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I believe that all museums that deal with history have the same approximate purposes. Since history around the world involves positive and negative happenings, museums have a special job in displaying these events from the past. Focusing on human history, the museums in the articles covered all had sensitive challenges to overcome in how they presented their information. Setting up various displays and programs for these museums take great effort and are especially difficult to keep balanced and fair when covering topics like the Holocaust and the brutal reality of America's Western frontier. In my opinion when making exhibits, the use of tact and pertinence is just as necessary as displaying the cold hard reality of the past. Museums such as the ones covered for this assignment are places to go to become more aware of the past and to gain enough insight to make the decision whether or not to continue to research the things that were presented to you.

The cold hard truth just doesn't suit some people. Unfortunately, we as humans haven't always conduct ourselves in the best ways, and a museum-goer may feel offended by being confronted with such documented brutality. In the case of the article by Thomas A. Woods¹ about the American West and Enola Gay exhibits, many people were upset because of perceived injustice to one group of people or another. "The West as America" exhibit was touted as supposedly showing the "Old West" to be a time and place "defined by violence, racial hatreds, gender discrimination, corporate greed, and disappointed hopes."² This made people angry enough to fill out the guestbook with insults to the Smithsonian. I think that removing the romance that so many people see in the "Old West" can be beneficial in understanding the true nature of the culture back then. The same principle can be applied to the Air and Space Museum that was mentioned in this article as well but reversed. The Enola Gay exhibit was criticized for showing too little viscerally-charged materials. Both of our nations lost many lives in war, and it seems as though people wanted more of that to be a part of the exhibit. I think the Enola Gay exhibit was something meant to represent a small piece of that war, specifically to talk about the bomb-dropping event. Since this exhibit focused on the plane and the bombs themselves, many people felt that it was unjust for the vehicle to be viewed without enough context behind it. For

¹ Woods, *Museums and the Public: Doing History Together*, *The Journal of American History*, (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1111-1115.

² Woods, *Museums and the Public*, 1113.

me, I think the exhibit was not doing any injustice to anyone, as the plane was only a single part of the war- just as the other atrocities during the war were their own parts of it. There are many places to go and many resources dedicated to the other parts of the war and it is unrealistic to think that the Enola Gay exhibit could possibly contain all the information behind why it was deployed. World War Two and the dropping of the atomic bombs is a memory etched into our collective psyche and I think that provides enough context for people to understand it was a tragedy and that personal research or other museums can help develop understanding about the rest of what happened then.

Next, I want to talk about the concept of leaving things out for the sake of remembering them. This may seem counterintuitive, but this is what I thought of when viewing the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” photos. Since I know about World War Two and the Holocaust, this monument doesn’t need plaques and names and photos of all who were murdered. I feel that the absence of the plaques and markers signifies the absence of the victims, and the absence of any way to make up for what happened. Sometimes the omitting of pieces means more than trying to include every tiny detail. Although I can appreciate taking things to a broadened view like this, sometimes omitting details is not beneficial. In the article by The American Historical Review about the Polin Museum, it states that “the ruling Law and Justice Party has passed legislation criminalizing any scholarship that criticizes the Polish nation...”³ This sends up red flags for me, as this type of censorship to the truth should not be legal. Omitting the bad parts or the “criticisms” of a nation (such as Poland being involved in the Holocaust) is a great way to ignore what happened there, *which is a great injustice to those who died*. Continuing on the topic of omission, this article brings up another point when addressing the accounts of women being downplayed and the parts that men took being highlighted.⁴ Even a small oversight by museums “distorts history by leaving out Thandi Modise, Lindiwe Zulu, and other women who actively participated in the ANC’s military wing, whether they appeared at Liliesleaf or not.”⁵ There must be great care taken when deciding where omission benefits an exhibit and when it does not. Museum exhibits are inherently only a piece of the grand picture, and I think it is important to understand that there is a personal responsibility to research and learn more after that.

³ *American Historical Review: Museum Reviews*, (2018), 1267.

⁴ *Museum Reviews*, (2018), 1269

⁵ *Museum Reviews*, (2018), 1269

