Another Roadside Attraction? Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Oak Ridge, Tennessee

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ABSTRACT: Nuclear tourism is rapidly becoming a popular industry that attracts a diverse international audience with interests in history, militarism, and anti-war activism. In some sites, nuclear tourism emphasizes the devastation of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while, at others, it draws on the past to present a future of environmental stewardship, technological achievement and scientific mastery of the earth’s energy. In so doing, nuclear tourism becomes a well crafted strategy to stimulate sentiments of nationalism and civic pride, while authenticating a particular perspective of history, science and identity. This article discusses efforts to use cultural heritage of the Manhattan Project both as a marketing strategy to bring tourist dollars to the city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and as a way to celebrate the community’s past as a ‘Secret City’ and its central role in the development of the atomic bomb. This construction of cultural heritage, however, may disregard cultural rights in respect to environmental justice, health and human rights, and serve to authenticate the history of the atomic bomb as having a single moral imperative, divorced from the international arena in which nuclear science is currently being developed and debated.

KEYWORDS: cultural heritage; nuclear tourism; Oak Ridge; Manhattan Project

Introduction

Communities are defined, Benedict Anderson (1991: 6) wrote, ‘not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’. Oak Ridge, Tennessee, was a Secret City established in 1942 to provide a manufacturing complex for the separation of uranium, to be used in the development and deployment of the atomic bomb. Although residents of nearby Knoxville knew that the city had been established and it was rumoured to be associated with the war effort, its mission was not even known to the Governor of Tennessee, nor even to most of those who inhabited and worked in the city (Johnson and Jackson 1981; Olwell 2004). Surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and protected from outsiders by armed guards who shot anyone seeking unauthorized entry, the community that worked and lived together within the fence was remarkable for its shared mission to end the war, the unity that came of having to keep secret the details of one’s daily work, while living under constant surveillance, the youthfulness of its migrant workforce which drew together the highest concentration of Ph.D.’s in the nation, alongside an unskilled and skilled labour force of blacks and whites from the rural south (Overholt 1987). In addition, the sense of community was fostered through a pioneer spirit that residents shared as houses, roads, schools, civic centres, churches, stores and services were established so rapidly that, within two years, the region went from being an active farming
community whose residents had been forced to leave their farms and homes with paltry compensation and no relocation plans, to the world’s largest manufacturing complex, the sole aim of which was to develop the world’s most powerful weapon of mass destruction. By the third year of its existence, the mission was accomplished, the bomb was dropped, and Oak Ridge opened its doors to the world.¹

As we now enter the twenty-first century and world leaders openly debate whether or not to use nuclear force on Iran (Baker, Linzer and Ricks 2006), the style in which Oak Ridge is to be memorialized and publicized is significant, not only because it raises questions about the community’s identity in the past and present, but because it also has implications for how nuclear science will be interpreted and accepted by the public. As part of this process, on 18 October 2004, U.S. President George W. Bush signed into law The ‘Manhattan Project National Historical Park Study Act of 2003’ (PL 108–340), which directed the Secretary of the Interior to study the feasibility of creating national historical sites at places that had been prominent parts of the Manhattan Project. This effort, to establish major sites of the atomic past as a part of U.S. national heritage and to promote nuclear tourism, has been the mission of the Atomic Heritage Foundation (AHF). AHF is a non-profit corporation, currently funded by the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, with additional contributions from the Department of Energy (DOE)-Idaho, the National Nuclear Security Administration, Bechtel National, DuPont, Eastman Chemical, and other corporations, foundations and individuals. Through a mobile exhibit that will highlight Oak Ridge, Los Alamos, New Mexico and Hanford, Washington, the Foundation seeks, not only to make public the city of Oak Ridge’s secret past—an objective that city leaders and many veterans of the Manhattan Project support, as bringing potential tourist revenues to the city—but to commemorate the city’s pivotal role in separating uranium for the development of the atomic bomb.

The questions that arise in preserving the past are: What is it that the public should know about the ‘Secret City’ of Oak Ridge? How are the social ‘facts’ of the city to be presented and interpreted; how are its ancestral founders to be remembered; and how ought the community be related to other times, places and peoples? These questions are central to efforts to preserve portions of the uranium-separating facilities known as K-25 and Y-12, considered some of the most radioactive and toxic buildings in the world, but whose historical role as two of the three sites (along with X-10, which is now the location of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory [ORNL]), where uranium was first separated,² infuse these spaces of production (and, some would argue, destruction) with a sacred quality that the Atomic Heritage Foundation—and many community members and others—believe merits their decontamination and preservation for future generations to view and experience at first hand. In what follows, I discuss a part of this effort at preserving cultural heritage through a proposed travelling mobile exhibit, which would link the major sites of the Manhattan Project, and relate it to my own ongoing research on the cultural, environmental and health legacies of uranium production at Oak Ridge.

While the proposed mobile exhibit, ‘Atomic Secrets: Inside the Manhattan Project’, which will travel throughout the United States, is intended to present the history of the Project ‘from the “inside,” exploring the motives, perspectives and values of the participants in their voices and in the context of the time’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 7), it raises both opportunities and challenges. The exhibit provides an opportunity to honour the city’s founders by presenting their contributions to science and the growth of the community through an historical context that illuminates the perspectives of these founding citizens, who perceived their work as bringing an end to war and marking new possibilities for technological achievement in the areas of health, environment and inter-
national relations. Their experiences and perceptions merit attention and respect with the same cultural sensitivity that is commonly reserved for the exotic ‘other’ in anthropology, but less commonly accorded to Western populations with greater power and who are more likely to share similar cultural traits with the anthropologist who is studying ‘up’ (as defined by Nader 1972). But, their experiences and perceptions, like those of any cultural group, cannot be taken at face value as representing historical ‘facts’. Such representations of the past would benefit from being examined as ‘culturally mediated’ in the same sense that anthropologists have analysed historical narratives and the memorialization of warfare among indigenous and other marginalized groups (e.g. Cole 2001).

