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Iannone, Carol: National Council on the Humanities Nomination (1991): News Article 05

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Politics and Scholarship

The academic establishment—or a certain easily identifiable part of it—is up in arms over the President's new appointee to the National Council on the Humanities—an advisory agency of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Those now opposing the appointment of Carol Iannone—writer, teacher and literary scholar—do so, they maintain, because they want to preserve the council's high scholarly standards. If only we still lived in an age when it was possible to credit such high-mindedness in this corner of academia.

The organizations involved have mounted a letter-writing campaign to convince Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources that Carol Iannone's scholarly credentials are inadequate. The effort that these academic groups have gone to in order to kill the nomination has been so extraordinary that even the most neutral observer can figure out that what this fight is all about, in a word, is ideology.

In her scholarship and literary values, Dr. Iannone is a traditionalist and conservative. Her writings, published in such distinguished but politically incorrect journals as *Commentary*, run counter to most of the political orthodoxies prevailing in academia today.

The organization leading the rush to the barricades in opposition to her nomination is the Modern Language Association. It is mainly thanks to the MLA's annual conventions that we've been able to grasp the depths of the literary scholarship being pursued in the universities. Some of the learned papers presented under MLA auspices this year—"Women's Responses to Shakespeare Today: Gender, Race and Colonialism," "Sodomy in the New World," "Gender, Race and

'Othering' in the Narrative Arts" and "The Ties That Bound: Homophobia and Relations Among Males in Early America" are more than instructive in this regard.

Another group joining the battle against Dr. Iannone is the College Art Association, whose new president herself describes it as a learned society that has "taken a position of activism and advocacy." The other organization involving itself in the effort to block the Iannone nomination is the American Council of Learned Societies. This is not surprising, given the council's record of obeisance to all the received political wisdom coming out of academia today.

The list of distinguished scholars supporting Ms. Iannone's nomination is impressive. It includes Donald Kagan, dean of Yale College, and distinguished historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, who is delivering this year's Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, which is sponsored by the humanities endowment. The endowment's head, Lynne Cheney, makes no secret of her view that the groups trying to block this appointment are ideologically motivated.

It is true that Dr. Iannone's literary scholarship has appeared mainly in nonacademic journals that people actually read, rather than in, say, the publication of the Modern Language Association, whose current issue carries a professorial article analyzing the connections between Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols and the late Graham Greene.

It is also true that Carol Iannone is well-qualified for the position to which she has been appointed. The political bias fueling this extraordinary effort to kill her nomination should be amply evident to the Senate committee headed by Ted Kennedy, which will ultimately have to pass on it.
