
"Our Nation's Attic?": Making American National Identity at the Smithsonian Institution

TASSLYN FRAME

Résumé

Parce que le Smithsonian est le musée national désigné des États-Unis et que les controverses soulevées au Smithsonian, comme celle entourant l'Enola Gay, sont devenues si politiques et publiques, il s'agit d'un endroit où le grand public et les historiens peuvent clairement voir certaines manifestations des discussions qu'ont les Américains sur l'identité nationale, la signification de la culture, la mémoire collective et les représentations dans leur pays en cette fin du XX^e siècle. Puisant dans les cartes de commentaires remplies par les visiteurs à la sortie de l'exposition sur l'Enola Gay du National Air and Space Museum, cet article se penche sur la réaction des visiteurs de musées aux idéologies nationales et sur la façon dont leurs commentaires suggèrent que l'identité nationale et la mémoire sociale peuvent se construire dans le musée. Une analyse préliminaire des commentaires suggère que les praticiens du domaine muséal et leurs publics construisent conjointement l'identité nationale américaine dans un musée national. Ce qui ressort aussi clairement de l'analyse, c'est la profonde personnalisation des visiteurs dans cette conversation de collaboration.

Abstract

Because the Smithsonian is the United States' designated national museum, and because controversies at the Smithsonian such as the Enola Gay become so political and public, it is a place where public and academic historians clearly see some of the manifestations of the arguments Americans are having over national identity, cultural meaning, collective memory and representations in late twentieth-century America. This article, using comment cards written by visitors leaving the exhibit, "The Enola Gay," at the National Air and Space Museum, examines the reception of national ideologies in museum visitors as well as how visitor comments suggest the construction of national identity and social memory in the museum. A preliminary analysis of the comments suggests a collaborative construction of American national identity in a national museum, between museum practitioners and their audiences. Also clearly revealed by the preliminary analysis is the museum visitor's deep personalization in this collaborative conversation.

Museums and the stories created inside them, Benedict Anderson¹ argues, are "profoundly political"² because their stories — exhibits — are related to the construction of national identity. The literature on the formation of nationalism and the construction of national identity has exploded in recent years.³ A fruitful branch of that explosion has been the study of the role of cultural institutions — like museums — in constructing national identity. Not only is the study of museums critical to these new conversations on nationalism, but

study of public controversies in museums — like that over the *Enola Gay* in 1995 and 1996 — are essential. Because the Smithsonian is the United States' designated national museum, and because controversies at the Smithsonian Institution like that of the *Enola Gay* became so political and public, it is a place where public and academic historians can clearly see the manifestations of the arguments Americans are having over national identity, cultural meaning, collective memory and representation in late twentieth century America.

One way that historians can explore these contests over national identity is through audience reaction to the controversies and the exhibits. A study of comment cards filled out by visitors to exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution can shed light on the relationship of individuals to the formation of national identity. This paper will discuss visitor responses to the exhibit, "The *Enola Gay*," installed at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1995.⁴ It will also draw tentative conclusions on the collaborative construction of American national identity between museums, curators, exhibit narratives and museum visitors at the Smithsonian Institution, and in particular, the National Air and Space Museum. Visitors' personal sense of American nationalism or American national identity was both reinforced by the museum exhibit as well as constructed in reaction to the exhibit.

There has been a great deal written about the Smithsonian exhibition controversies and the controversy over the exhibit of the *Enola Gay* in particular.⁵ Previous studies of the *Enola Gay* controversy, however, have made assumptions about the audience not only of the controversy but the audience of the exhibit that was installed — "The *Enola Gay*." The analysis in this paper does not represent a quantitative study of the audience comment cards. I have selected particularly telling examples of reactions, which were shared by some visitors. I am especially interested in a spectrum of audience comments that reveal the ways in which visitors collaborate in the construction of national identity and articulate notions of historical truth that are based, in part, on their personal experience. I am not claiming that the comment cards provide unmediated access to any audience member's authentic "experience."⁶ Rather, a study of the comment cards allows us to get a glimpse of the public — the audience's comment — on their participation and representation within national culture and their strong interest in using *their* past to create a personal manifestation of American national identity.