At the same time, in their efforts to preserve and make public the voices of Manhattan Project veterans, the Atomic Heritage Foundation is faced with decisions about how this history will be presented, whose contributions are emphasized, for whom this cultural heritage is intended, and how the moral complexity of the atomic bomb is to be addressed. The founder and President of the AHF, Cynthia Kelly (personal communication, 18 April 2006), indicates that the most significant factor shaping these decisions is limited funding and limited space (with 1,500 square feet allocated for the mobile exhibit). Thus, from her perspective (shaped in part by her prior career with the Office of Public Accountability at the DOE, where she was involved in environmental clean-up, and fifteen years at the Environmental Protection Agency), there has already been considerable attention paid to the environmental legacies of the Manhattan Project and the Cold War. In addition, Kelly (personal communication 18 April 2005) indicated that ‘attacks were very vigorous against participants’ of the Manhattan Project during the 1960s and 1970s, leaving many of the surviving veterans ‘gun shy about [discussing] their past participation’ in the project. Thus, from her perspective, in order for the veterans of the Manhattan Project to willingly participate, it is essential to illuminate their perceptions and showcase the positive aspects of the project and the community, to ensure that their voices are heard, and that this aspect of cultural heritage is preserved in the face of indifference and outright opposition by many who have failed to consider the cultural and historical context of the Manhattan Project that motivated veterans to work on the bomb, and the reasons for the pride they feel in having participated in something so morally complex. For these reasons, she suggests that it is a paradox that while it may be more difficult to write an objective and sensitive history of a people while the people themselves are still alive, it is also necessary to record and preserve these voices for a more objective cultural heritage to be preserved—and in this case, with veterans reaching the ends of their lives, it is exigent to do so now.

Nonetheless, without alternative views being included or the complexity of the moral issues raised by the bomb being addressed, the exhibit has the potential to become problematic because the ways in which this history is conceptualized, presented, interpreted and commodified can serve to legitimize the militarization of science and society, while delegitimizing the social consequences of the atomic bomb and of subsequent nuclear proliferation. These consequences include the environmental and health concerns of many of the city’s workers and residents, which are similar to those at other sites of uranium production (e.g. Kuletz 1998), as well as repatriation and justice efforts by the Marshallese Islanders (Barker 1997); social legacies of nuclear testing (Johnston forthcoming); Native American ‘downwinders’, who were unknowingly exposed to the bombs when they were tested (Steele 1985; Fradku 1990); radiation victimization in Russia (Garb 1997); institutional cultures of nuclear scientist and related cultural perceptions of nuclearity (Gusterson 1996; 2004); radiation and food systems in Chernobyl (Phillips 2002); secrecy and nuclear science (Masco 1999; 2002); ‘biological citizenship’ and radiation (Petryna 2002); metaphorical and symbolic
worlds shaping identities and perceptions of risk among nuclear-sector employees in France (Zonabend 1993); and the ongoing testimonies of suffering and calls for nuclear disarmament by the Japanese *hibakusha*, or survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Shohno 1986).

**Constructing Culture Through Heritage Tourism**

Blake (2000) has shown how state authorities actively produce and define ‘culture’ by determining what is deemed worthy of preservation and how the past is to be interpreted, while alternative perspectives are disregarded or controlled through selective presentation or intentionally crafted interpretations. This process raises questions as to how ‘culture’ and ‘heritage’ are defined, according to Blake, with most ‘cultural heritage’ legislation focused on material elements of culture, while giving scant attention to the more ephemeral elements of culture, such as perception, belief, social relations, language, classification systems and meanings. Rather than broaden the categories of ‘culture’ and ‘heritage’ to include everything tangible and intangible related to a given cultural group, Blake suggests that it is the relationship between culture and heritage that is most central to an understanding of how cultural heritage is conceptualized and presented. By selectively choosing those elements of a culture regarded as worthy of ‘inheritance’, cultural heritage becomes symbolic of the state’s authority to shape or quash competing claims of cultural validity.

Thus, as efforts are made to preserve and protect cultural heritage, social ‘facts’ can readily convert to social ‘fictions’, illuminating the nexus between folklore and cultural identities.

The characterisation of folklore as ‘part of the universal heritage of humanity’ while at the same time noting its power in asserting the cultural identity of the community which produced it contains an inherent contradiction since the very character which renders this heritage folklore—its intimate relationship to the identity of a specific community or people—is in opposition to the idea of it being a ‘heritage of mankind’ in any but a very distant sense. (Blake 2000: 68)

‘The problem with Oak Ridge’, one long-time (anonymous) resident who is an active member of several committees and advisory boards in the city, explained to me, ‘is it doesn’t know who it is’. How identity as an ‘Oak Ridger’ is to be presented to outsiders, in contrast to how it is understood and performed by its socially diverse population, is central to understanding how cultural heritage and nuclear tourism in Oak Ridge is currently put into practice.

In his study of the Second World War internment camp for Japanese Americans at Manzanar, Davenport (2006) suggests that, by commodifying history for the consumption of tourists, the identities of those who produced, or were produced by, specific historical sites is selectively negotiated to best meet the needs, interests and cultural identities of tourists. At the same time, as Davenport argues, the social meanings of the sites themselves, the stories of place and space, are presented through collective memories that fashion a particular perspective that ties identity to place.

As an exercise in negotiating cultural memory and the construction of identity, the broader project of memorialization, necessarily assumes the role of public arbiter, silently settling differences under the veil of questionable omniscience. Yet to ask questions and challenge the answers which are laid out before us is both healthy and righteous. Memorials are not exempt from such scrutiny, nor should their legitimacy fall victim to
erroneous claims on the past. To bring about va-
lidity and transparency in the process of discov-
ering the past is surely a noble cause upon which
the foundations of any memorial strives to be
built. (Davenport 2006: 187, 188)

Davenport links the commodification of his-
tory and negotiation of cultural memory to the
needs of capitalism.

Despite a formal proclamation that the National
Historic Site at Manzanar was to be established
not in the name of commercialism, but rather to
serve as a venue for cultural preservation and
historical interpretation, the inexorable influence
of commodifying the experience (a hallmark of
tourism in general) undoubtedly intertwines
the process of negotiating memory with the inherent
interests of capitalism. Commercialization is
clearly not an ‘all or none’ proposition, yet varying
shades of involvement appear to have imbedded
themselves in certain consumptive practices at
Manzanar, while dissociating themselves with
others. (Davenport 2006: 188, 189, emphasis his)

He regards this ‘consumption of place’, as ‘a
euphemism for an unfolding of the hegemonic
order. Certain groups offer an alternative mode
of place consumption, situating themselves atop
the hegemonic order, and the process of ne-
gotiation continues—checked and unchecked
along the way—one participant at a time’ (Dav-
enport 2006: 189).

Mythologizing the Future by
Envisioning the Past

The mobile exhibit of the Manhattan Project is
intended to showcase the sense of urgency that
scientists and workers felt as they worked dili-
gently to beat the Germans in the race to build
the atomic bomb, while American lives were
being lost daily to the war. Through the prop-
aganda posters urging workers to keep secret
all they witnessed, to a timeline of atomic sci-
ence and a reproduction of the letter Albert Ein-
stein sent to President Roosevelt, urging him
to develop the bomb before the Germans did,
the exhibit seeks to place visitors in the cul-
tural and temporal context in which the war
was affecting everyone’s life, in one way or an-
other, with a constant state of threat weighing
heavily upon the minds of those who saw their
task as necessary for world peace and lasting
security:5

Such a cultural context is indeed relevant to
the historical interpretation of the period. Vet-
erans of the Manhattan Project whom I have
interviewed in Oak Ridge, whether low-skilled
janitors or nuclear physicists, have consistently
emphasized the urgency and threat that prop-
elled them to work long hours on a project
they didn’t fully comprehend, to sacrifice civil
liberties and privacy, and to accept, ultimately,
that they were working on a bomb of unprece-
dented destructive capacity. Yet, in so present-
ring this sense of urgency, alongside the very
real and fascinating story of the community that
developed in its wake, the exhibit seems to in-
tend to construct certain themes to guide the
way that visitors will interpret this context.

