalization, terrorism was something foreign. Dick Cheney was at Haliburton, Paul Wolfowitz at Johns Hopkins. But in December 2003, the United States was embarked on a war whose rationale was largely Cheney’s, now in a position of unsurpassed political power and, as James Mann puts it, the chief proponent of a vision of the United States as “the world’s lone superpower not merely today or ten years from now but permanently.”⁴⁴ At the press preview on 11 December, the Udvar-Hazy Center was teeming with celebrities, such as actor John Travolta and aerobics champion Patty Wagstaff, and with heroes of flight—John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, Scott Crossfield, Paul Tibbets. Mr. Udvar-Hazy spoke briefly, as did Chief Justice William Rehnquist as head of the Board of Regents, but it was another regent who delivered the keynote address, Dick Cheney himself.

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Cheney was characteristically flat until he got to his conclusion, when he injected some real enthusiasm into a remark that “our air and space programs have been critical to American prosperity” and then into another: “in the war we’re facing today, our mastery of aerospace technology has been essential to the success of our military and to the security of the American people.”⁴⁵ One can make what one wishes of this “Vulcan” par excellence—always looking, as Mann notes, “to engage the rest of the world”—presiding over the opening of a place dominated by engines of destruction, the first Smithsonian museum to be military in spirit. One assumes that he would not have harbored reservations about venerating the *Enola Gay*, as Goldwater did, and Harwit’s predecessor as NASM director did, doubting that the public had “an adequate understanding with which to view it.”⁴⁶ Ed Linenthal remarks that when the exhibit planned by Harwit was canceled, we “lost a chance to remind each other that irony, ambiguity, and complexity are part of every human story.” A fine sentiment for a professor of religious studies, but one does not imagine irony, ambiguity, and complexity looming large in the worldview of Cheney, whose friends say that he regards warfare as being “a natural state of mankind” (though, as Colin

44. James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York, 2004), 212, 213.

45. The text of Cheney’s speech is available at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases.

46. Walter J. Boyne, *The Aircraft Treasures of Silver Hill* (New York, 1982), 178.

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FIG. 2 On 1 May 2003, a smiling Dick Cheney watched from his West Wing office as George W. Bush became the first sitting president to land on an aircraft carrier, in a four-seat S-3B Viking whose pilot said Bush “enjoyed the heck” out of taking the controls for a moment. A year later, chances of this flight suit or the plane ending up at the Smithsonian seemed radically diminished from the day that Bush announced to the world that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended.” (SharpShooter Photo by Denis Poroy.)

Powell has noted, he “never spent a day in uniform”), and who said of himself that he “never met a weapons system he didn’t vote for.”⁴⁷ And who of course understood that there was nothing like massive airstrikes to induce shock and awe (fig. 2).

So, the *Enola Gay* happens to be not only “a magnificent technological achievement” but also a milestone among engines of destruction, and yet its label hardly mentions this. A “lie of omission,” as Doctorow puts it?⁴⁸

47. Mark Hosenball et al., “Cheney’s Long Path to War,” *Newsweek*, 17 November 2003, 34–40; Mann, 201; Colin Powell, *My American Journey* (New York, 1995), 405. Of the Vietnam era, Powell also wrote (148), “I am angry that so many sons of the powerful and well placed . . . managed to wangle slots in Reserve and National Guard units.”

48. Doctorow quoted in Elizabeth Olson, “Criticism Meets New Exhibit of Plane that Carried A-Bomb,” *New York Times*, 2 November 2003.

Udvar-Hazy was designed as “open storage,” after all, and nowhere is there detailed scripting such as one can find in exhibits on the Mall like Crouch and Jakab’s new presentation of the Wright Flyer. To one historian, it may have seemed that proper display of the *Enola Gay* “required a substantial prose exposition,” but another—better versed in the potentials and constraints of museum exhibits—is much closer to the truth of the matter when he warns that “academic critics would have curators and designers embrace the nuance of scholarly discourse in a medium clearly unsuited to it.”⁴⁹ Such expositions were imported into the Smithsonian by a generation of curators who had mostly failed to penetrate the academic job market but still looked to academe for their cues about narrative style—arguably a mistake. So was the turn to “modernistic new-think display theory,” as one critic put it with respect to NMAH’s lavishly staged and exceedingly wordy *America on the Move*.⁵⁰ What’s at Udvar-Hazy, Jakab says, is “less intensely interpreted.” But is there any excuse for displaying something as freighted with moral ambiguity as the *Enola Gay*—as *demanding* of “interpretation”—with only a dollop of factoids? As Peter Kuznick remarks, “Displaying the *Enola Gay* puts a special kind of burden on the museum.”⁵¹

