Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Correspondence 03

Stanley N. Katz

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July 25, 1991

Stanley N. Katz
President

The Honorable Daniel Patrick Moynihan
464 SROB
United States Senate
Washington DC 20510-3201

Dear Senator Moynihan:

I had heard indirectly that you were supporting the nomination of Dr. Carol Iannone to the NEH Council, but until I read this morning's Wall Street Journal, I had no idea that you were accusing Iannone's opponents of religious, class and ethnic prejudice.

I am outraged by your statement. Perhaps the nine Senators who voted against her hate Italians, Catholics and working class people (women, too?), but I doubt it.

The organization of which I am President opposed Iannone's nomination in a letter to Senator Kennedy's committee. We are concerned with the steady decline in the overall quality of the NEH Council, given the fact that NEH is increasingly the dominant funder in the humanities in this country.

Something like 300,000 post-doctoral scholars belong to the 51 organizations we represent, and you have attacked the integrity of each and every one of them. You have certainly insulted me personally, as a public opponent of the nomination. ACLS is the largest humanities organization in the world, and it resides in New York state -- might it not have been a good idea for someone on your staff to inquire into our reasons for opposing Iannone? Or don’t you care what we think? Or why we think it? I am simply appalled that a fellow Democrat, intellectual and academic should resort to such scandalous and irresponsible imputation of bad motives. What should I make of your own?

There are two problems of political correctness in this country, and you have now publicly endorsed the version of PC espoused by Dr. Cheney, President Bush, and the Olin and Heritage Foundations. How good for the Democratic Party is that, Senator? Much more important, how does that aid the free exchange of ideas in a democratic society?

I have never written an angry letter to a public official before, but I have never felt so betrayed by someone I admired.

Yours sadly,

Stanley N. Katz

SNK:mb
Class Warfare

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a New York Democrat, was appalled when Ted Kennedy and his cat's-paws rejected conservative literary critic Carol Iannone for the advisory council of the National Endowment for the Humanities. He told the Senate he deplored "the further intellectual decline of the Democratic Party. I almost said demise, but we've had enough alone." The former Harvard professor believes the attacks on Ms. Iannone represented a form of intellectual elitism. Her rejection did not stem "from the quality of her work, but from her genes, social and otherwise. She is an Italian, Catholic ethic with a working-class background," Senator Moynihan noted that such people have been driven from the Democratic Party in droves. Nonetheless, he thinks Ms. Iannone has a bright future. She "has now been banned in the Democratic Party," he notes. "What greater fortune could happen to an American intellectual in this decadent fin de siecle? I wish her well."

Asides

I May Be a Teacher

By John Taylor Gatto

I've taught public school for 26 years but I just can't do it anymore. For years I asked the local school board and superintendent to let me teach a curriculum that doesn't hurt kids, but they had other fish to fry. So I'm going to quit, I think.

I've come slowly to understand what it is I really teach: a curriculum of confusion, class position, arbitrary justice, vulgarity, rudeness, disrespect for privacy, indifference to quality, and utter dependency. I teach how to fit into a world I don't want to live in.

I just can't do it anymore. I can't train children to wait to be told what to do; I can't teach people what they are doing when they fail; I can't persuade children to feel some justice in their class placement where there isn't any, and I can't persuade children to believe teachers have valuable secrets they can acquire by becoming our disciples. That isn't true.

Government schooling is the most radical adventure in history. It kills the family by monopolizing the best times of childhood and by teaching disrespect for home and parents.

An exaggeration? Hardly. Parents aren't meant to participate in our form of schooling, rhetoric to the contrary. My orders as schoolteacher are to make children fit an animal training system, not to help each find his or her personal path.

The whole blueprint of school procedure is Egyptian, not Greek or Roman. It grows from the faith that human value is a scarce thing, the narrow. That idea is the only one that makes the system work.

I'd be better served learning about what the church needs, and I'd be better served learning how to be a teacher. I'd be better served learning about all the other work I've learned how to do.

That's why I'm out of this town. I imagine school without a school flag.

David is a chimp at age 2. He can't do what he's learned first, so we're not sure what he's learned. He learned it because he was told to do it.

For a parent trying to stop, he won't identify what's special about his child.