For example, prior to the rapid development
of the Secret City, the region was a productive
and self-sustaining farming community until
1942, when the government sent letters to the
area’s 1,000 households, condemning their
homesteads, and offering them from $34.16 to
$44.10 an acre for their land, payable upon quit-
ting the premises. Residents had two to three
weeks to leave their homes, crops and live-
stock, and no relocation plans were made to aid
them in finding new homes and land (Robin-
son 1950). Among the interpretive exhibits
planned for the mobile exhibit, ‘Breaking New
Ground’ will explore this displacement through
a photographic and textual montage of the early
farmland (the details of which I no longer have
permission to detail). However, in the public
proposal submitted to NEH, the Atomic Her-
itage Foundation (2006: 10) does acknowledge
the great loss to those who were displaced: ‘Oak
Ridge in eastern Tennessee was chosen for pro-
ducing enriched uranium. For some local resi-
dents and Native American tribes who were
displaced, these were wrenching and sometime bitter changes. But, trucks and construction crews quickly transformed the areas and boom towns were hastily built for the influx of workers from all over the country.

It is true that while the displacement of the community had profound and lasting effects on those who lost their land and their descendants, some residents did benefit from the social and economic changes brought by the shift from an agricultural to a manufacturing-based economy. Young adults were the most likely to benefit, as they were offered jobs at the new military-industrial complex, and ultimately prospered significantly beyond the subsistence standards farming had provided (Irwin 1987). But the same was not true for older residents, for whom not only was the loss of land, stock, crops and home economically devastating, but the breaking apart of the community was an even greater loss, as ties to land, kin and social networks were abruptly severed.

The economic and technical problems inherent in such hurried-up moving, monumental as they were, did not compare to the mental trauma. One has to understand the cultural and ancestral roots to which rural folk become attached to the land after a few generations in order to understand the shock which results from such uprooting. (Irwin 1987: 21)

Irwin continues,

Young folks could look toward the future with enthusiastic optimism and quickly adjust. Old folks couldn’t. They were, to some extent, living in the past, among the familiar hollows and ridges they had known all their lives. They lived among their relatives and neighbors and lived in their memories among their ancestors—their people. This would not be the case when they moved to new places, and among strange people. (Irwin 1987: 22)

With the low sum paid to homeowners making it impossible to replace homes and farms and no funding provided for relocation, the mass exodus of farmers in search of arable land—limited by the flooding associated with the Tennessee Valley Authority’s (TVA) Norris and Watts Bar Dams constructed in the 1930s—led to an inflation of prices in the surrounding communities (Irwin 1987). Just as these land appropriation acts replicated in many respects colonial and current displacement of indigenous peoples for the establishment of protected areas in other parts of the world (see Harper 2002), the displacement was regarded as necessary and justified by the government for the greater social good. Viewed from this perspective, displacement is presented as a relatively low-cost means toward social progress that ultimately benefitted greater numbers of families economically, and the broader society by way of scientific progress. Thus, the history of the Manhattan Project can be presented in such a way that it acknowledges the loss incurred by the families who were displaced, and encourages reflection on other government projects that have displaced communities. But any representation of an international work-force engaged in industry, scientific research and technological achievement replacing what may be depicted as a slumbering Appalachian community would guide the interpretation of this displacement as ultimately a beneficial and inevitable cultural change.

Yet, the question would remain, to what extent was the development of the atomic bomb necessary and progressive? Was it, indeed, a cultural change leading toward greater, and more sustainable, benefits for greater numbers of people, at the cost to a few farming families? Were the economic and social benefits associated with its development and deployment greater than the costs incurred by others? As the proposed exhibit has developed, and a virtually all white-male Advisory Board originally comprised of corporate executives, DOE officials and community leaders, has diversified to include historians, authors and women, and a production team has been added which included experts in museum representation, the exhibit has incorporated these more sensitive
and morally complex questions. ‘After presenting the moral and ethical questions that the Manhattan Project scientists struggled with, the exhibition will ask visitors to imagine the world 60 years from now. Should the United States or any nation have nuclear weapons?’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 8). Thus, through a process of cultural negotiation with scholars and others, the proposed exhibit is positioned to present both the cultural heritage of Manhattan Project veterans who perceived themselves as working toward peace, while simultaneously challenging the viewer to reflect upon how cultural changes brought on by the bomb might raise new, yet troubling, questions on the cultural legacy of the Manhattan Project which cannot be easily answered.

By raising these questions, the ways in which interpretive displays shape viewer perception is illuminated. For example, if one considers the relatively small number of local families who were displaced as those who bore the costs, while the economic benefits were shared by the 75,000 workers employed at the height of the war, and the subsequent scientific achievements are viewed as a benefit to ‘mankind’, then the likely conclusion would be that the costs were justified. Yet if one considers, as well, the costs incurred by those beyond what could potentially be portrayed as a small farming community of Appalachian hill folk, such as those upon whom the bomb was dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; those upon whom it was tested in Nevada and the Marshal Islands (Steele 1985; Fradku 1990; Barker 1997); those who were exposed, both as workers and residents, to the toxic legacy associated with its production both during the Manhattan Project and during the Cold War (U.S. House of Representatives 1986; McCally et al. 1994); and the costs shared by global citizens for whom nuclear proliferation now poses very real risks (Welch and Utgoff 2000), then the conclusions drawn are far more complex and raise important debates about the cultural heritage of Oak Ridge. These debates may well be troubling and inconclusive, but they merit as much reflection and respect as are due the perspectives and experiences of the city’s founders, if one is to conceptualize local cultural heritage as indeed an issue of global heritage, and to conceptualize culture as comprised of diverse perspectives, meanings, belief systems and values negotiated through social networks and hierarchies of power.

