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RESISTANCE TO LOBSTER

If a coarse, unreflective appetite for lobster has ever compelled you to don a plastic bib in public, if you’ve ever innocently associated the state of Maine with the king of crustaceans, have we got an article for you. Summer’s here and the time is right for iconography on the beach.

EXHIBIT A: Submitted for your consideration: the regime of Carol Iannone, at the moment the most famous adjunct instructor in America, as well as a scholar “without distinction,” in the opinion of MLA Executive Director Phyllis Franklin.

Iannone, an anti-feminist commentator and vice president of the National Association of Scholars, has been nominated to the National Endowment for the Humanities—prompting the Modern Languages Association, the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Studies Association, and the College Art Association to formally oppose her confirmation. The position of all these scholarly bodies is that the nominee simply does not meet congressional standards for council members, which include established records of distinguished service and scholarship in a manner which will provide a comprehensive representation of the views of scholars and professional practitioners in the humanities and of the public throughout the United States. Nor so incidentally, council members are also charged with making recommendations to the chairperson on applications for financial support.

This latest NEH contretemps transpires amid charges that, under NEH chairwoman Lynne Cheney, grant-giving has become thoroughly politicized, with a bias toward right-of-center projects. (George Will, captain of Ronald Reagan’s debating team, used a recent Newsweek column to applaud Iannone as a “trenchant critic” of the “watery Marxism” he presumes to be lurking in faculty lounges everywhere.)

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LEWIS concludes. “But like all true cultural icons, the lobster remains something that is economically beyond the reach of many local citizens. And to this the widespread distaste of ingesting strange, shelled sea creatures and the ambivalence locals feel about outsiders and the tourist trade, and we have a potentially volatile and negative image of the lobster for many long-term residents of Maine.” It came as no surprise to lobster-baiting Lewis that some locals have taken to whitening out the offending crustacean on new Maine license plates—a phenomenon soberly and perhaps definitively captured in “The Maine Lobster as Regional Icon.”

“It has been eyed and loved, steamed and boiled,” Lewis concludes. “But like all true cultural icons, the lobster remains something that is economically beyond the reach of many local citizens. And to this the widespread distaste of ingesting strange, shelled sea creatures and the ambivalence locals feel about outsiders and the tourist trade, and we have a potentially volatile and negative image of the lobster for many long-term residents of Maine.” It came as no surprise to lobster-baiting Lewis that some locals have taken to whitening out the offending crustacean on new Maine license plates—a phenomenon soberly and perhaps definitively captured in “The Maine Lobster as Regional Icon.”

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