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In thinking he could pursue two distinct ends at the same time, in actually inviting censorship, Harwit was guilty, says Linenthal, of “real errors of judgement, if not stunning examples of political naivete.”⁵² But what might have happened if Harwit’s team had not handed critics plenteous opportunities to accuse them of politically correct cant, had not given the impression that they regarded those critics as lacking in “intellectual sophistication”? If there had been an explanation of why the mission of the *Enola Gay* was of transcendent import that was framed in a few hundred words rather than tens of thousands? If due attention had been paid to William Cronon’s strictures about the care that historians are obliged to take in “separating story from non-story”?⁵³ Had not NASM’s plans imploded in 1994, per-

49. Barton Bernstein, “The Struggle Over History: Defining the Hiroshima Narrative,” in Nobile (n. 8 above), 207; Roth (n. 11 above), 48.

50. Don Phillips, “Did History End in 1926? One Wonders . . .,” *Trains*, March 2004, 15.

51. Kuznick quoted in Jacqueline Trescott, “Enola Gay Draws More Flak,” *Washington Post*, 6 November 2003.

52. Edward T. Linenthal, “Struggling with History and Memory,” *Journal of American History* 82 (1995): 1094–101, quote on 1100.

53. William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 78 (1992): 1347–76, quote on 1349. In *The Landscape of History* (New York, 2002), p. 32, John Lewis Gaddis quotes the satirist Jorge Luis Borges, who wrote that “the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that . . . the cartographers’s Guilds struck a map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it.” As the editor at the Museum of History and Technology during the 1970s, I found that this weird ideal was quite prevalent among curators trying to construct exhibit scripts. Still in a personal vein, I have wondered what might have happened if there had been somebody at NASM in the mid-1990s with the preparation and pres-

haps today in 2004 the *Enola Gay* might be serving educational ends faithful to NASM’s formal mission. I found that I could not spend any time in the vicinity of the *Enola Gay* without realizing that visitors *do* want to know more, often quite a bit more, than they are presently told, to wit:

Boeing B-29 Superfortress *Enola Gay*

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Boeing’s B-29 Superfortress was the most sophisticated propeller-driven bomber of World War II, and the first bomber to house its crew in pressurized compartments. Although designed to fight in the European theater, the B-29 found its niche on the other side of the globe. In the Pacific, B-29s delivered a variety of aerial weapons: conventional bombs, incendiary bombs, mines, and two nuclear weapons.

On August 6, 1945, this Martin-built B-29-45-MO dropped the first atomic weapon used in combat on Hiroshima, Japan. Three days later, *Bockscar* (on display at the U.S. Air Force Museum near Dayton, Ohio) dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, Japan. *Enola Gay* flew as the advance weather reconnaissance aircraft that day. A third B-29, *The Great Artiste*, flew as an observation aircraft on both missions.

Transferred from the U.S. Air Force

Wingspan: 43 m (141 ft. 3 in.)	Engines: 4 Wright R-3350-57 Cyclone
Length: 30.2 m (99 ft.)	turbo-supercharged radials, 2,200 hp
Height: 9 m (27 ft. 9 in.)	Armament: two .50-caliber machine guns
Weight, empty: 32,580 kg (71,826 lb.)	Ordnance: “Little Boy” atomic bomb
Weight, gross: 63,504 kg (140,000 lb.)	Crew: 12 (Hiroshima mission)
Top speed: 546 km/h (339 mph)	Manufacturer: Martin Co., Omaha, 1945
	A19500100000