These questions, which point to the moral complexity of the atomic bomb, are debated throughout the world, but this debate, while raised in the interpretive displays, is downplayed in the staging of Oak Ridge as a pivotal actor in scientific achievement, particularly as this representation is divorced from the international arena in which the bomb was produced. In part, I would argue, the absence of this complexity in the cultural heritage project is owing to the Foundation’s Advisory Board being comprised almost exclusively of DOE representatives and the management sector of the Oak Ridge facilities (with few women, minorities, workers or residents represented) and, in part, to a sincere desire by the founders of the community to showcase their contributions toward peace and toward progress, in the face of a growing lack of interest from many U.S. citizens in understanding their efforts in an historical and cultural context. Also absent is evidence of rising concerns about worker and resident health that have led to deep cleavages within the community, as some people call for greater epidemiological research to address what they perceive as epidemics of cancers, birth deformities, immunological, neurological and developmental disorders associated with the facilities, while others deny that there are any significant health problems in the area and that the community has falsely been stigmatized as unfit for habitation by such alarmist allegations and demands for further research (Harper 2005; forthcoming).

These issues cannot be readily arbitrated and settled, either through public meetings or through cultural heritage displays. There is a
very real history of the DOE (and its predecessor, the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC]) suppressing information regarding worker exposure, health, secret human experimentation and environmental contamination in the region. The history of human experimentation with radiation, such as the AEC’s study of the human effects of radiation on U.S. servicemen and Marshallese Islanders beginning in 1954 (see Johnston and Barker 2001), and a history of secrecy surrounding radiation and nuclear weapons production and testing (Masco 2002), have further contributed to concerns among some that not only is radiation dangerous, but its research is controlled by a state that has shown considerable disregard for the health of those exposed and has not always been honest to the public regarding exposures and potential or known health impacts of radioactivity. For example, Johnston (2004) points to a long history of human subjects testing at AEC-sponsored facilities, including Oak Ridge, where people were not fully informed of the nature or purpose of the studies to which they were subjected, and the government withheld information concerning their exposures or potential health risks. This history of secrecy contributes to current distrust of the DOE, the management of the Oak Ridge facilities, and ongoing environmental and health research (Harper 2005; forthcoming). Thus, the role that the DOE and corporate contributors play in currently or previously funding the efforts of the AHF may influence how representation of the past is presented to the public, or how the public will interpret such presentations.

Moreover, a history of institutionalized segregation, initiated with the initial urban planning of the city which included housing blacks in inferior housing and situating their community closest to the Y-12 electromagnetic separation facility, has led to current concerns about environmental justice and institutionalized racism which many believe persist to this day. Finally, I have found in my own research in the community of Oak Ridge, that a palpable divide between workers and management has contributed to class divisions within the community that have deepened racial cleavages, intensified distrust of the DOE and community leaders by many residents and workers, and continues to characterize the local culture.

Consequently, as the cultural heritage of Oak Ridge is commodified as a tourist industry funded and/or directed (through its Advisory Board) by the DOE, representatives of management and science sectors, and corporate representatives from the military-industrial complex, questions arise as to how history is to be remembered. For example, in addition to exploring ‘how the worlds of science and government, once separate, became interdependent during the Manhattan Project’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 8), it places special emphasis on the merging of government, science and industry, such as through one exhibit entitled ‘Wartime Alliance’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 10):

The unprecedented partnership among leading universities, industries, and the government was critical to the Manhattan Project’s success. Fundamental research was done at Columbia, California at Berkeley, Chicago and other universities. Union Carbide, Tennessee Eastman, Dupont, General Electric, Chrysler, Eastman Kodak and other companies brought industrial expertise, marshaled huge construction projects and ran first-of-a-kind production operations. The Manhattan Project’s wartime alliance transformed the relationship between industry and government and between science and government, laying the foundation for America’s post-war scientific preeminence.

Thus, the celebration of the rise of the military-industrial complex that was nurtured in Oak Ridge is given prominence by the exhibit, it lacks any meaningful reflection on the broader and more adverse global impacts of the rise of the military-industrial complex. For example, ‘the 1940s corporate logos of General Electric, DuPont and Union Carbide and pennants from University of Chicago, Columbia and University of California at Berkeley, will highlight the
partnerships of industry and academia with government in a colorful and dramatic way’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 11).

But, as the complexity of this heritage is glorified and simplified for palatable consumption by tourists, the contradiction between cultural heritage and cultural rights is buried in a narrative of scientific achievement, economic prosperity and moral pride. Indeed, the moral values that guided the scientists and workers who were instrumental in the success of Oak Ridge in separating uranium cannot be understated, and their stories and their own perceptions of their work merit the very preservation and promotion at which the AHF aims. Yet the absence of other voices, along with guiding the interpretation of this heritage through a celebration of the merging of science, government and private corporations as a seemingly evolutionary marker of progress, serves to soften reflection on the moral complexity and ambiguity of the bomb. In addition, through its emphasis on technological achievement and progress, the continuing weapons development at the Oak Ridge manufacturing industry itself is not discussed. But by defining the legacy of the Manhattan Project through a nationalist rhetoric of nuclear proliferation, the exhibit guides interpretation toward specific nationalist sentiments:

Similarly, the exhibit (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 11) defines as a ‘fact’ that ‘Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan brought an end to the war and altered the course of history’, despite alternative views that this was not necessarily the case. At the same time, while not discussing the ongoing production of weapons of mass production at the facilities, the legacy of the Manhattan Project as presented by the exhibit emphasizes the positive aspects arising from its development, aspects which I would argue are worthy of thoughtful reflection and add to the moral complexity of the project. ‘The Manhattan Project’s legacy also brought many benefits to society such as atomic energy, nuclear medicine, materials science, high-speed computing and other advances’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 11).

This emphasis on the potential for technological achievement in socially beneficial areas such as energy and medicine, while providing visitors with more thoughtful issues to consider, issues which I would argue cannot be credibly dismissed in any thoughtful analysis of the nuclear legacy, become intellectually dishonest when they are divorced from the ongoing production of weaponry at the facilities and the continuing environmental and health hazards posed to workers and residents from weapons production at the facilities. In this way, the exhibit mirrors in many respects the ways in which nuclear scientists have distanced themselves from the moral issues raised by their work, and pursued their aims behind a gloss of scientific objectivity and national goals for military and economic dominance, which has obscured the subjectivity of their mission (see Gusterson 1996; 2004).

Objectifying Science, Culture and Subjectivity in Oak Ridge

In the unveiling of the Secret City of Oak Ridge, workers were finally freed from the secrets they had been keeping the previous three years, and
their role in the production of the atomic bomb became known to the world. With the advent of the Cold War, however, secrecy remained imperative, and it is this secrecy that continues to be both celebrated (through the city’s annual Secret City Festival and the cultural heritage mission of the AHF), and perpetuated (through a cultural consensus of silence that permeates discussions of work, environment and health issues in the community today). Yet in his discussion of nuclear testing, Gusterson (2004) contends that secrecy serves as an initiatory rite, in which access to knowledge marks one’s membership into the group.