In the late 1980s, curators at the National Air and Space Museum began developing plans for an exhibit that would introduce visitors to issues surrounding the bombing of Hiroshima. They hoped to open the exhibit for the fiftieth anniversary of the end the Second World War.⁷ A restored airplane — the *Enola Gay*, the airplane that dropped the first atomic bomb in war —

sat in the heart of the exhibit plans. Early drafts of the exhibit text enraged veterans' groups and disturbed some military historians.⁸ The veterans felt that the exhibit questioned the actions taken by United States military officials at the time and ignored the expectations for thoughtful commemoration at the fiftieth anniversary.⁹ Military historians from branches of the defense department took issue with the scholarship and suggested that it was politically motivated.¹⁰ It became clear that both the veterans and military historians hoped that the National Air and Space Museum, as a national museum, would reinforce the traditional national understanding of the story of the end of the Second World War. The controversy quickly became a politicized fight, leading ultimately to Congressional Hearings and the resignation of the director of the National Air and Space Museum, Dr Martin Harwit.¹¹ In late 1994, the Secretary of the Smithsonian cancelled all plans for any exhibition of the *Enola Gay* after the American Legion pulled out of the ongoing exhibit negotiations with National Air and Space Museum officials.¹²

However, after the cancellation, veterans' groups and other museum stakeholders called for the exhibit of the *Enola Gay*, albeit exhibited in its *proper context*. At this point, the Secretary ordered a scaled back exhibit, stripping away all information and any artifacts that dealt with the results of the atomic bombing (Ground Zero), concentrating instead on presenting the restored front forward fuselage of the *Enola Gay*. According to the Secretary's statement,¹³ the Smithsonian Institution was wrong to examine the results of the bombing during the fiftieth anniversary. In placing this statement at the entrance to the exhibit, the Secretary and exhibit curators suggested that the National Air and Space Museum misjudged the needs and desires of its visitors. This statement is highly significant for it suggests that the state, in the guise of the Smithsonian Institution, lost its power to write national stories and histories. This statement also reflects a legitimization of those involved in the controversy who expected a national museum like the National Air and Space Museum to support, memorialize, and commemorate American power, nationalism and national identity, not to question or critically examine that power and authority.

The second exhibit, called "The *Enola Gay*," limited discussion to the evolution of different bomber classes and took an in-depth look at the restoration process of the *Enola Gay*. A video-

tape played testimony from the flight crew at the entrance to the exhibit. As visitors entered the exhibit space itself, they saw the propeller of the *Enola Gay*, mounted on the wall, and next to that were panels that explained the development of the B-29 bomber. Next, visitors entered a room with a video of the Smithsonian's restoration efforts and a model of the *Enola Gay's* engine. Continuing through the exhibit, visitors turned a corner and were confronted with the gleaming front forward fuselage of the *Enola Gay*, similar to the famous picture taken with Paul Tibbets in the cockpit as the *Enola Gay* left for its bombing mission on Hiroshima. Visitors could walk around the aircraft — examining it from all angles. The area above the bomb bay doors was cut away, allowing visitors to see the slightly opened doors. In front of the bomb bay was a replica of Little Boy, the name of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.¹⁴ Visitors then could leave the exhibit, passing by a wall of newspapers from all over the world whose headlines announced the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The same videotape that played at the entrance played at the exit.

As the Secretary's statement at the entrance of the exhibit explicitly stated, the Smithsonian and the National Air and Space Museum hoped to honour the achievements of the veterans of the Second World War and the mission of the *Enola Gay* in this new exhibit. The focus of the second exhibit — primarily on the aircraft — I argue, raises several important issues. First, the exhibit was clearly designed to showcase pride in an aircraft that many veterans and non-veterans consider the savior of their lives. In addition, criticized for many years about their treatment of the *Enola Gay* (the aircraft was in storage and in poor repair for many years) the Smithsonian spent a great deal of time, money and effort in restoring the aircraft. Through a detailed examination of the Smithsonian's restoration process in the exhibit, the museum also may have hoped to salvage its pride and reputation.

