Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): News Article 09

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

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/pell_neh_I_36/16

This News Article 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: News Articles (1991) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.
Rejection Without Merit

THE SENATE shoulders a particular burden of proof in rejecting a presidential nomination. Nominations are understood and expected to be political, at least in part, but the Senate's response is not; it is supposed to be confined to what are vaguely called the merits and the nominee's qualifications.

That's a double standard, and half the time a distinction without a difference. Still, it's pretty well accepted that the Senate should reject a nominee just to please a pressure group, and the less important the nomination, the more unseemly it is thought to be for the Senate to stoop.

All this concerns the nomination of Carol Iannone, an adjunct professor of English at New York University, to a seat on a 26-member advisory council to the National Endowment on the Humanities. The council advises the chairman of the endowment on grants. It seldom disagrees with the endowment's staff; the chair is also free to disregard it. That's not a problem over which the Senate might normally be expected to bestir itself. Nine Democrats on the Labor and Human Resources Committee led by Chairman Edward Kennedy and humanities subcommittee Chairman Claiborne Pell nonetheless took the time to vote no and kill the nomination.

They claim that their only concern was for the quality of the council, and maybe it was, but they looked like puppets on a string.

The nomination was indeed political in part. Miss Iannone has made her reputation as a critic of what she views as the politicization of much recent literary criticism. That view is a contrary political statement of her own. She has written that college English faculties are dominated by feminists whose scholarship is distorted by their politics. Likewise, she has complained that some black authors have received undeserved national literary awards just because they were black.

The Modern Language Association, professional association of college English and modern languages and home to some of the tendencies she has attacked, took the lead in asking the Senate to defeat her nomination. The MLA said the same thing the nine committee Democrats did, that the issue wasn't her politics, but her record as a scholar. Her record wasn't "without merit," the MLA's executive director said, "merely without distinction."

Her defenders of course take the opposite view that this was a case of political correctness raised to the governmental power, in which the Senate Democrats became the enforcers. And so it surely seemed to us, though both sides have now made more of the event than it deserved. There are no doubt lots of ways to improve the quality of the humanities. Rejecting this nomination was a bad idea and a bad precedent, and can also hardly be expected to do much in that objective.

Senator Kennedy Gets His Woman

Senator Edward Kennedy, once expelled from Harvard for having a friend take his Spanish exam, has ruled that literary critic Carol Iannone doesn't have the academic credentials to serve on the National Council on the Humanities. Bowing to the Senator's personal leadership, his Senate committee on Labor and Human Resources turned down her nomination by a 9-8 vote.

If you believe this ploy had anything to do with academic resumes, you probably also believe the Senate made a wrong turn on Chap- paquiddick Island. Professor Iannone drew opposition because she shares the political views that have consistently won presidential elections, instead of those considered acceptable in the fever swamps like the Modern Language Association.

A conservative literary critic, Professor Iannone ran afoul of the guardians of political orthodoxy by daring to write about the corrupting effects of the current obsession with gender and race. Brigades of the politically correct, led by the Modern Language Association and Guggenheim Foundation Chairman Joel Conarroe, formed up to mount a campaign of vilification against her.

"Racist," they screamed.