

1) <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/1215-08.htm>

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When officials at the [Smithsonian Institution](#) unveiled a new home for the World War II bomber the **Enola Gay** in August, they had hoped to avoid the kind of controversy that had previously plagued efforts to exhibit the airplane that carried the first atomic bomb.

Not likely. Now a group of scholars, writers, activists and others have signed a petition criticizing the exhibit for labeling the **Enola Gay** as "the largest and most technologically advanced airplane for its time" without mentioning that the [Boeing](#) B-29 dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.

"You wouldn't display a slave ship solely as a model of technological advancement," said David Nasaw, a cultural historian at CUNY Graduate Center, and one of more than 100 signers of the petition. "It would be offensive not to put it in context."

Peter J. Kuznick, the director of the Nuclear Studies Institute at American University, who initiated the petition along with members of the antiwar group Peace Action, emphasized that they were not opposed to the display. "It is essential that the plane be displayed," Mr. Kuznick said, "but it must include discussions about the decision to drop the bomb."

He said he and other signers hoped "to sit down with [Smithsonian](#) officials to see the seriousness of this, and revise the exhibit."

Claire Brown, a spokeswoman at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, said the [Smithsonian](#) would have no comment until the petition was presented.

The **Enola Gay** is exhibited at the Steven Udvar-Hazy Center near Dulles International Airport in Virginia, with other vintage war planes. Its explanatory placard includes the restored airplane's dimensions and the information that while it was originally built to be used in the European fighting theater, it found "its niche on the other side of the globe."

This is the second time the [Smithsonian](#) has been taken to task for its display of the **Enola Gay**, named after the mother of its pilot, Paul Tibbets. In 1994, war veterans criticized material in a planned [Smithsonian](#) exhibit, claiming viewers could conclude that the Japanese were victims of American aggression.

The groups also took issue with the number of Americans -- 30,000 to 50,000 -- military officials anticipated would have been killed in an invasion of Japan and which has been cited as the crucial factor in President Harry S. Truman's decision to approve use of the bomb. The [Smithsonian](#), which is heavily supported by federal money, increased the estimate to one million, which then drew historians' complaints of "historical cleansing." A compromise was reached for a pared-down exhibit in 1995.

As it was before, the argument is as much about politics as history. The intellectuals and activists who are lining up to oppose this "celebratory treatment," say it is particularly dangerous at a time when the United States is displaying its military might. They want the bomber to serve as a catalyst for national debate on nuclear weapons.

"We've just broken ground in our history with a pre-emptive war," said Jean-Christophe Agnew, a cultural historian at [Yale University](#). He said there was much more public discussion between 1945 and 1947 about the wisdom of the bombing, "there was a lot more openness, and a lot more doubt."

This is a "lie of omission," said the writer E. L. Doctorow, who signed the petition. "To present this as a technological marvel with no reference to the number of people killed ignores what happened when the bomb hit the earth."

[Photograph]

An **Enola Gay** exhibit has some scholars, writers and activists saying it lacks context. (Photo by Paul Hosefros/[The New York Times](#))