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Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): Letter to the Editor 03

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In Defense of the MLA's Executive Director

TO THE EDITOR:

Although I do not believe that anything Peter Shaw writes deserves a response, I cannot let his grossly unjust attack on Phyllis Franklin in *The Chronicle* pass unremarked ("How Non-Ideological Has the Opposition Been to Nominee to National Humanities Council?" Opinion, May 1).

Peter Shaw, like his comrade-in-arms, George Will, who has written with similar inaccuracy in *Newsweek*, feels compelled to come to the support of Lynne V. Cheney because Carol Iannone does not seem, to the academic community, qualified for the position to which she is nominated. . . . *The Chronicle* has, therefore, printed an attack on Phyllis Franklin not unlike the "Willie Hor-

lin, might better have learned something about the organization of the M.L.A.

In the past, the executive director was a senior scholar whose main task was editing P.M.L.A., the organization's journal. Before Franklin was chosen as executive director, however, the Executive Council decided to separate the editorship of P.M.L.A. from the running of the organization. Franklin was chosen to run the organization and has, indeed, greatly improved its operating efficiency and its finances. The editor of P.M.L.A. is a highly qualified scholar from Cornell University. But sound bites, as Lee Atwater confessed on his death bed, are the cruel work of desperate and immoral people. Franklin was personally attacked, because no rational objection to the M.L.A.'s expressing its opinion about scholarly qualifications is possible.

Shaw's assault on Phyllis Franklin, who was carrying out the wishes of the Executive Council and, therefore, of the M.L.A., was not only scurrilous. It is, alas, characteristic of the tactics of those who cannot openly argue the merits of a case without irrelevant accusations.

CAROLYN G. HEILBRUN
Professor of Humanities
Columbia University
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

In addition to providing an irrelevant and partial description of Phyllis Franklin's record, Peter Shaw's Opinion presents the misleading suggestion that Franklin, as M.L.A. executive director, made the decision to question the nomination of Carol Iannone to the N.E.H. National Council on the Humanities. The decision was made by the M.L.A. Executive Council. I serve as chair of the council; the executive director reports to the council and implements council decisions.

Shaw speaks of everything but the one relevant thing—the legislative criteria for appointments to the N.E.H. National Council on the Humanities that call for: individuals who (1) are selected from among private citizens of the United States who are recognized for their broad knowledge of, expertise in, or commitment to the humanities; and (2) have established records of distin-

guished service and scholarship or creativity. . . . These criteria were not established by the M.L.A.; they were established by the Congress of the United States.

Shaw's failure to address this issue and his effort to substitute a discussion of irrelevancies are disturbing because, as a member of the N.E.H. National Council on the Humanities, he should know and respect the legislation governing the N.E.H.

MARIO J. VALDÉS
President
Modern Language Association of America
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . To our regret, Professor Shaw distorts the record and character of Phyllis Franklin, the executive director of the Modern Language Association. The writers of this letter differ among ourselves in terms of our intellectual and professional interests. All of us, however, are past presidents of the M.L.A. who have worked directly with her.

As executive director, Dr. Franklin earned our great respect and that of a wide variety of the more than 30,000 members of the M.L.A. She did so for many reasons, among them her acute judgment, integrity, hard work, and thoughtful administration of the policies that the M.L.A. Executive Council and Delegate Assembly established. As spokesperson for the association, she is always careful to represent, not her own opinions, but the decisions that these groups and the membership as a whole have reached.

Dr. Franklin's record can speak for itself, but we also want this letter to speak on her behalf.

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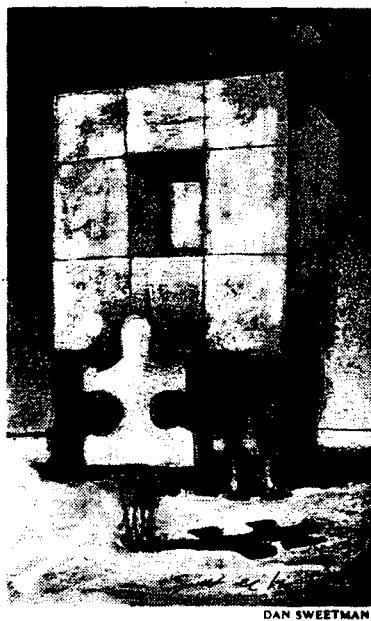
research journal but that is generally inadequate to allow other scientists to verify and build upon the published scientific research results. Indeed, journals are reluctant to accept articles where the biological materials covered in the article are made freely available to other scientific purposes.

This Scripps agreement also requires that Scripps obtain a royalty-free, non-exclusive license to improvements or modifications or materials," with the right to license, and a "90-day right of refusal to obtain an exclusive license." The rights that Scripps acquires are understood to be solely the benefit of a single company, although the majority of Scripps' search is funded by N.I.H.

We then can note that the majority of biomedical research in the United States also is conducted using N.I.H. funds. Thus, most scientists of the Lerner materials will be researching under public funds the benefit of a single commercial entity. If the Lerner combinational technique is as revolutionary as is purported to be, this situation, it seems to me, interesting lic-policy questions.

Research findings:

It is ironic that the Stratacyte Corporation, a for-profit company v



DAN SWEETMAN

ton" sound bite. Neither Shaw nor Will has time for facts or moderation. *The Chronicle* has, I trust, noted that both Gertrude Himmelfarb and Robert Hollander were approved with no problem by the Modern Language Association. Ideology is not the issue.

First, please note that Franklin, writing on behalf of the M.L.A., has never taken any but a scholarly stand in objecting to the qualifications of Carole Iannone. The M.L.A. Executive Council voted that objection; Franklin, as executive director, carried out their orders and wrote the letter. Second, Shaw, before his shameful personal attack on Frank-

