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Smithsonian Continues the Cleanup

The course correction at the Smithsonian Institution continues. In January, Smithsonian Secretary I, Michael Heyman — hard-pressed by the Air Force Association and other veterans' groups — canceled a politically distorted exhibition planned by the National Air and Space Museum of the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 that dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945.

On February 23, Secretary Heyman announced that he had ordered major changes to another Smithsonian exhibition and put yet another planned exhibit on hold. His announcement came a day after the House Appropriations Interior Subcommittee proposed cutting \$ 32 million from the Smithsonian's annual allocation, which would otherwise amount to \$ 371.1 million.

Revisions are under way, Secretary Heyman said, to "Science in American Life" at the National Museum of Natural History. After spending seven hours in that exhibit, Mr. Heyman found merit in the complaints of scientists that it "degrades science and is unbalanced in the sense that it views science's failures to a much greater extent than science's triumphs."

Placed on hold for "a time uncertain" is an exhibit on Vietnam that was scheduled to open in 1997 at the National Air and Space Museum. Secretary Heyman said the program will be postponed "until we [get] through with the *Enola Gay* and see what kind of ground rules we come up with."

The *Enola Gay* exhibit has been the most controversial in the history of the Smithsonian Institution. Politically committed curators designed it initially in a way that came close to portraying Japan as the victim rather than as the aggressor in the Pacific war. Under relentless fire from Congress and veterans' groups, the museum revised the script four times before Secretary Heyman scrapped the plan in January in favor of a smaller show, presenting the forward fuselage of the famous bomber without political commentary. The new program is expected to open in June.

In January, eighty-one members of Congress called for the resignation or replacement of Dr. Martin O. Harwit, director of the Air and Space Museum, under whose leadership the *Enola Gay* exhibit plan took a wrong turn and went over the edge. Secretary Heyman defused that call by canceling the exhibit and denies that Dr. Harwit's departure is imminent. "You don't punish people for a single mistake, and you certainly don't punish people in the midst of emotional stress and political heat," Mr. Heyman said.

Rocked by cancellation of memberships and subscriptions as well as by the drying up of corporate funding sources, the Smithsonian commissioned a poll by Peter Hart Research Associates to determine how badly it had been hurt by the *Enola Gay* controversy. The poll found that sixty-one percent of the public had heard of the controversy; of those who had heard, twenty-three percent said their views of the Smithsonian were less favorable, eight percent said their views were more favorable, thirteen percent said it "made no difference," fifty-one percent said it had no effect, and five percent didn't know.

—John T. Correll