B) Why is it difficult to question the official narrative?
★ Two books, *Japan Subdued: The Atomic Bomb and the End of the War in the Pacific* (1961) by Herbert Feis and Gar Alperovitz’s *Atomic Diplomacy* (1965) were the first to challenge the popular memory and official narrative. However, the public and members of the Senate and Congress could not accept the idea that there would be any other way to remember the bombings than the official narrative.

★ In 1995 an exhibition about the atomic bombing of Hiroshima marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the War in the Pacific was planned. The B-29 Superfortress that dropped the atomic bomb over Hiroshima Enola Gay was to be displayed in Washington, at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Air and Space Museum (NASM). At first, the exhibition aimed at informing viewers of the debates over use of the bomb and at encouraging questioning about the use of American power. The veterans groups, and particularly the Air Force Association (AFA) saw the museum’s role as commemorative. The AFA rallied political conservatives who considered the proposed exhibition as unpatriotic or untrue to history. Senate and congress demanded to add more information on Japanese wartime atrocities like its invasion of China and the Nanking massacre and the removal of all documents that were critical of the use of nuclear weapons. Ultimately, the exhibit was dramatically scaled back because of veterans’ protests that it portrayed the Japanese as victims rather than as aggressors. Generational differences played a prominent part in this furious controversy. For the veterans, the atomic bomb ended the worst horror of their lives. On the contrary, the historians who organised the exhibitions were afraid of the perils of the atomic age.

★ So, why the official narrative which has become the popular memory of bombings has remained so strong?

- During the Cold War, the USA was painted as a bastion of democracy and freedom compared to the Soviet Union. How could a nation possess such a vast amount of nuclear weapons and question itself on its use of them in the past? The only certain thing people could believe in was that their country was doing the right thing.

![](image1.png)

Soviet and United States build up of nuclear weapons

- There are less and less people who remember Hiroshima, and even those who are around do not necessarily have a full picture of the event. Thus, the memory of the survivors can become distorted and they recreate official stories.

![](image2.png)

Surviving WWII Veterans
Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Washington University jointly organized an Exhibition on the Atomic Bomb to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the bombings in 2015. The exhibit included objects Doc 1, collected from the debris of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as 6 folding screens Doc 2, depicting the horrors of the event by Iri and Toshi Maruki.

This exhibition was less contentious than the 1995 one because:

- The primary aim of the exhibition was to portray the human suffering caused by the atomic bombings in an era in which absolute destruction of the planet became possible.
- It showed not only Japanese suffering. Two of the Hiroshima Panels portray the death of American prisoners of war and Korean forced laborers in the bombings.
- Not only are the Japanese portrayed as victims, but also as victimizers.
- The Smithsonian is a government-funded institution whereas the Washington University is a private one.

Conclusion

World War II is remembered as the “good war” by most of the Americans. The soldiers who fought were the “greatest generation”. If the 7th of December of 1941 was remembered as “a day of infamy”, D-Day was, on the contrary, considered as a turning point. However, some historians have criticized this heroic view with little success. The “saving lives narrative” that justified the dropping of the atomic bomb was also questioned by historians but this couldn't be accepted by most of the Americans. Memories of World War II remain nationalistic because of globalization’s paradoxical tendency to sharpen national identities. Memory is a reconstruction of the past, not a reproduction. Like memory, the writing of history is as much a product of the past as it is a child of its time.