Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): News Article 11

Karen J. Winkler

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_36

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_36/14
Scholarship

A House Divided
By KAREN J. WINKLER

Christopher Columbus has put the National Endowment for the Humanities in the midst of a heated debate over the meaning of American culture.

Some scholars charge that the endowment is letting political bias and fear of controversy influence its grants for programs to honor the 500th anniversary of Columbus's first encounter with the New World.

The 1992 Columbus quincentennial is already causing friction between groups that see it as a celebration of Western civilization and those that view it as a commemoration of native cultures victimized by European imperialism.

Too Cautionous, Critics Say

Some scholars who have applied to the humanities endowment for grants to stage public quincentennial programs say the agency favors the approach that celebrates Western civilization. Other scholars say the endowment is overly cautious—reluctant to make available to a general audience research that might be controversial.

In a written statement to The Chronicle, the N.E.H. chairman, Lynne V. Cheney, said: "The endowment is not hostile to critical inquiry into any subject or culture." Mrs. Cheney declined to be interviewed.

Critics contend, though, that top N.E.H. officials are overturning peer and staff recommendations on Columbian grants. The charges raise questions about who makes decisions at the endowment—and how.

Last fall, a group of scholars and filmmakers who had previously received N.E.H. funds to plan and write a public-television series called 1492—Clash of Visions was turned down for a final grant to produce the programs.

The applicants included Yanna Kroyt Brandt, a producer whose previous historical documentaries include A House Divided, on slavery. Among the members of the project's advisory board are leading scholars of the period.

‘Multiple Points of View’

By KAREN J. WINKLER

Rather than telling the traditional story of Columbus and his ships, we proposed looking at 1492 from multiple points of view," says Nancy L. Roelker, who heads the advisory committee and is a visiting professor of history at Brown University. The series proposed that the experiences of different nations and cultures in

Continued on Page A8