More than salvaging pride, showcasing the Smithsonian's restoration would begin to recapture the museum's authority and legitimacy, seriously challenged by the controversy over the earlier exhibit. For instance, one comment repeatedly used to attack the Smithsonian, the curators of the original exhibit, and the National Air and Space Museum, was the statement that the role of a national museum was to celebrate and memorialize, not to engender controversy

through an examination of a difficult historical decision.¹⁵ Many of the veterans groups and military historians felt that by showing the results of the atomic bombing, and questioning the bomb's use, the Smithsonian Institution moved beyond the role of a "national" museum. In the installment of the stripped back exhibit, the Smithsonian reinforced a traditional patriotic vision of American national identity. Although the Smithsonian did not necessarily allow outside interest groups to dictate the content of the second exhibit, the exhibit's significant shift in focus and context clearly legitimized one of the multiple politicized viewpoints involved in the controversy over the earlier exhibit.

Comment cards for the exhibit "The *Enola Gay*" were short, individual, responses left by some visitors at the end of the exhibit.¹⁶ A preliminary discussion of the variety of visitor responses shows an engaged and conflicted citizenry who both accept and reject varying and, at times, even contradicting tenets of state driven nationalism.¹⁷ In addition, the audience comment cards reveal a personal and intimate glimpse of the formation of American national identity as well as a contentious and collaborative imagining of American nationalism — one that exists, however, still within the boundaries that are constructed by the state and the institution of the museum.

Visitors to the *Enola Gay* saw the exhibit and responded to its explicit and implicit messages in several ways, expressing themselves at times in lengthy, emotional comment cards.¹⁸ The exhibit affirmed personal feelings of American national power and authority. It also angered some visitors. The exhibit, many comment cards suggested, was at odds with their personal sense of what the American national story ought to consist of and the correct/proper role of a national museum in shaping that story. Finally, the exhibit left some visitors wondering at the expression of American nationalism and its consequence for America's international role.

Some visitors, in their comment cards, acknowledged the personal significance of family, friends, and community, because through their personal story, the visitor was connected to the national story and a communal sense of American identity.¹⁹ For example, comment cards with emotional personal connections often described the visitor's personal story within the context of the national story of the end of the Second World War. One

visitor explained: "As a radar operator on a B-29 in the 9th Bomb Group I am glad that the original planned exhibit was revised. The number of casualties on both sides was reduced drastically as a result of the bombing of Hiroshima."²⁰ Analysts of visitor behavior, such as John Falk and Lynn Dierking, emphasize the interactive and engaged visitor and have demonstrated the desire visitors have to see themselves within the exhibit texts.²¹ Visitor comments to "The *Enola Gay*" indicated both an apparent active engagement with the exhibit and the strong desire of visitors to see themselves and *their* story in the exhibit. For instance, one visitor wrote: "I was impressed! Thank you for not portraying our veterans in a bad way! My grandfather served in the Pacific and without the *Enola Gay* he may never have come home!"²² This visitor links notions of the role of the National Air and Space Museum to his/her story and existence.

Other visitors interpreted the exhibit in the context of their lives. For instance, a graduate student in museum studies began her page long commentary: "As a graduate student in Museum Studies and the daughter and granddaughter of Army and Air Force Officers, I come to this exhibit with mixed emotions."²³ The preceding public and political controversy also complicated her experience in the revised exhibit. She continued: "It is unfortunate that the original script and planned exhibit could not have been developed in such a way that allowed these officers to speak, but also allowed for the context of the originally intended exhibit. I learned more about the war in the Pacific from your original script than anywhere else during my academic years. I think my grandfathers, who both served in the Pacific during World War II, would have wanted me to see all of the photos and read all of the texts. That, combined with this film would have spoken to me as a young adult who has never truly experienced a 'total' country war."²⁴ Both the visitors who saw the *Enola Gay* as the reason for their survival and the graduate student who focused on her own educational experience — in the context of her personal relationship to grandfathers and fathers who served in the military — intertwined understanding of a national narrative with personal experience and story.²⁵ The personal experience served to underpin the legitimacy of a personal story as well as link the individual to the nation.

