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Iannone, Carol: Letters Opposing Nomination of (1991): Correspondence 56

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American Studies Association

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April 14, 1991

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman, Committee on Labor and Human Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6300

Dear Senator Kennedy,

I write on behalf of the Executive Committee of the American Studies Association with regard to the nomination of Carol Iannone to the Council of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I will send a copy of this letter to other members of your committee.

On behalf of the ASA Executive Committee, I respectfully urge the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources to decline to recommend confirmation for Carol Iannone. I do so for reasons having to do with her lack of distinction as a scholar and with her limited experience as a member of the academic community.

Chartered in 1951, the American Studies Association has approximately 4000 members. They come from many fields, including history, literature, religion, art, philosophy, music, folklore and museum studies. They include persons concerned with American culture who approach the subject from many directions but have in common the desire to view the United States as a whole rather than from the perspective of a single discipline. The ASA Executive Committee, elected by the membership, consists of distinguished scholars, with national reputations in the field of American Studies. The organization publishes the American Quarterly, a highly regarded scholarly journal that speaks to the interests of our members and beyond.

As scholars, and as practitioners who work as museum directors, public officials and administrators, many members of the American Studies Association rely heavily on the National Endowment for the Humanities for essential support for our projects. We are concerned that the NEH maintain its carefully nurtured reputation for selecting and supporting the most distinguished scholarly and creative work. To do this we believe, members of the Council should, in the words of the enabling legislation, consist of individuals who "are recognised for their broad knowledge of, expertise in, or commitment to the humanities," and who have "established records of distinguished

service and scholarship or creativity." Carol Iannone possesses neither of these credentials.

We have carefully examined Carol Iannone's curriculum vitae and find it lacking in those elements that commonly characterize distinction in the humanities. Every discipline within the humanities judges its practitioners by means of their contributions to original research or practice. Dr. Iannone's vitae not only contains no evidence of such publication, but it demonstrates a rather thin record of scholarship of any kind. Nothing in her record thus far suggests that Dr. Iannone has performed the kind of service or achieved the kind of eminence that would inspire confidence in her judgments.

Carol Iannone's vitae also suggests a surprising lack of experience with the academic enterprise. Her peripheral position in academia, as a part-time lecturer, has freed her of responsibility for departmental decision making. Nor does the vitae indicate experience in other institutions that might compensate for this gap. Protected from the kind of seasoning that we should expect of any member of the NEH Council, Dr. Iannone's contributions as a Council member will necessarily be limited.

It is possible that in future years, Carol Iannone may develop the professional reputation and the scholarly distinction desirable for a member of the NEH Council. Since those qualities are not present at the moment, to recommend her appointment will do a disservice to the NEH and to the Council. We urge you to decline this nomination.

Sincerely,

Alice Kessler-Harris

Alice Kessler-Harris
President-elect
Professor of History, Rutgers University