Since the comparison of nuclear tests to rituals may seem improbable, even offensive, to some, particularly the scientists who carry them out, it bears a word of explanation. My intention in making the analogy is not to be cute; nor is it to satirize nuclear weapons scientists by comparing them to tribal ‘savages’, nor yet to deny that nuclear tests are rigorously executed scientific experiments. I make the guarded analogy between ritual and nuclear testing because it seems to me to genuinely illuminate the significance to testing for Livermore scientists in a way that affords a new vantage point, not only on the vexed debate over nuclear testing, but also, more broadly, on the cultural and psychological significance of scientific experimentation in general ... In rites of passage, the social status of initiates is irrevocably changed as they are indoctrinated with the special, or even secret, knowledge of the initiatory group. (Gusterson 2004: 155)

As guardians of the secret—even for the majority who did not fully grasp the scope and scale of their mission—workers and residents of Oak Ridge were initiated into a culture of science and warfare that marked them as initiates, insiders and select members of an exclusive community from which outsiders were literally locked out during the years of the Manhattan Project, and metaphorically excluded during the Cold War as information about the facilities and the community was limited. This culture of secrecy and security served two purposes. First, it fostered identity as ‘an Oak Ridger’ that persists to this day. Secondly, it delegitimated critiques of weapons production because it fostered the view that only insiders possessed the knowledge with which to make informed judgements about the scientific and political objectives of the facilities. In this vein, Gusterson (2004) suggests that the production of knowledge about nuclear weapons serves as a form of symbolic capital: the more that one participates in the scientific process (nuclear testing, in the case of Gusterson’s argument), the greater one’s authority and respect.

It is through such symbolic capital, I would argue, that the perspectives of scientists and management at Oak Ridge have gained prominence in the AHF’s presentation of cultural heritage, while the views of workers, residents, minorities and others who have raised concern about the historical and ongoing environmental-health exposures to the community (see Harper 2005; forthcoming) have been subordinated as less worthy of preservation, and the broader, adverse affects of weapons production—particularly the atomic bomb—on those upon whom such weaponry has been tested and deployed, have been omitted from any meaningful presentation and interpretation of the cultural heritage of Oak Ridge.

Central to this hierarchy of knowledge and authority that guides the presentation and interpretation of cultural heritage is the idea that the project was a scientific feat, with the harnessing and mastery of the earth’s energy made possible through technology and science. As humans are seen to control nature, culture becomes viewed, not as a complex web of social relations and meanings conferred upon the material and social world and interacting with nature (as agent and as subject), but as a natural trajectory of increasing mastery over the environment toward greater efficiency and production. Thus, as Latour and Woolgar (1986), Zonabend (1993), Gusterson (1996; 2004) and others have shown, scientists have tended to abstract their work from the social world in which it is embedded and produced, viewing their role as
agents in a process of cultural change that is regarded as having a natural and inevitable tendency toward the good of humanity. The production of cultural heritage at Oak Ridge has replicated and reinforced this abstraction of science as neutral, moral and natural, by the way in which the social ‘facts’ of its history are to be presented to the public.

Latour and Woolgar (1986: 171) provide a useful means of analysing the ideas and ‘facts’ generated by and about science. They suggest that examining individual ideas and thoughts at face value fails to account for the social character of fact construction, but if such ideas are treated as stories or tales ‘which obey certain laws of their “genre”, it is possible both to extend the analysis of fact construction and to understand how such stories about ideas and thoughts are generated’. They suggest that these social constructions of facts are further illuminated by analysing the ways in which new statements and anecdotes emerge and become linked to other social ‘facts’, within the perimeters of systems of logic and local circumstances. Yet fleshing out such systems of logic that generate ‘facts’ is challenging, as Latour and Woolgar (1986: 176, emphasis theirs) concede: ‘Our argument is not just that facts are socially constructed. We also wish to show that the process of construction involves the use of certain devices whereby all traces of production are made extremely difficult to detect’. They suggest that as information is generated about objects, statements are made about them which, in time, become taken to be attributes of the object, rather than statements about the object.

Haraway (1989) suggests that narratives attract listeners who are drawn to them. The AHF is acutely aware of how marketing the exhibit will require targeting those listeners who will be drawn to the specific narrative themes it envisions.

The Atomic Heritage Foundation will specifically reach out to World War II veterans and their children and others particularly interested in the Manhattan Project through its extensive mailing list... After the war, a large percentage of the 125,000 people who worked on the atomic bomb program moved to other places across the country. Through outreach efforts, the Atomic Heritage Foundation will encourage the attendance of these veterans and their family members. At each venue, veterans will be recruited to provide first-hand accounts of their wartime experiences. In addition, over 25 major corporations and dozens of smaller companies were part of the wartime alliance of industry, government, and academia. Outreach efforts will be directed to retirees of corporations such as DuPont, Union Carbide (now part of Dow), Tennessee Eastman (now Eastman Chemical), Alcoa, Chrysler and others who played major roles in the Manhattan Project. Exhibition events will highlight these contributions in areas where the companies are now located. (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 13)

As a marketing strategy, targeting such audiences is understandable and likely to be effective in bringing attention to the exhibit. Yet, while not to discredit the logic of such a strategy, one must also reflect on how the presentation of ‘facts’ or the narratives associated with the presentation of history, will be shaped to appeal to such an audience, and whether or not ‘facts’ may readily convert to ‘fictions’ or ‘folklore’ through the process of marketing the past. If so, these are the types of fictions which, according to Haraway, are pathways to truths, however, and fashioned and formed to resonate with personal experience.

Scientific practice may be considered a kind of story-telling practice—a rule-governed, constrained, historically changing craft of narrating the history of nature. Scientific practice and scientific theories produce and are embedded in particular kinds of stories. Any scientific statement about the world depends intimately upon language, upon metaphor. (Haraway 1989: 4)

Among the more prominent statements made about the development of the atomic bomb are those related to exigency, ingenuity and determination. For example, in its proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the AHF (2006: 7, 8) writes:
This exhibition will focus on a number of important humanities themes that will be a means to understand many dimensions of the Manhattan Project and its legacy and also help visitors to explore their own values. One theme is how the American spirit of the early 1940s—the risk-taking, willingness to try unorthodox approaches, and hard-driving determination to succeed—was critical to the incredibly ambitious undertaking. Naming the participants the ‘Greatest Generation,’ [journalist] Tom Brokaw has documented this spirit in the context of World War II; this exhibition will explore how these values were manifest among the Manhattan Project workers as well.