The exhibit also affirmed some of the visitors' nationalistic convictions of United States'

supreme authority. One visitor wrote: "This is a very noble and dramatic way to portray the Hiroshima bombing. To display an exhibit in America which does not emphasize our patriotism and correctness to have done something like this is wrong and simply un-American. This is the best way to exhibit the *Enola Gay*."²⁶ The visitor tied some of these comments into his/her knowledge of the controversy surrounding the exhibit. One visitor thought that the controversy over the exhibit, and the resulting exhibit, would mar the memory of the role that the United States had played in ending the Second World War. "Don't degrade our country for doing this necessary thing!"²⁷ Another stated: "A good exhibit, but very disappointed at the lack of American Patriotism."²⁸ Finally, another visitor wrote simply: "Made in America, Tested in Japan,"²⁹ suggesting perhaps that the event and aircraft exemplify the best of what it means to be American, crudely using the "Buy American" slogan. This comment uses late twentieth-century images of competitiveness between Japan and the United States. It is an excellent example of ways that ideas of history are mobilized and used for present concerns. Notice that much of the audience responses are framed within a personal context although dealing with national or community driven issues — patriotism, nationalism, American power and global responsibilities. These visitors engaged with the exhibit and museum on a personal level that allowed them to express nationalistic feelings of pride, attachment, and community. These visitors responded to implicit nationalistic sentiments connected to the *Enola Gay* and its perceived role in the end of the War. They also responded to the exhibit and notions of national pride and identity that they felt were neglected or swept aside during the controversy over the original exhibition.

The aspect of the exhibit that most encouraged or supported visitors' sense of the supreme national power of the United States was seeing the actual aircraft — the *Enola Gay*.³⁰ The messages that the visitors' comments attached to the aircraft depended on their personal experience. Some visitors connected their feelings of national pride to the *Enola Gay*. The aircraft stood, for many of these visitors, as a pre-eminent symbol of American power and as a savior for its role in ending the War in a deeply personal manner. For example, one visitor wrote: "I was in navy boot camp at the time. During training the navy was pulling men out

of my company for amphib training. We all knew it was for the invasion of Japan. I'm convinced that dropping the bomb saved my life as well as thousands of others."³¹

In direct contrast, for some visitors, the display of the airplane symbolized the ability of an arrogant nation to impose untold devastation and create a legacy of nuclear fear for future generations. One child wrote, "I thought it was very depressing,"³² sensing, perhaps, the fear of accompanying audience members generated by the *Enola Gay*. For many the *Enola Gay* stood as the ultimate symbol of destruction, especially symbolic to some as the ultimate power of destruction and the United States' continued aggressive foreign policies. For example, one visitor responded: "Your exhibit and the six minute tape makes viewer consider the *Enola Gay* as a sacred artifact completely disregarding that it was a horrific machine of human destruction. Shame on you for caving into the reshaping of American history."³³ Another visitor wrote: "However, [emphasis in the original] the exhibit's complete focus on the plane, itself, and on the restoration effort, completely missed the point. *Enola Gay* is famous precisely because its mission was so utterly devastating and destructive — end the war, yes, but ushering in a new age of nuclear fear and threat, as well."³⁴ For these visitors, the exhibition of the *Enola Gay* was not merely telling the story of the aircraft's restoration or its technological development. Rather, these audience members were connecting in deep emotional ways to the object and constructing their personal narrative about the aircraft, its mission and the effect on their lives and its role in American national memory and national identity.³⁵

The physical presence of the *Enola Gay* triggered many of these visitors' thoughts about American national identity and responsibility. For some, the way the Smithsonian exhibited the *Enola Gay* was directly related to its messages or reinforcement of a national story. For instance, only the front forward fuselage of the *Enola Gay* was on exhibit.³⁶ Some visitors believed that the curators, perhaps purposefully, had dismantled an American symbol. "Wish the total plane could have been preserved, as well as other WW2 planes, so future generations could see them. Hopefully the WW2 will be the last of the big wars. Realize there will always be wars of some type, unfortunately."³⁷ This visitor hopes to use the *Enola Gay* as a symbol of the devastation of war to future

generations — to teach and educate those about America's history. Other comments were similar to the following: "Nice display, but the *Enola Gay* deserved to be fully restored in one piece. If the Smithsonian is too small, the Air Force Museum at Wright Patterson might be able to make room beside BOCKSCAR."³⁸ Another visitor wrote: "I loved it! Why isn't the *Enola Gay* up front — in a position of honor?"³⁹ For this visitor, a position of honour — perhaps at the entrance of the exhibit — would position the aircraft more centrally in the exhibit, emphasizing pride in its mission and consequently, national authority.