NASM says that “this type of label is precisely the same kind used for the other airplanes and spacecraft in the museum. Its intent is to tell visitors what the object is and the basic facts concerning its history. Over the 27 years of its existence, the museum has carefully followed an approach which offers accurate descriptive data, allowing visitors to evaluate what they encounter in the context of their own points of view.” This is disingenuous. Over the years, different “basic facts” have been brought to the fore, as when Dom Pisano and Joanne Gernstein took a new look at air power in World War I, or when David DeVorkin revised the labeling with the museum’s V-2 rocket, which formerly had addressed an engine of mass destruction in the same terms that might have been used for a Windsor chair. With the *Enola Gay*, it is amazing how unhelpful—how *unfactual*—the present label is *even on its own terms*; as a West Coast journalist noted,

ence to fend off criticism that often transgressed the bounds of fair play, as Roger Kennedy was able to do at NMAH with exhibits having an equal potential for arousing ire. In 1985, Stanley Goldberg staged an exhibit called *Building the Bomb: Forty Years after Hiroshima* that attracted a great deal of comment, most of it constructive, and in 1987 Kennedy adeptly defused jingoistic criticism of *A More Perfect Union*, an exhibit in which Crouch—temporarily displaced from NASM to NMHT—told of the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, an especially provocative narrative given that it was the bicentennial of the United States Constitution.

“the Smithsonian’s unwillingness to court argument leaves it to visitors to fill in the blanks.”⁵⁴

First, for the benefit of people like Minoru Nishino, there should be information about American customs for naming warplanes. Then, there is a series of unanswered “technical” questions. What difference did it make that the plane was pressurized? Of what tactical import were the speed and power? What was its range? Why was defensive weaponry virtually absent? How many such planes were there, anyway, and how did it happen that a Boeing plane was built by Martin? Why did it find its niche in an unexpected theater of war? Why devote a full sentence to *The Great Artiste*, instead of explaining that development of a very-long-range (VLR) bomber was considered so crucial to victory that costs for the B-29 exceeded those of the Manhattan Project? The answers to these questions are not trivial; rather, they are essential to enabling people to “evaluate what they encounter.” Specifically in the realm of the unfactual: Assigning agency to an inanimate object, saying it was the *airplane* that “dropped the first atomic weapon,” violates every conceivable narrative of military and political contingency, no matter *what* one’s “point of view” might be. Here you have a museum label full of facts but empty of meaning. Truth be told, Jack Dailey has little more reason to believe that he has met a unique explanatory challenge than Martin Harwit did.⁵⁵

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When he read Harwit’s book in 1996, Michael Kammen saw it as “a profound parable for the politics of culture of our time.” It was that, in many ways; recall that the mid-1990s marked the most heated phase of the culture wars, with equally fraught episodes involving the National History Standards, the National Endowments, and a number of other museum exhibits. I want to close with a look at just one aspect of the *Enola Gay* controversy in which people talked past one another because of the “politics of culture.” It has to do with the nature of history. We take the word to mean different things: what happened in the past, the evidence of what happened, how narratives are constructed and reconstructed—or, rather, revised. When people were imbued with a mistaken notion of revisionism as something akin to distorting or denying immutable truth in the name of political correctness, it was not just because of the Sam Johnsons and the John Leos and other demagogues. This was made clear to me a few days after Harwit left NASM forever and the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration convened hearings on “future management practices” for the Smithsonian.

54. Edward Epstein, “Spreading Its Wings: The Smithsonian’s Soaring Annex to the Air and Space Museum Shows Sweep of History, through War and Peace,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 February 2004.

55. One can find answers to almost all the questions noted here in fewer than three pages of Anne Millbrooke’s *Aviation History* (Englewood, Colo., 1999), 7.62–65.

The committee was under the chairmanship of Ted Stevens, an Alaska Republican. Stevens was a veteran of the Pacific theater in World War II and a Senate veteran by virtue of the vast sums of federal money he had funneled into his state, and he relished “a reputation as a grouch and a bully.”⁵⁶ He commenced one day of hearings by having Representative Johnson read a statement about the national museum’s fundamental duty to teach “what is good about America.” Why, Stevens asked, should taxpayers support research that contradicted “commonly accepted viewpoints” about what really happened? With witnesses such as Crouch and Linenthal he made no effort to mask his disrespect. Not so California Democrat Dianne Feinstein, who tried to be considerate of the scholars who were being so badly flayed by Stevens and others on the committee, such as Democrat Wendell Ford of Kentucky.