There is no denying the remarkable rapidity and ingenuity that went into the development of the Oak Ridge manufacturing facilities, as well as the construction and development of a community to house 75,000 people in such short a space of time. Nonetheless, the linguistic emphasis on the development of the bomb as reflecting ‘hard-driving determination to succeed’, along with its linkage to the ‘Greatest Generation’, invokes a spirit of nationalism in which the development of the bomb is viewed as a product of a unique American culture that enabled the U.S. to succeed when other industrial nations in Europe failed. ‘President Roosevelt placed great trust in the scientists and duly authorized the program. In contrast, there was no such confidence or mutual understanding in Germany. Despite their head-start, the German effort became stymied and their scientists abandoned work on the bomb’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 8). In this way, the emphasis on the bomb as a symbol of U.S. superiority casts the bomb as an object of success, while an emphasis on its role in ending the war marks it as an object of peace.

In raising these issues, one must concede that to those involved in the development of the bomb, these attributes do indeed reflect the perspectives of those involved in its production. Nonetheless, once the bombs were dropped, first on Hiroshima and then on Nagasaki soon after, the scientific community became deeply divided as to whether or not nuclear weapons production should continue, and if so, who should control this production—the military or the public (Rhodes 1995; Rockwell 2004; Bird and Sherwin 2005). The divisiveness that followed in the wake of the bomb is discussed in the proposed exhibit, but by emphasizing the production of the bomb as an historical event to celebrate, rather than to question.8

Moreover, in so doing, the cultural heritage objectives of the AHF focus on the international efforts of scientists from Europe who migrated to the United States and worked with American scientists to solve the puzzle of nuclear fission. In this way, the heritage of Oak Ridge is presented as an international heritage, marked by the international makeup of the community’s population, which to this day comprises one of the largest concentrations of Jewish residents in the Bible Belt. But the roles that European immigrants (e.g. Enrico Fermi, Leo Szilard, Hans Bethe, Edward Teller and Eugene Wigner) played in the development of the bomb have been cast as an American triumph in drawing scientists from Nazi Germany to side with the United States and in so doing, to assimilate into an American culture of ingenuity, determination, and spirit of nationalism that made this development possible in the United States, but not so in Europe.

Another humanities theme is the role that trust played between the government and the scientists. With enormous uncertainties and technical challenges, initiating the construction of an atomic bomb in the midst of a war required a leap of faith. President Roosevelt placed great trust in the scientists and duly authorized the program. In contrast, there was no such confidence or mutual understanding in Germany. Despite their head-start, the German effort became stymied and their scientists abandoned work on the bomb. (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 8)

The focus on the marriage between science and the state has the potential to strengthen the exhibition, but if done so through a nationalist rhetoric that encourages visitors to narrowly
interpret this alliance, it is more likely that thoughtful reflection on how this alignment of interests has subjectively shaped the scientific process may be limited. In his ethnography of the U.S. nuclear complex, Gusterson (2004) suggests that the study of science and technology has tended to ignore the relationship between science and the state, as it has moved from an exploration of the social values of scientists themselves to the social construction of scientific ‘facts’. Gusterson focuses, instead, on the connections among scientific ethics, militarism and the environment that shape how science is conducted. Thus, the politics of the state and the organizational culture in which science is conducted clearly shape the directions and findings of science (see Latour and Woolgar [1986] for further discussion on this topic).

In addition, linkage of the bomb to Japan and to other nations which have, or are attempting to have, nuclear weapons capabilities, has not been included in the presentation as planned, except to the extent that nuclear proliferation is viewed through the lens of nationalism and self-defence.

Today, nuclear weapons and security issues dominate the national agenda, from proposals to dramatically reduce the stockpiles of 27,000 warheads to the construction of new ‘bunker busting’ nuclear bombs. The potential for terrorists to obtain nuclear weapons is cited as the chief security threat faced by the United States. Being informed about nuclear issues is clearly important not just for politicians, scientists or historians but for citizens who are equally affected by United States policies to control the spread of weapons of mass destruction or address the nation’s long-term energy security. The exhibition seeks to inform and engage visitors on these vital subjects. (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 13)

In the spirit of the AHF’s interpretive efforts to engage the public in contemplating the Manhattan Project’s legacy impact on the twenty-first century, one might ask as well, ‘How might other nations view the development of the atomic bomb? Has development of the bomb influenced international relations among nation-states and peoples? Should the control of nuclear energy be in the hands of a single nation-state or would global security be better insured through control by a global entity?’ These questions are as politically and culturally interpreted as are those raised by the AHF, but perhaps less likely to be supported by funding agencies, tourist dollars or the community of Oak Ridge. But in not asking these questions, they remain speculative, rather than empirical.

**Defining and Conceptualizing Communities of Heritage**

The efforts of the AHF and the community of Oak Ridge to preserve the community’s cultural heritage as a pivotal one in scientific and technological achievement merit respect and support, because the region (like those of other sites of the Manhattan Project) has a remarkable history to be told, and its founding members have stories of profound import to understanding contemporary narratives and debates about nuclear energy, warfare, economic development and scientific achievement. At the same time, Blake’s (2000) suggestion that in constructing these narratives of preservation, state authorities actively construct history to conform to the interests of the state and its agents (which include corporate interests) is clearly reflected in the ways in which preservation and presentation of this cultural heritage at Oak Ridge and other sites of the Manhattan Project are envisioned.

By selectively limiting the participation of alternative voices (such as exposed workers and residents, disenfranchised African Americans and voices of resistance) in any meaningful way, such as in project planning or advisory board roles; by downplaying the environmental and health legacies of the Manhattan Project and the Cold War; and by framing these narratives in a celebratory tone of nationalist sentiment and the language of modernity and progress, the interpretation of this cultural heritage is con-
trolled by a select group that represents corporate and state interests, which define both history and culture on their own terms.

In the very decision to withhold documents and limit cooperation with the research for this article, once it became clear that my analysis would address how understandings and representatives of cultural heritage can be enriched by a process of negotiation with social scientists and others, along with AHF President Kelly’s willingness to cooperate so long as the aims of the Foundation were portrayed in an exclusively positive light, the opportunity to engage in fruitful dialogue with anthropologists and marginalized groups was lost, pointing to Dav-enport’s (2006) claim that negotiating identities related to place become commodified to meet the needs of capitalism, with negotiation limited to participants who conform to the hegemonic social order. In this way, the crafting of history was further underscored, whether intentionally or in a well meaning effort to protect the integrity of AHF’s project, through the deliberate termination of negotiation and dialogue once concerns of cultural representation were raised.

This loss was, in my view, both unnecessary and unfortunate, because through the process of meeting with Manhattan Project veterans, workers and residents, and by interviewing Cynthia Kelly, my own views were enriched and gained more nuanced understandings of the region’s history, its founding leaders and workers, and the strategies and goals of the cultural heritage project. The continued resistance by social projects, whether international development projects or national park projects that affect communities and socially marginalized peoples, to meaningfully reflect upon potential errors of representation or adverse social impacts, continues to place applied anthropologists in the ethically challenged position of having to conform to the needs and interests of those in positions of power by not including constructive critique in our writings, or to lose the opportunity—to having dialogue and the access to data restricted—to fully explore and present the views of those in power in the true spirit of cultural relativity, which is to say, through the perspectives of those we study when we ‘study up’.