Other visitors directed curators to change the positioning and location of the *Enola Gay*. "Could you put a slight angle on the floor so that we can see into the bomb bay better?"⁴⁰ Another asked that the National Air and Space Museum "allow visitors to view cockpit of the *Enola Gay*."⁴¹ Many children wanted to be allowed to get into the aircraft: "make it bigger [sic] and better and so you can go in the plain [sic]."⁴² Perhaps with repositioning of the aircraft or getting into the cockpit, visitors could imagine themselves as part of the mission and better understand the importance of the *Enola Gay*. They seem to have wanted to touch and place themselves in history.⁴³

For some visitors, they felt that the messages they perceived as implied in the museum exhibit neglected their personal sense of American nationalism and identity. Many comments in this vein hotly debated the notion of what it meant to an American, the truth of the past, and the National Air and Space Museum's responsibility in representing those two ideas. The reason the two are tied together is because in many of these comments the concept of a "true" past was used to verify the visitor's personal identity as an American. Intriguingly, the visitor's own experience personally verified the truth of the past as presented on the walls of the National Air and Space Museum. The visitor's personal sense of the "true" American national identity and past relied on their personalization of the museum exhibit experience. The visitor responses indicate a belief in a "true" account of the past, and that history is objective, but with a personalized twist. For example, one visitor wrote: "I believe the Smithsonian Museum has a responsibility to accurately report and exhibit events the way they happened. There is no place for subjective opinions of the curators of this museum — there should be no issue with respect to the

harshness of the effects of the bomb because this country was in a state of war."⁴⁴ Another felt just the opposite, in terms of the appropriate truth for the *Enola Gay* exhibit. "I remain appalled by the decision to 'rewrite history' and remove almost all mention of the thousands of people killed by this plane. One of the purposes of a museum surely should be to present the whole truth, or as much of it as is possible, rather than caving into the interests of groups that do not represent the entire population of the country. After all, this is supposed to be a national museum."⁴⁵ One visitor said: "I am glad to see that the Smithsonian has presented history accurately, not in retrospect as some wanted."⁴⁶ Notice that in these comments, the idea of a *national* museum, with responsibilities to a collective entity — American citizens — figures prominently.

Many of the comment cards often discussed the responsibility that a national museum has to educate its citizens. These comments were concerned especially with the museum's responsibility to educate those people who were not first hand witnesses to history. Many comment cards hoped that young people would benefit from hearing the veterans' experiences. For example, one visitor wrote: "People today know what atomic weapons can do — but not what brings a country to all out war and the focused goal to end it — to second guess the efforts of so many forty years ago would have been a great disservice to them."⁴⁷ At times, younger people agreed. One visitor wrote: "Excellent exhibit. Although I am only 27 and did not live through the war, it really angers me when my generation says we shouldn't have dropped the bomb because they can't relate to what it was like. I salute all the veterans that served in that war."⁴⁸

Strongly connected to these notions were the comment cards that suggested that a national museum, like the National Air and Space Museum, ought to show what it means to be American.⁴⁹ Many of the comment cards had distinct notions of correct American pasts and national identities. Some visitors suggested, or even expected, that the role of the National Air and Space Museum ought to reinforce and idealize those conceptions. These visitors' responses in their comment cards make clear that this reinforcement was dependent on the visitors' personal definition of American national identity. As Anderson maintains in his work, museums can and do serve state-building goals such as the articulation of

national sentiments. These comment cards complicate Anderson's assertions by showing that the articulation is more of a collaborative process, shaped by the state's (museum's) needs and the citizens' personal needs.

In one instance, a visitor commented: "the emotional and psychological impact this exhibit could have had, has been rendered impotent in the face of zealous vets and partisan concerns."⁵⁰ This visitor responds in part to the story told, and in part to the possibilities that the National Air and Space Museum had in the earlier exhibit plans. In a way, the visitor both engaged with and rejected the state-building goals of the exhibit in favor of the previous messages, which connected with his sense of nationalism. He continued, stating: "I laud, however, the Smithsonian's original efforts to infuse a sense of compassion, realism, and truth into the planned exhibition. It is saddening that this planned exhibition [the original one] could not come to be ... I am no revisionist but I do believe the sort of patriotic trash that blinds people to the point of ignorant nationalistic devotion has swung America's convoluted sense of self too far. It's time to swing the pendulum the other way towards a more comprehensive, thorough, and courageous understanding of history and actions. It is a movement which will have its roots in sensitivity, compassion, and faith and an undeniable adherence to the truth."⁵¹ It is important to note that this comment, seemingly critical of the scaled back exhibit, continues to cling to a notion of objective and historical truth — although based in the subjective, personalized, moral and emotional choices made by people about the past. The myth of a true and verifiable past cut across the political divides in the audience responses. A graduate student in Museums Studies questioned the possibility that a national museum could both educate and instill notions of American national identity. She wrote: "I sympathize with your position here at the National Air and Space Museum. As a national museum do you celebrate our 'glorious national past' or educate objectively and provoke thought? I wish you could educate and provoke thought."⁵²

