

1984

National Endowment for the Humanities: Council Reappointments (1984): Correspondence 11

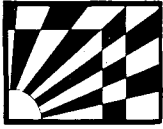
Mollie C. Davis

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THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE HISTORICAL PROFESSION
and
CONFERENCE GROUP ON WOMEN'S HISTORY

7556 Thorncliff Drive
Charlotte, N. C. 28210

July 6, 1984

Senator Claiborne Pell
U. S. Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

JUL 10 1984

Dear Senator Pell:

I thought you'd especially be interested in the letter just written to Senator Robert Stafford, whom I understand is chairman of the subcommittee which would have been involved with the hearings on the NEH nominees, now recess appointees, to the NEH Council. I was an IPA (slang for persons employed under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act) at the Endowment from 1979 through May of 1982, so I had a chance to see how Mr. Bennett was directing the NEH and how the first few Council members appointed by the President judged applications. But this protest came from our members who are simply irate. They feel that women and women's history and anything on the cutting edge of scholarship will now go down the drain. They were particularly INSULTED over the choice of female Council members, but hesitated to single just the women out, especially since some of the male nominees, now Council members, looked to be inappropriately qualified. My mail indicated that scholars affiliated with institutions of higher learning as well as those employed as historians outside academia were raising all sorts of questions. I am sure that you know them all.

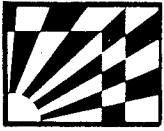
If you have any idea of how we can turn this thing around, please let me know. We are grateful for you and your continued interest in the humanities. It would be a shame to see the NEH go the way of misdirected agencies destroying the very life of the mind they are supposed to encourage and sustain.

Sincerely yours,

Mollie C. Davis

Mollie C. Davis, President
Coordinating Committee on
Women in the Historical
Profession

Enclosure



THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN THE HISTORICAL PROFESSION
and
CONFERENCE GROUP ON WOMEN'S HISTORY

7556 Thorncliff Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina
28210

July 6, 1984

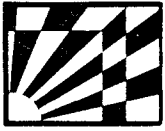
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Senator Robert Stafford
United States Senate
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Stafford:

On behalf of the individuals and the regional and national groups groups affiliated with the Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession and the Conference Group on Women's History, I write to protest the President's recess appointments to the Council of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Because we question the credentials of several nominees and the appropriateness of the qualifications of certain others, we had urged the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources to conduct a thorough review of the nominees before granting consent. By his recent action the President not only showed outrageous disregard of the law prescribing the qualifications of NEH Council members and the manner in which they are to be chosen, but the White House simultaneously evidenced disrespect for the United States Senate by ignoring its advice and consent powers. As a scholarly humanities group, we consider the recess appointments a mocking insult to the community of scholars at large and an affront to the Senate as well as the principle of separation of powers.

We based our request for an extensive examination of the nominees on several grounds. The law establishing the NEH prescribed that Council members "be chosen on the basis of distinguished service and scholarship or creativity in a manner which will provide comprehensive representation of the views of scholars and professional practitioners in the humanities and of the public throughout the United States." We thought it necessary to ensure that the NEH Council appointees be excellently qualified as individuals to advise Chairman William Bennett. We wanted to be certain that, overall, the Council members were comprehensively representative of professional and public views in the humanities. We also considered it essential that the newly appointed Council members be highly capable of placing scholarship before ideology in order to properly and fairly review the broad range of grant applications from humanities scholars and institutions. In certain cases we had grave reservations concerning an individual's qualifications; in other instances we thought the nominees only peripherally qualified in the humanities; in still other cases we thought the nominees inappropriately qualified. We are dismayed that, taken as a whole, the slate of seven appointments does not seem exemplary of the best in the humanities at large. Further, it is not representative of the distinguished service, scholarship or creativity in the humanities. The major humanities disciplines



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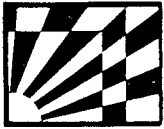
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of history, English, foreign languages and philosophy are not represented. None of the appointees are active in the major learned societies serving the humanities scholarly community. We interpret "comprehensive" to mean inclusive of a wide scope. We believe that Congress specifically directed Presidents to choose Council members who are well above average in ability to understand a broad range of humanities scholarship; this they must have over and above their own particular expertise. The NEH under its current leadership has made a strong case for excellence in awarding grants. We thought it only reasonable that Council members sitting in judgment of applications have credentials sufficient to command respect from the broad range of applicants. A Senate hearing possibly could have dispelled doubts.

The Congress specifically built in comprehensive coverage to ensure against loss of freedom of thought, inquiry, and imagination in humanities scholarship. Indeed, in the original authorizing Act, the Congress declared as a purpose that the NEH sustain a climate encouraging free inquiry and development of leadership qualities in the realm of ideas and the spirit. The newly appointed Council members, as a group, are narrowly representative, if at all, and may unwittingly do grave disservice to the humanities and to the intellectual climate of the nation.

We understand that the recess appointees will serve without Senate consent until this Congress adjourns in December, 1985. Meanwhile, they will advise Chairman Bennett on policies, programs and procedures of the NEH. They will review grants and recommend recipients. We sincerely doubt that some members are qualified to render judgment on the merits and demerits of humanities grants. All, however, have excellent qualifications in right-wing political activism. We fear that some will callously place their ideological agendas above scholarship. Direction toward a narrow political philosophy may define "excellence." The shortness of the new members' terms fails to improve our appraisal. Together with a few other Council members, they could set policy, establish or abolish programs, and install procedures that amount to a misdirection of the NEH and the public funds for years beyond their official tenure. Individual scholars may have their careers adversely affected. Funded scholarship may become a tool of the Executive Branch.

We are outraged that the President made July recess appointments. He disregarded legitimate questions raised concerning the quality and appropriateness of the credentials of a number of nominees. He treated the humanities scholarly community with disdain and he bypassed the United States Senate. We remember that the President, in his First Inaugural Address, mentioned the possible abolition of the NEH. We do not take lightly the indication that the NEH



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is now being directed to serve and fund scholarly efforts aimed toward implementing a preset ideological agenda. In the final analysis, the fact that the President made recess appointments clearly answers more questions that it raises, and it raises a lot.

Therefore, we strenuously protest these irregular appointments. We entreat you to object on both substantive and procedural grounds. Further, should the President resubmit these or other appointees as nominees for confirmation by the Senate for the usual term of office, we urge you to conduct an extensive review of the qualifications of the nominees and to consider the prescribed requirement that the NEH Council provide comprehensive and excellent representation of the views of humanities scholars, professional practitioners, and the United States public for which the NEH was created.

Sincerely yours,

Mollie C. Davis, Ph. D.
President, Coordinating
Committee on Women in
the Historical Profession

cc: Senators Hatch, Quayle, Nickles, Thurmond, Denton, Weicker, Grassley, East, Hawkins; Kennedy, Randolph, Pell, Eagleton, Riegle, Metzenbaum, Matsunaga, Dodd.