At the same time, by mentioning unfavourable or negative aspects of history or cultural representations in cultural heritage exhibits, without including adversely affected actors or those with alternative views as true participants in planning and implementation of cultural heritage projects, such a glossing of adverse social and cultural impacts amounts to meaningless window-dressing for opposing views. This downplaying of adversity or moral complexity is further trivialized when these concerns are raised but given little prominence in exhibits, contrasted to large-scale showcasing of the beneficial fruits of state and corporate authorities who fund and direct interpretive displays. The demand that anthropologists conform our analyses to the objectives and perspectives of those in power also makes it difficult to represent a multiplicity of views from the cultural perspectives and contexts of the diverse participants who comprise a given ‘culture’, if only those in the position to shape the outcome of a project are positioned to speak with authority on whose culture is to be bequeathed to future generations.

Who, then, determines the ‘participants’ or ‘stakeholders’ in crafting cultural heritage projects? The concept of ‘stakeholder’ has been useful in identifying those individuals and groups who have a stake in the outcome of social policies and practices and has become commonly employed in policy research, just as the concept of ‘participation’ has been employed by projects having social impacts on local populations. Yet the concept of stakeholder, rapidly replacing that of participant, however useful as a unit of analysis, has its own boundaries, which may limit the potential for discerning the complexities and contradictions within ‘stakeholder communities’. Fortun (2001) explores diversity within stakeholder communities. In her study of advocacy in the aftermath of the Bhopal dis-
aster, she focused on what she termed ‘enunciatory communities’—communities of people with shared interests, but multiple social positions and/or perceptions. Suggesting that enunciatory communities are by their very nature fissured, and change through time and space, Fortun illuminated the ‘double binds’, in which individuals find themselves confronted with multiple responsibilities that may be conflicting or incongruent, thereby leading to complex messages and ways in which people understand and engage in the world.

This concept of enunciatory community may provide a starting point from which to flesh out the cultural context under which certain views and beliefs are held about the hybrid objects of science (see Latour 1991/1993), and the ever-changing networks that connect these objects with societies and their cosmologies, belief systems, institutions and rituals. Thus, just as Rosenthal (1991) aimed the lens of cultural relativity on her study of the multiplicity of meanings attached to the nuclear mushroom cloud, communities born of the Manhattan Project may be viewed as some form of ‘enunciatory community’, which is to say, communities having shared interests, but often differing strategies, objectives and cultural foundations that constitute the cultural context within which specific belief systems emerge. Moreover, how such communities respond to science and technology creates unique relationships among actors, social groups and institutions. And through these emerging and interconnected communities, come the political, economic and social networks that constitute the cultural foundations and frontiers of science, technology and communities that projects such as preserving the cultural heritage of the Manhattan Project.

How might cultural heritage projects better incorporate these diverging and ever-changing views, experiences and belief systems into their presentations? Two immediate suggestions come to mind, the first being the abstract, scholarly efforts to disentangle conflicting worlds that collide in public meetings, historical representations and household discussions, the second, the practical ways in which ‘interpretive’ displays might more explicitly and bravely present uncomfortable, but equally legitimate, cultural perspectives.

Lock (2002: 51) writes, ‘public debate reveals the politics and values invested in boundary making … My task as ethnographer is to go one step further: to consider why certain responses, decisions, and commentaries become dominant and “naturalized” and why other possibilities may be either openly disputed or completely beyond consideration’. Through her analysis of cultural perceptions regarding death and the body, Lock draws on Kopytoff’s (1986) concept of ‘social lives’ of objects, to suggest that by focusing less on the objects themselves, such as the atomic bomb in this case, and more on the systems of exchange (such as mining, production, commodification, trade and deployment of atomic weapons), one can better discern the ways in which value shifts as it moves from one social sphere and time to another. In this respect, an analysis of the Manhattan Project that is truly mobile, that shows how the Project is conceptualized and debated in differing locales and by differing stakeholders (or ‘enunciatory communities’) globally (if it is indeed to be marketed as a ‘global heritage’), can provide a more clear understanding of the ways in which the symbols and values attached to an object produce or reinforce the boundaries of debate.

One way in which this objective can be put into practice is by presenting the unsavoury and discomforting visual, textual and material artefacts of cultural production of the bomb on vivid display for tourist consumption in the same way that the more palatable and socially beneficial artefacts are showcased. At the National Atomic Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for example, alongside photo montages of Oak Ridge, Los Alamos and Hanford,
replicas of Fat Man and Little Boy, recorded narrations of the remarkable scientific achievements of the Manhattan Project, exhibits showcasing the story of technological mastery of the earth’s energy in such a short period of time, Second World War remembrances, and humorous retro artefacts of the era such as ‘Atomic Bomb Perfume’, ‘Uranium Earrings’, and a ‘Three Mile Island Table Lamp’, are also prominently displayed exhibits on ‘Radiation Victims’, which include a poster presentation of Native American Uranium Miners and Millers, describing the low pay, hard work, and death and disease that Native Americans suffered in providing uranium to manufacture the bomb. Another exhibit, entitled ‘Deadly Radiation’, includes discussion of nuclear power plants, testing at the Nevada Test Site and in the Pacific at the Bikini Atoll, and accidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. In addition, the exhibit includes a prominent statement that ‘the enormous amount of radiation released by the two atomic weapons dropped on Japan is still killing people who were exposed to them’ (Narrative Poster at the National Atomic Museum, 14 March 2006).

The National Atomic Museum also includes exhibits on nuclear waste, alongside an exhibit entitled ‘Sandia National Laboratories: Road to Long-Term Environmental Stewardship’. In its exhibit on nuclear energy, the accident at Chernobyl is discussed, along with the statement that radiation from the accident affected the entire northern hemisphere. And perhaps most troubling of all are the photos of a charred helmet worn by a little boy in Hiroshima, alongside a photo of his charred tricycle, with the caption, ‘This tricycle belonged to three-year-old Shinichi Tetsutami, who was riding in front of his house in Hiroshima when the atomic blast flattened it. He died that evening’. The photos, which also include the only known photos taken of Hiroshima that day, are acknowledged as coming from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, illuminating the ways in which international exchange can enrich cultural heritage representations. A guest book asks visitors to ‘Please leave your reflections on Hiroshima and Nagasaki’, which include multiple and conflicting views that visitors were inspired to record.