Finally, some visitors were left wondering at the expressions of American nationalism they read on the walls of the exhibit and worried for its reception by an international audience.⁵³ Many visitors expressed concern at the messages implied in the exhibit and controversy — both by what was exhibited and what

was not. One visitor wrote: "I notice you very discretely [sic] forgot to place photographs of decomposed, excruciatingly radiated, tortured Japanese women and children."⁵⁴ Many asked what would Japanese citizens think, seeing what seemed to many an outrageous expression of American pride in such a sobering act. For example, one child wrote: "I think that wasn't a nice thing to put up, you should reuck[sic] it. There are a lot of people from Japan here!"⁵⁵ Another child wrote: "I think that this place is nice but I hate that the USA dropped a bomb on Japan. Just think of all the animals that died the people the house's [sic] Just think what if Japan dropped[sic] a bomb on us?"⁵⁶

Many visitors from other countries commented on the expressions of American nationalism. For instance, one woman wrote: "I don't know what, how I should say, because I'm Japanese. I want you to keep in mind that the atomic bomb killed a lot of people. To end the war is very important, but I hate to kill

people in any means. We should not kill people."⁵⁷ In fact, a visitor from Greece reacted to the nationalistic sentiments of the exhibit and wrote: "Only the American can feel proud of this. The rest of the world — NO."⁵⁸

In conclusion, it is clear from a qualitative examination of the audience comment cards from the exhibit "The *Enola Gay*" at the National Air and Space Museum, that memories and personal experience shape the audience (visitor) meaning and interpretation of the exhibit. Consequently, this moulds their vision of a collective American national identity. The memories and personal experience become the means through which individuals and citizens (visitors) see their role and participation in the construction of American national identity in national cultural institutions like the National Air and Space Museum. What is apparent, in these audience comment cards, is a collaborative imagining of American national identity at the Smithsonian Institution.

NOTES

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1. In his work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson maintains that museums can provide an illustration of one of the ways in which colonial states and emerging nations defined themselves and their relationships with citizens. The state museum articulated a legitimate history of the nation and supplied the state with a space to create a suitable past for the diverse, emerging nationalities of a diverse citizenry. The museum showed the cultural and social boundaries of the emerging nation.
2. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 178.
3. Recent works on nationalism that focus especially on the relationships between cultural institutions and the construction of nationalism include the following: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

1992); Sarah Corse, *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Ivan Karp, Steven D. Lavine and Christine Kreamer, *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); Lyn Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

