Berman, Ronald: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1975-1976): Correspondence 02

James S. Ackerman

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_9

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_9/16

This Correspondence is brought to you for free and open access by the Education: National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, Subject Files I (1973-1996) at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Berman, Ronald: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1975-1976) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.
June 17, 1976

Claiborne Pell
Labor and Public Welfare Committee
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

I write in vigorous opposition to your effort to alter the funding procedures of the National Endowment for the Humanities and in support of Mr. Berman's position. The present method of funding, in which applications are reviewed by the most qualified humanists in the country, is the best way to protect public money. The nationally recognized referees who presently serve have not shown bias. In humanistic scholarship, eminence can be readily identified—not with perfect objectivity, but with a small margin of error. Because eminent scholars gravitate to great universities, fewer grants are now awarded in states which, because they spend less on education, do not have the best universities.

Were your proposal to be enforced, the result would be that the present disinterested choice would be replaced by one subject to political influence and manipulation. Furthermore, the bulk of the money would be distributed to applicants of less talent and achievement because they would have to clear only a statewide screening, not a national one. Finally, the proposed change would be supremely inequitable because an applicant from New York, California, or Massachusetts would have to outshine a high percentage of the most brilliant scholars in the nation, while one from North Dakota or Mississippi might encounter next to no serious competition. I know that this position can be dismissed as elitist, especially when expressed by an employee of this institution, but it is the defensible elitism of talent that restrains us from seeking representation from every state on our Olympic track team or in major league baseball.

But here we are dealing with the education of our young people, and it will be far more effective if the most productive and imaginative scholars are supported in the writing of articles and books that illuminate their subject for other teachers and students in every state, than if grants were treated as some kind of handout to be distributed according to political boundaries.

Cordially yours,

James S. Ackerman
Professor of Fine Arts

JSA/mm