

1991

Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Memorandum 01

Alexander D. Crary

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_33

Recommended Citation

Crary, Alexander D., "Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Memorandum 01" (1991). *Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991)*. Paper 22.
http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_33/22

This Memorandum 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 Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

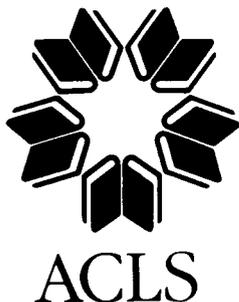
United States Senate

MEMORANDUM 6/24

Senator: Please note attached "thank you" from Stan Katz.

He also sent an analysis of fellowships in the humanities over the last decade which he mentioned in the meeting. I will send it over if you'd like to see it.

ADC



91 JUN 24 AM 10:07

Stanley N. Katz
President

June 20, 1991

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
Committee on Labor and Human Resources
335 SROB
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-3901

Dear Senator Pell:

I am very grateful to you for taking the time to speak to Phyllis Franklin and myself on June 19. I valued the opportunity to talk to you, particularly on a subject which is genuinely important to ACLS.

I hope I was able to express my own gratitude for the work you have done for the humanities all of these years, but I should also tell you something you must know, which is how profoundly grateful Bob Lumiansky was in all of his private discussions of your role in the founding and nurturing of NEH.

Yours sincerely,

Stanley N. Katz

SNK:mb

Enclosure: DG-Hum-F

American Council of Learned Societies
228 East 45th Street, New York, NY 10017-3398
212 697 1505
Fax: 212 949 8058
Telex: 798921 ACLS UD

The Washington Post rightly described Carol Iannone as a "slash and burn critic." Her book reviews can have damaging effects that go beyond whether people buy the books she discusses. Consider, for example, the "Literature by Quota" review, which denigrates the novels of several African-American authors whose works have been honored by national literary awards. Dr. Iannone insists--without providing evidence--that these awards were not based on the merit of the novels.

English teachers tend to be conservative in selecting the literature they assign to students because they wish to assign only the best literary works. So when teachers read that prize-winning novels by African-American writers did not deserve to receive prizes, these teachers are reluctant to assign the books to their students. Consequently, students who might have benefited not only from reading such an excellent book as Toni Morrison's Beloved, but might also have been heartened by the model of Morrison's personal achievement lose an important educational opportunity.

I can verify the potential for positive and negative effects on school teachers of what they take to be authoritative judgments about literature. I serve as an evaluator on an NEH-funded project administered by the University of Houston English department, which is trying to introduce literature by minority and other American writers to those who teach English in Houston's junior high and secondary schools. The teachers wish to assign their students the best possible books, and so they are reluctant to use books that are not part of the traditional curriculum. Because the Houston school district has one of the highest drop-out rates in the United States, the English curriculum specialists are concerned. They think that assigning students an occasional book about people and situations the students might more easily identify with--such as Bless Me Ultima, a novel by a Chicano author--might encourage more students to feel comfortable in school and to continue their studies. The NEH-funded project allows professors from the University of Houston to introduce books like Bless Me Ultima to the district's school teachers, and so the project confirms the literary status and acceptability of this and other works by minority authors.

Although one cannot know with certainty that adding novels by minority writers to the school curriculum will encourage minority students to feel more positive about themselves and their ability to succeed in school, the hope that this will happen is not unreasonable. Many of us can recall the one or two books that changed our view of the world and our sense of ourselves.

In making these observations about the possible negative effects of an article like "Literature by Quota," I do not intend to say that Carol Iannone does not have the right to hold the views she expressed or to publish them. Indeed, I would defend her right to do so. But I cannot help but wonder whether the University of Houston project would have received NEH funding if Dr. Iannone had been on the NEH council.