Despite the discomforting photographs and narratives that are displayed at the museum, they in no way detract from the museum’s emphasis on the scientific and technological achievements of the Manhattan Project, the potential for the scientific achievements of that era to lead to social benefits in the areas of environment, medicine and technology, or the remarkable social history of the workers and scientists who participated in the Manhattan Project. But by showcasing—rather than merely mentioning—the underside of the story as well, the museum compels visitors to reflect more thoughtfully and with a richer understanding, on the moral complexity of the atomic bomb and the historical era from which it came. In this way, participation is replaced with critical engagement, and visitors become more active agents in interpreting the history of the past (McIntosh and Prentice 1999).

Downey (1986: 394) writes that by providing convincing evidence of both the potential of ultimate world progress through the limitless harnessing of nature’s energy and the risk of ultimate regress through the total destruction of both man and nature, atomic energy was a maximally ambiguous technology for most members of American culture. Consequently, it became a difficult policy problem.

It remains a difficult policy problem today, as we seek to memorialize it through cultural heritage displays. But by confronting the ambiguous legacy of atomic science and Second World War, those who inherit this legacy are better equipped to confront the future of atomic energy. The National Atomic Museum in Albuquerque quotes George Santayana, over a large photo montage of the destruction of Hiroshima: ‘Those Who Cannot Remember the Past are Condemned to Repeat It’.
Conclusion

When crafting cultural heritage, one must ask, to what extent does ‘cultural heritage’ conflict with ‘cultural rights’ (Blake 2000)? In the case of Oak Ridge, and I would argue at other major sites of the Manhattan Project, the cultural rights that are raised include the right to participate meaningfully in the representation of history and the right to have addressed the environmental and health legacies of the weapons production from these sites. Moreover, the right to an authentic cultural representation is precluded when culture is defined by state authorities, who ‘present largely a simple concept of culture: that of culture as a social category, the “whole” way of life of a people’ (McIntosh and Prentice 1999: 592), or what McIntosh and Prentice (1999: 593) refer to as ‘the McDonaldization of culture’. This commodification of culture, according to McIntosh and Prentice, produces and reproduces certain forms of identities that are tied to particular interpretations of the past.

In the case of Oak Ridge, identity as an ‘Oak Ridger’ includes identities as Manhattan Project veterans who comprise not only community leaders and scientists, but unionized workers, temporary migrant workers, African Americans who found both economic opportunity and social segregation at Oak Ridge, residents and workers who sickened or died, or continue to sicken and die, from exposures to toxic chemicals and radioactive exposures, and a socially diverse, highly educated, pioneer generation who settled and created one of the most unique and culturally rich communities in the nation, and whose children have inherited not just the toxic and social stigma of being ‘Oak Ridgers’ or descendants of the ‘Secret City’, but also a rich and complex social legacy in which they have great pride and an attachment to place and history.

It was not only uranium that was fissured at Oak Ridge, but the community as well, and, by showcasing the complexity of this history and the social differences, power relations and ambiguities that the Manhattan Project created, rather than just the voices of community leaders and the national achievements their participation fostered, the cultural heritage of Oak Ridge is more likely to reflect the intricate and puzzling networks, meanings and symbols that mark culture as it is understood and practised by anthropologists, and by the people who create our diverse and global cultural heritage.

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Notes

1. I would like to thank Eric Ross for his thoughtful critiques, suggestions and insights which have considerably improved this analysis.
2. The designations of these three buildings as X-10, K-25 and Y-12 were arbitrary labels meant to obscure the nature of their activities. Because scientists were unsure of which method for uranium separation would be most effective, it was decided to build the three facilities and pursue all three methods simultaneously (Johnson and Jackson 1981; Olwell 2004). X-10 was the Research Laboratory where the world’s first full-scale nuclear reactor was built and put into operation; this reactor, known as the graphite reactor, remains intact as a tourist attraction. K-25 was the Gaseous Diffusion Plant, and Y-12 was the Electromagnetic Separation Plant.
3. The Atomic Heritage Foundation (2006: 20) estimates that it will require $850,000 for the mobile exhibit, but reports current funding of $200,000, primarily from the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust.
4. See Harper (2005; forthcoming) on contrasting views among workers and residents who are vocal in their protests that very little meaningful attention or epidemiological research has addressed these issues.
5. Although earlier unpublished drafts provided to me, outlining the proposed exhibit, detailed the visual and textual representations that the mobile exhibit will present to facilitate visitors’ interpretations, Cynthia Kelly revoked permission to cite from these working documents when
I explained my interest in showing how the project has developed over time and benefitted from working with scholars in history, political science and museum specialists. Responding: ‘So, you plan to make us your poster child for improvement after taking a “more informed approach to cultural heritage.”’ Well, as long as you present us as going in the right direction, I suppose you can cite our work in your article’ (Cynthia Kelly, e-mail communication to Janice Harper, 20 April 2006). Her withdrawal of permission came after I added that I did, indeed, support the aims of the project and that the learning process was mutual, as applied anthropologists learn as much from those we ‘study’ as do those we hope to influence with our expertise. She expressed concern that such a representation would not present ‘an accurate portrayal of the situation’ (Cynthia Kelly, e-mail communication to Janice Harper 21 April 2006) and requested I ‘rethink’ use of the documents. Thus, although I quote from the final proposal submitted to a public agency, the National Endowment of the Humanities (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006), I am unable to cite many of the details of how imagery and text used in the mobile exhibit will represent the transformation of the pre-Second World War community from a passive, nonproductive Appalachian hill culture, to an industrious, productive, military-industrial symbol of modernity and progress.

6. The exhibit does propose addressing some of these issues. For example, it suggests targeting middle- and high-school students with interactive displays addressing racial segregation, and includes among its goals the aim of exploring ‘the social and cultural aspects of the experimental government-run “secret cities” of Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, and Hanford, WA, and the experiences of women, African Americans and other minorities in the Manhattan Project’ (Atomic Heritage Foundation 2006: 9) although the strategies toward achieving these goals remain unaddressed.

7. While the exhibit illuminates the Manhattan Project as bringing an end to the war, this perception, while central to understanding the motivations and memories of Manhattan Project veterans, remains a contentious issue among historians. With some arguing that Japanese surrender was imminent, the use of the bomb was regarded not as a strategy to end the war, but instead, to prevent Soviet entry into the war in the Pacific. For example, in their biography of Robert Oppenheimer, Bird and Sherwin (2005) quote James Byrnes, then Secretary of State-designate, as suggesting that using the bomb on Japan would be helpful in persuading the USSR to withdraw their troops from Eastern Europe. Moreover, use of the bomb was viewed as sending a signal to the world about the changing nature of the geopolitical realities of the post-war.

8. Although I did not raise this issue with Cynthia Kelly, she herself commented (personal communication 18 April 2006) on the use of the term ‘celebrate’, suggesting that ‘commemorate’ might be more appropriate.

References


