

The exhibit that is up for discussion is the display of B-29 bomber *Enola Gay* displayed at the National Air and Space Museum (NASM). It was to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. This aircraft was the first to drop an atomic bomb that caused unprecedented destruction. The exhibit that displayed the aircraft was called, *The Crossroads: The End of World War II, the Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War*. Surrounding the aircraft was pictures that illustrated the results of the bombing. As one can imagine, after the opening of this exhibit there was a burst of controversy over the subject matter. This paper will focus on two impactful decisions that created ethical issues from showing *Enola Gay*. They were the generational gap of opinions on the bombing of Hiroshima that resulted from poor timing and the approach of the design of the exhibit.

In the reading called, "Battle Royal; The Final Mission of the *Enola Gay*" does an exceptional job describing the general gap of opinions on the bombing of Hiroshima. It mentions the critic Tom Engelhardt who stated the two different viewpoints on the bombing of Hiroshima. The first viewpoint he described as "victory culture," which is that there are less civilized cultures, i.e. Japanese, and transforming these cultures by simply vanquishing them. This type of ideology is that as a superior race we should be proud of our soldiers and our strength. However, the other opinion is of course opposite of that ideology in that we should help and learn from one another peaceably. The reading also mentioned that a generation divided was the cause of these mixed reactions. In a Gallup Poll conducted in the midst of the NASM controversy, it showed that 57 percent opposed to the bombing were under 50 years old, while the 55 percent who stated they would have dropped the bomb were over 50 years old. What is shocking is that the survey also proved that the memory of this event was starting

to fade away from the public. They showed that 60 percent of the Americans did not know that President Harry S. Truman was the president who ordered the nuclear bombing of Japan. Another result found that 49 percent of that poll felt they would have tried some other way to force the Japanese to surrender. Therefore, they proved there was a generational gap of opinions over the event of bombing Horoshima, Japan.

There were other events that had happened several years after the bombing that influenced dividing opinions over the years. Right after the bombing there was major support to help rebuild Japan. This created Japan to be an “economic powerhouse.” Helping Japan rebuild resulted in Japan purchasing Rockefeller Center, Columbia Pictures, and a purchase of Vincent Van Gogh’s \$82.5 million painting. However, tensions from economic competition increased between Japan and the United States that hate crimes began. These feeling of competitiveness events happened before the display of *Enola Gay* and, interestingly enough, emerged again during the exhibit while Japans economic situation declined. The timing of this exhibit was not considered when it was opening. Contemporary events did not resonate to the exhibit designer that resulted in a gap of opinions and created much discomfort for the viewers. Therefore, the exploration of opinion from the audience was not considered. This should have factored in when discussing such a controversial subject matter.

The other hot topic that was discussed in the reading was the labeling and wording used for the exhibit and display. How this show was presented created a negative view of the service men and women. Even though individual who are part of the U.S. armed forces did not have a hand in the event itself, they were still viewed as the villain. On page 197, there is an example of a cartoon that was published during the showing. It illustrates two museum staff members

that are looking at a poster. The poster has the words “Natural Born Killer; The U.S Atomic Bombing of Japan.” Most critics of the show agreed that the exhibit seemed to have sympathized more for Japanese. These were not the intentions of the museum according to the NASM director, Martin Harwit, who stated they had sent a script to the Air Force Association (AFA) and gave their opinions before the implementation of the exhibit. The reading mentioned how preliminary scripts were leaked out and an excerpt gave an impression that Americans were racist and spiteful, while the Japanese were honorable protecting themselves. The one label that fit this description was;

For most Americans this war was fundamentally different from the one waged against Germany and Italy. – it was a war of vengeance. For most Japanese, it was a war to defend their unique culture against Western imperialism.

In the author’s opinion the museum seemed to have been trying to balance both sides of the story. They wanted to demonstrate how each side felt before and after the event happened. However, NASM was not successful in their approach and instead alienated the military and Americans.

There were many other ethical decisions made the NASM on their showing of *Enola Gay* that were not discussed in this reading. However, the two major decisions of the timing of the showing and how it was presented were imperative. There were two major things that NASM could have done when exhibiting this work. One, was to pick a more fitting time. Now, the aircraft is on display at NASM's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. There is not a generation gap of opinion and so much is learned about the event. The other was to approach the show in a different matter to not alienate the common

viewers. Those were the two major ethical issues for the presenting of the Enola Gay aircraft.