4. Comment cards and books from museum exhibits are a complicated and difficult source to use, especially when trying to obtain information that provides a gauge of visitor reception and interaction within a museum exhibit. By their nature, comment books and cards are created by self-selecting members of the audience, who do not inform the researcher for their reasons for writing or their reasons for avoiding creating comments, and many comments cannot include demographic detail. Comment cards cannot be used to substantiate representative claims about all visitors to any one exhibit; nor do they represent a sampling of the Smithsonian's audience. I draw on the comment cards to provide insights from actual visitors to the exhibits when those comments intersect with the comments of others, stakeholders and staff, and reflect the landscape of public opinion about American national identity.
5. There have been several important books written that deal with aspects of the controversy over exhibiting the *Enola Gay* at the National Air and Space Museum. The following is a selection of some of the most important works: Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (Stony Creek: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998); Center for Museum Studies, *Museums for the New Millennium: A Symposium for the Museum Community* (Washington: Center for Museums Studies, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Martin Harwit, *An Exhibit Denied* (New York: Copernicus, 1996); Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaeppeler, eds., *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Michael Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Richard Kurin, *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996); Sharon Macdonald, ed., *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998); National Academy of Public Administration, *The National Air and Space Museum: A Review of the Organization and Management* (Washington: National Academy of Public Administration, 1995); Philip Nobile, *Judgement at the Smithsonian* (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1995); Daniel Seltz, *The Enola Gay Exhibition and the Challenge to American Memory* (Providence, R.I.: East Asian Studies, Brown University, 1996); Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); *Presenting History: Museums in a Democratic Society* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995). Articles on the *Enola Gay* Controversy are numerous. They include extensive coverage in several major newspapers; symposiums, journals and magazines. A collection of clippings is available from the Air Force Association, in Arlington, Va. This collection covers primarily 1994–1997 with the majority of information from Washington, D.C. area papers. One of the most important academic journals to cover the controversy, the special issue of the *Journal of American History* was devoted in entirety to the controversy. This issue included articles by David Thelen, Richard Kohn, Kai Bird, and Edward Linenthal, *Journal of American History* (1995) 82 (3). There was also important and extended coverage in *Technology Review: The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* and the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*. An annotated bibliography of references to the *Enola Gay* controversy is also available from the Institutional History Division of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.
6. See Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 363–387.
7. National Air and Space Museum, *Enola Gay* Exhibition Records, 1994–1995. Accession 97-168, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C. National Air and Space Museum, *Enola Gay* Exhibition Records, 1988–1995, Accession 96-140. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
8. See especially the records of the Air Force Association, American Legion, and the reports from the Tiger Team. The Tiger name was the name for the joint revision committee created by the National Air and Space Museum to respond to initial problems with the exhibition script. Tiger Team records are available from either the individual veterans' organizations, the different defense branches or the Smithsonian Institution Archives — National Air and Space Museum, *Enola Gay* Exhibition, Records, 1994–1995. Accession 97-168, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
9. Records of the *Enola Gay* Controversy, American Legion Files, American Legion, Washington, D.C. Also: Steven Aubin, Air Force Association, interview with author, Arlington, Va., 19 November 1995.
10. See records of the Tiger Team. Also: Benis Frank, Chief Historian of the Marine Core, interview with author, Washington, D.C., 13 November 1995. Herman Wolk, Center for Air Force History, interview with author, Washington, D.C., 4 March 1996.
11. For further information about Dr Martin Harwit, see his work on the *Enola Gay* controversy, *An Exhibit Denied* (New York: Copernicus, 1996).
12. Records of the *Enola Gay* Controversy, American Legion Files, American Legion, Washington, D.C. Phil Buhdan, interview with author, 14 November 1995. National Air and Space Museum, *Enola Gay* Exhibition, Records, 1994–1995, Accession 97-168, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
13. This statement was issued as a press release in April 1995 and was also placed at the entrance to the second exhibit.
14. "Little Boy" was the nickname given to the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. "Fat Man" was the name given to the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki.
15. This idea was most clearly expressed to me in oral interviews with Benis Frank, Chief Historian of the Marine Core, Steven Aubin of the Air Force