It quickly became obvious, however, that Feinstein was starting from the same premises as Stevens and Ford. Was it, she asked, the Smithsonian’s role “to interpret history”? What had happened to the history profession, she asked Linenthal, since the days when she majored in history at Stanford and what she learned from her text “was essentially a recitation of fact, leaving the reader to draw their own analysis?” Feinstein was referring specifically to the professor she remembered best, Thomas A. Bailey—a powerful academic presence in the 1950s—and might have been shocked to learn that Bailey’s narratives could be anything but a “recitation of fact.” About the origins of World War I, what he wrote in the 1946 edition of his diplomatic history survey is entirely different from what he wrote in the 1940 edition, omitting any mention of pressure on Congress from “interested financial and industrial groups.” Peter Novick recounts how Bailey once told a publisher that his manuscript for *America Faces Russia* had great sales potential because the army would find it useful “for indoctrination purposes.”⁵⁷

The irony of Feinstein’s reference to a historian of Bailey’s ideological hue probably escaped everyone on Capitol Hill, even Speaker Newt Gingrich, who had a doctorate in history. But Gingrich did have a ready answer to the question that Feinstein left hanging. What had happened? No less so

56. Chuck Neubauer and Richard T. Cooper, “Senator’s Way to Wealth Was Paved With Favors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 December 2003. Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation referred to Stevens’s “drunken sailor spending attitudes.” David Whitney, “Mr. Stevens Goes to Washington,” *UCLA Magazine* 12 (winter 2000): 26–31, quote on 26.

57. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 306. It was with the causes of World War I that the term revisionism became ingrained in historical discourse—in this case with a double meaning. As more documents became available during the 1920s and the war’s complex causation more evident, historians revised earlier interpretations and also called for “a ‘revision’ of that clause in the Treaty of Versailles which declared Germany and her allies were solely responsible.” Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War* (1928; reprint, New York, 1966), 1:xiii.

than academe, the Smithsonian had become “a plaything for *left-wing ideologues*.” It had been transformed by a “new museology . . . a wholesale embrace of the worst elements of academic culture,” wrote the Manhattan Institute’s Heather MacDonald, in a decidedly unpleasant essay titled “Revisionist Lust.”⁵⁸ Vicious though people like Gingrich or MacDonald could be, however, there was no mistaking a genuine disparity between how the historical enterprise was conceptualized by most historians and by most everyone else. History as a dialogue between present and past? New questions arising with the passage of time and changing contexts? New concerns suggested by the availability of new sources? Equally plausible answers to the same question? None of those. Rather, the term was equated with deliberate falsification, as when Johnson remarked: “We want the Smithsonian to reflect real America and not something that a historian dreamed up.” Not “disregard for truth,” said another Congressman.⁵⁹ Revisionism: As when Indiana basketball coach Bobby Knight explained that he did not throw a chair across the court in a fit of rage but, rather, was simply passing it to a lady who seemed uncomfortable on a wooden bench and, he said, “looked very much like my mother.”⁶⁰ In other worlds, the term was linked to the retreat from Marxist dogma among communists. Or to Oliver Stone, or Mel Gibson.

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What came to define revisionism with respect to the *Enola Gay*? More than anything, it was any kind of a qualified reaction to President Truman’s declaration: “Having found the bomb, we have used it. . . . We have used it to shorten the agony of young Americans,” Or to Paul Fussell’s pithier one: “Thank God for the Atom Bomb.” Any suggestion that the bomb was not essential to bringing the war to an immediate close was dubbed revisionist. And yet those suggestions are never going to go away, because so much of revisionism is really just a matter of how narrative is framed. In a new book jointly published by NASM, one finds this remark, which must have escaped the scrutiny of the Air Force Association and the American Legion: “Even before the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, strategic bombing had crippled Japan’s ability to continue the war.”⁶¹ Suppression of NASM’s exhibit may have set a precedent, says Linenthal, “that will come back to haunt the integrity of history and

58. Heather MacDonald, “Revisionist Lust: The Smithsonian Today,” *The New Criterion*, May 1997, 17–31. On other instances of Smithsonian involvement in the culture wars, see Robert C. Post and Arthur P. Molella, “The Call of Stories at the Smithsonian Institution: History of Technology and Science in Crisis,” *ICON* 3 (1997): 44–82.

59. Peter Blute, “Revisionist History Has Few Defenders,” *Technology Review*, August–September 1995, 51–52. Under the heading of “The Atomic Age at 50,” this issue of *Technology Review* included seventeen diverse essays; among their authors were John Dower, Bill Holley, Hugh Gusterson, Carl Kaysen, and Alex Roland.

