

1991

Iannone, Carol: National Council on the Humanities Nomination (1991): Correspondence 09

Nicholas Davidson

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Tuesday, June 11, 1991

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell,

My father, Frank Davidson, with whom you have had some railroad dealings in the past as I understand it, authorizes me to mention my affiliation with him in writing this letter. I am writing to express my support for the Carol Iannone nomination to the National Council on the Humanities, which I hope you will see your way to supporting. While much has been talked about concerning this subject, almost no one seems to have read Miss Iannone's articles, which are the crux of the matter. To this end, I enclose the piece of hers which launched this whole controversy, believing you will find it not only entertaining but stimulating. Miss Iannone is consistently moderate, balanced, and careful in all she does--rather the antithesis of the Washington Times's recent characterization of her as a "slash-and-burn critic." What the Times did was to describe Patrick Buchanan and affix the name "Carol Iannone" to the description. I enclose my letter on this subject, published in the Washington Times, in the event it may shed any light on the matter.

The charge of insufficient scholarly publication has been launched, and is superficially the most credible in this case. Still, it is rather amusing to hear the relentlessly highbrow publications Miss Iannone writes for--Commentary, The New Criterion--dismissed as "journalistic" by Miss Iannone's radical foes at the MLA (who themselves loudly call for the destruction of standards at their interminable annual conferences). I say "radical" because the term "liberal" will not do here: nothing so galls a deconstructionist as the term liberal, and for the types who are assassinating Miss Iannone's character, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. is a "conservative." While Carol Iannone can somewhat more legitimately be considered a conservative than Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., it must be observed that she is the most moderate of moderate conservatives, and surely among the more moderate of literary critics, in a field where an acid-dipped pen is almost de rigeur. Miss Iannone is at most occasionally arch; she is never intemperate.

Carol Iannone is in my considered judgment, for whatever small value it may have, America's finest living literary critic, and likely to be remembered as such by posterity. She has always condemned as trivial writers who are trivial, however fashionable, and praised those who deserve praise, however obscure, without regard to race, gender, and class, irrespective of the standards of "political correctness" of either the Left or the Right. Her only known eccentricity (if eccentricity it be) is an attachment to the doctrines of Christian Science. In any event, she is legitimate; and the enclosed article is doubtless the strongest indication of this.

I remain,

Very respectfully yours,



Nicholas Davidson

Author, editor, and literary agent
Alumnus, University of Chicago



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