- Association, and Phil Buhdan of the American Legion.
16. Occasionally museums will leave comment cards at the end of exhibits with directed questions that investigate different parts of the exhibit. For the exhibit "The *Enola Gay*," this was not the case. The comment cards were blank 3"-by-5" cards, left on a bench with available writing tools at the end of the exhibit. The comment cards were part of an attempt by National Air and Space Museum curators to stem audience commentary about the controversy over the original exhibit. They were gathered by museum personnel periodically and deposited at the Smithsonian Institution Archives.
 17. I use the term, "state-driven nationalism" because I want to distinguish between the articulations of American nationalism and national identity as created by the museum — a representation of the state — and the articulations of the visitors, museum stakeholders, and even the curators — all who reformulate and re-imagine those ideas into a personalized vision of American national identity. A work pertinent here is Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration*.
 18. There are three accessions of comment cards at the Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession Nos.: 96-036, 98-030 and 97-085.
 19. For further exploration of the personalization of national American history narratives, see Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Chapter five, "Beyond the Intimate Past: Americans and their Collective Pasts" is especially relevant to analysis of the *Enola Gay* comment cards. Rosenzweig and Thelen argue that Americans place national events — like the assassination of John F. Kennedy or even the bombing of Hiroshima — within their own familial stories or identify with national stories, making the events and people into familiar, personal characters.
 20. Public Comment Cards, 1/24/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 21. See the work *The Museum Experience* (Washington: Whalesback Books, 1992) by John Falk and Lynn Dierking, or Karp, Kreamer and Lavine's work *Museums and Communities*.
 22. Public Comment Cards, 11/24/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 23. Public Comment Cards, late February, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 24. Public Comment Cards, late February, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 25. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen offer some valuable thoughts there concerning their survey of 1500 Americans about their uses of history, "Over and over respondents told stories that reflected the intersection of their families and the wider world. Professional historians often use families and individuals to illustrate some larger historical theme: rural versus urban deprivation in the Great Depression, the impact of World War II on women on the home front, the religious basis of the civil rights movement. But our respondents tended to start with the immediate, personal, and familial and then reach out for larger narratives and explanations." Rosenzweig and Thelen, *Presence of the Past*, 135.
 26. Public Comment Cards, 11/24/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 27. Public Comment Cards, 12/4/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 28. Public Comment Cards, 11/24/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 29. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession no 96-036, Box 1.
 30. Benedict Anderson's work suggests that flags, songs, and other symbols are important in understanding why people become attached to nations. Many of the comment cards certainly support these conclusions.
 31. Public comment cards, 23 October 1995, *Enola Gay* Exhibition, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 32. Public comment cards, 20 November 1995, *Enola Gay* Exhibition Files, National Air and Space Museum Archives, Washington, D.C.
 33. Public comment cards, no date, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 34. Public comment cards, 2 October 1995, *Enola Gay* Exhibition Files, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 35. For further examples of this tendency see Rosenzweig and Thelen, *Presence of the Past*.
 36. The *Enola Gay* was not exhibited in its entirety because its wing span would have been bigger than the exhibit space and it would have weighed too much — it would have fallen through the floor of the National Air and Space Museum. William Jacobs, interview with author, Washington, D.C., 1 March 1996.
 37. Public comment cards, 11/24/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 38. Public comment cards, 11/30/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 39. Public comment cards, 12/2/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 40. Public comment cards, late February 1996, *Enola Gay* Exhibition Files, National Air and Space Museum Archives, Washington, D.C.
 41. Public comment cards, 18 February 1996, *Enola Gay* Exhibition Files, National Air and Space Museum Archives, Washington, D.C.
 42. Public comment cards, 18 October 1995, *Enola Gay* Exhibition Files, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 43. Stella V. F. Butler, *Science and Technology Museums* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992) argues that science museums have traditionally had a mission of public enlightenment. Technology museums (especially industrial museums), she suggests, were created to commemorate activities. Visitors come to hear the stories of individuals who operated or worked with the technologies. Both science and technology museums, she argues, are in flux, in face of increasing funding, audience and market challenges. The National Air and Space Museum is a museum that is difficult to characterize — its very founding purposes were often under fire throughout the *Enola Gay* controversy, especially during the congressional hearings. But combining Butler's assertions about the traditional purposes of science and technology museums with

- current analysis of visitor behavior in museums — especially Falk and Dierking — it can be argued that these children's behaviors indicate an engagement with the stories surrounding the commemorated object — the *Enola Gay*. By playing in or around, they are trying to engage with the *Enola Gay*, just as visitors to industrial museums respond to the operators of technology in industrial museums. Another source for evaluating visitor behavior in science and technology museums is Matthew Weinstein, *Robot World: Education, Popular Culture and Science* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).
44. Public comment cards, 11/21/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 45. Public comment cards, no date, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 46. Public comment cards, 12/3/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 47. Public comment cards, 11/24/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 48. Public comment cards, 12/2/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 49. Anderson suggests museums reinforce inculcation of values received elsewhere — like in churches, schools and other community activities.
 50. Public comment cards, no date, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 51. Public comment cards, no date, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 52. Public comment cards, Late February, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 53. Theorists on emerging nationalism in nation-states suggest that international status is key in forming a national identity. International relations give status and recognition to a nation. International relations also provide points of comparison. They allow the emerging nation to identify unique characteristics of itself.
 54. Public comment cards, 11/24/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 55. Smithsonian Institution Archives, no. 96-036, Box 4.
 56. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Accession no. 96-036, Box 4.
 57. Public comment cards, no date, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.
 58. Public comment cards, 12/8/95, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C.