60. John Feinstein, “In Revisionist History, a Final Grade Awaits,” *Washington Post*, 14 February 2004.

61. R. G. Grant, *Flight: 100 Years of Aviation* (New York, 2002), 255.

memory in this country for a long time.”⁶² Possibly, but the presence of those dissidents at the Udvar-Hazy Center suggests that even though the *Enola Gay* may be “a technological marvel,” it *means* a great deal more, and it means *different things to different people*. The authors of a new book on museology write: “Ultimately in the museum context the most important thing is to make visitors aware of the provisional nature of all knowledge of the past, and to help them to develop the confidence and the skills needed to come to their own conclusions based, at least in part, on what historical scholarship has to offer.”⁶³

The provisional nature of knowledge. Hear John Dower: “It is a daunting task to try and convey to the public the idea that critical inquiry and responsible revision remain the lifeblood of every serious intellectual enterprise.”⁶⁴ Still, people understand that they may not see the past, including their own past, in the same terms they once did. People change their minds with good reason. They also understand “honest disagreement.” But they take a dim view of “official history,” especially in places where it seems most tenacious—like Japan. At one point during the hearings on Capitol Hill, Senator Ford warned that “the Smithsonian must understand that, as an institution supported with Federal funds, it is ultimately accountable to the American public, whose lives and history its exhibits reflect.” Accountable to the American public, yes, of course. But accountable “to the air and space community because,” as a veteran NASM official put it, “they’re the ones who we want to make the donations”?⁶⁵ Or responsible, as Kohn put it, “for negotiat[ing] content with groups outside the museum with political agendas and no claim to scholarly knowledge, museum expertise, or a balanced perspective”? This is partly what Harwit meant by “a dangerous game,” and it is also what an independent commission meant when it warned in 2002 against “possible partisan or parochial politicization of museum content.”⁶⁶

* * *

When Harwit warned about the Smithsonian becoming a vehicle for disseminating government propaganda, he may not have known about a prior instance of “politicization of museum content,” an exhibit aimed at

62. Linenthal quoted in Nobile (n. 8 above), xlv.

63. Colin Divall and Andrew Scott, *Making Histories in Transport Museums* (London, 2001), 99.

64. John Dower, “How a Genuine Democracy Should Celebrate Its Past,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 16 June 1995, B1.

65. Donald S. Lopez, quoted in Phil McCombs, “Staying the Course: At Air and Space, a Stout Salute to the Engen Legacy,” *Washington Post*, 15 July 1999. At the time Lopez made this remark, he was acting director of NASM.

66. Kohn, “History and the Culture Wars” (n. 10 above), 1054; *Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on the National Museum of American History Presented to the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (March 2002), 2.3.

influencing perceptions of the so-called productivity crisis of the early 1970s. This was financed to the tune of half a million dollars—more than had ever been spent on any other Smithsonian exhibit—directly from Nixon’s White House, the intermediary being George Schultz, later Secretary of State but at that time director of the Office of Programming and Budget. Schultz set the process in motion by means of a “Dear Dan” letter to Daniel Boorstin, a former colleague from the University of Chicago who had become director of the Museum of History and Technology.⁶⁷ The message of the “productivity” exhibit? The message was that *there was no crisis*. Could such a thing happen again? Would Lawrence Small turn down a request that came directly from the White House? Would any secretary of the Smithsonian?

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Imagine the messages that might be useful for the administration to purvey in the national museum today. People in the administration are not ignorant of the uses of history, least of all Condoleezza Rice, who spent several years as Schultz’s colleague at Stanford. During the summer of 2003, Rice and President Bush both branded as “revisionist history” reports about the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq—not because they commanded the high ground in terms of “having the facts” but because of its power as a term of opprobrium.⁶⁸ Bush has said that his wife is the one who reads books in their family, so he may not know about Newspeak. But in 1984 Rice published a book about Czechoslovakia under communism, and so there is reason to believe that she knows these lines from 1984:

*Who controls the past controls the future:
who controls the present controls the past.*

67. See Robert C. Post, “History and the History of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 43 (2002): 125–27.

68. See James M. McPherson, “Revisionist Historians,” *AHA Perspectives*, September 2003, 5–6, and, for evidence that the AHA is nothing like an ideological monolith, letters in subsequent issues of *Perspectives* highly critical of McPherson’s remarks about the administration’s dissimulation.