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June 3, 2001

A Disputed Gift at the Smithsonian

To the Editor:

"Gifts That Can Warp a Museum" (editorial, May 31) reaches the wrong conclusion.

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To suggest that the Smithsonian, in its agreement with the Catherine B. Reynolds Foundation, has abdicated control of the exhibition "The Spirit of America" ignores the fact that we retain explicit and exclusive control as part of this agreement.

Good ideas are the antidote to insularity. If we look only inward for inspiration, as you suggest, how can we accurately reflect our society, its history and our times?

The Reynolds Foundation's gift to honor Americans of great achievement will inspire countless young people woefully in need of positive role models. The agreement provides explicitly that all honorees must have been recognized as Nobel laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners and Medal of Honor recipients or by other clearly exemplary means. Calling this idea "trivial" dismisses the needs of this and future generations.

LAWRENCE M. SMALL

Secretary of the Smithsonian

Washington, May 31, 2001

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