

Date: Wed, 20 May 1998 17:15:00 CDT
To: "cattcommittee" <cattcomm@iastate.edu>
From: "Wellnitz, Lynn" <lnwelln@iastate.edu>
Subject: FW: progress

I have some thoughts on the structure of our efforts going forward and would like to continue and encourage this discussion. Judd, for purposes of this discussion, I've highlighted your comments below because I would like to discuss why I see your suggested structure/framework as being incompatible with the mission and objectives of this Committee.

I am going to be out of town until Tuesday, May 26th..... but would like for us to continue this discussion.

Judd:

>With regard to Lynn's suggestions, I think we should attempt to follow the
>guidelines and first establish whether C.C.Catt was racist, classist, or
>xenophobic. For instance, chap. 6 according to our discussion is proof to
>some that she may have been racist, etc. according to the words that she
>used. However, in a historical context this is not the case. For
>instance, there are a number of articles where she is clearly against
>slavery, etc.

>We need to consider everything she did, good or bad on a utilitarian basis.
>As well, we need to consider the relative basis or the time she lived in.
>Also, we need to consider the universal good and bad or whether she truly
>was racist, xenophobic or classist. Therefore, we have 3 moral criteria to
>consider.

>Perhaps we should assign readings to specific persons, compare and
>contrast, and then write a brief with concurring and dissenting opinions
>for those that disagree or differ in opinion, etc.

>I'm not sure if I appreciate outsiders coming in and doing our jobs, it
>makes things much more political and I would prefer to function above the
>political realm.

And here are my feelings about the structure/framework for this Committee.

The vision that led to the proposal of this Committee was the hope that we could achieve some sort of resolution to the Catt Hall conflict so that this community can move on. I am worried that the Committee is

going to focus on the framework of WHO IS RIGHT vs. WHO IS WRONG. My feeling is that this framework perpetuates the conflict because the issues surrounding the Catt Hall conflict are so complex and based in fundamental ideological disagreements that people will be still be arguing about WHO IS RIGHT vs. WHO IS WRONG for years after we are all dead and buried.

In other words, this framework does not lend itself to resolving the Catt Hall conflict: it perpetuates it.

Judd's suggestion that we focus on the utilitarian argument in an effort to place Catt within the context of her times (to demonstrate she wasn't racist) also concerns me because both the utilitarian and context-of-her times argument are at the very heart of the Catt Hall conflict. From the beginning one faction has fervently subscribed to these claims while trying to prove themselves right. Another faction does not find these claims to be compelling relative to Carrie Chapman Catt and the naming of Catt Hall at Iowa State.

This IS the conflict.

Jane Cox and I could argue for the next twenty-five years and still not agree who is RIGHT and who is WRONG about Carrie Chapman Catt. And my guess is that Jane's continued research reinforces her position and my continued research reinforces my position and we could both could make compelling arguments. But this does not resolve the conflict and it seems to me that we are setting the Committee up for failure if we pursue such such polarized answers.

It seems more appropriate and productive for us to work on understanding why the utilitarian and context-of-her times argument (and any other type of argument) relative to Carrie Chapman Catt is acceptable to one group of persons, but not acceptable to some people within our community -- thus causing the conflict that brought all of us to this Committee.

I am willing to concede that due to various factors, the people in the state of Iowa may be more favorable to the utilitarian and product-of-her times argument. If the goal of the Committee is to prove that the MAJORITY IS RIGHT and the MINORITY IS WRONG, then I will suggest that this Committee is not doing its job.

Because we have been charged with attempting to find a possible resolution to the Catt Hall conflict, I believe this Committee needs to structure itself in a way that lends itself to *understanding* the conflict and looking at resolution without walking in the same steps of

the last two and a half years.

To understand the conflict, I feel we will need to hear a presentation by both the pro and con side of the conflict. The parties that are at the heart of this conflict deserve to be heard and should not be excluded or made to feel out "outsiders" to this process. Matt's original vision for this Committee, for those who have not heard it, was to provide a process in which both sides could take ownership in reaching a resolution. To the extent exclusionary issues are part of the complaint about the naming process and are central to the Catt Hall conflict, I hope this Committee would not proceed in a manner to cause complaints of exclusion to be leveled against us.

I feel just as strongly about hearing Tim Lane and President Jischke as I do The September 29th Movement.

This is what I think we have the capacity to do successfully, dependent on our structure:

1. Because the Committee has been formed to address the Catt Hall conflict, I feel we need to develop an understanding of the conflict itself. At a minimum the Committee ought to produce a document that does justice to explaining the pro and con arguments, assertions, and claims that are at the heart of this conflict. Virginia, I feel your original suggestion regarding arguments and claims provides us with the structure needed for this task. First, the Catt Hall conflict can be broken down into philosophical disagreements, arguments, and claims. Second, I don't believe the community has an adequate understanding of the conflict. This type of endeavor (producing a document that explains the conflicting ideologies, claims, assertions, and rebuttals) has not yet been done and it seems this would be a valuable and much-needed contribution to the community. Such a document could be posted on the web, given to the Board of Regents, distributed to all Faculty and Staff, etc.
2. The Committee has been charged with examining the naming process itself because it is at the heart of this conflict. I hope the Committee is able to produce a timeline and comprehensive report on the naming process. If we determine the rights of people were violated or that University policy(ies) were violated, before or after the naming of Catt Hall, our findings will be included in such a report. Certainly, recommendations that speak to University policies may very well come out of this report.
3. The Committee has been charged with determining whether or not the

issues of racism, xenophobia, classism relative to Catt have merit. To the extent these issues are now being covered in scholarly circles, I ask if we are able to concede some basic claims with clarifications on particulars?

I recently had a conversation with a scholar who I believe is respected in the field who has published a book on woman suffrage. In this book the author addresses the issues of nativism, racism, and elitism within the suffrage movement and with Catt as a leader within the suffrage movement. In the conclusion of this book, the author "exonerated" Catt with a sweeping conclusion that did not convince me. So I contacted the author. The author told me that if I see Catt has having internalized nativist, elitist, and racist (or "ethnocentric") ideologies, she is NOT going to disagree with me. In fact, she told me that I will be in good company with other scholars in the field (this is what I mean by a "concession").

This author argued a pro-Catt argument using (1) context/product of her times and (2) the utilitarian argument. And I still am not compelled about her conclusions, and I have read extensively and exhaustively on this subject for the past year and a half. Yet this author understands WHY and HOW people see the nativism, elitism, and racism in Catt's and other suffragists rhetoric and writings and did not contest these points with me. I'm not sure she could have contested these points after giving them coverage in her book. Instead, she asserted a pro-Catt argument based on (1) context/product of her times and (2) the utilitarian argument.

This is where the fundamental disagreement and conflict is.

The clarifications on particulars would come in during our formulation of the arguments surrounding the conflict. For instance, some people read a writing like "Objections" and do not see any racism because..... (insert argument, context of her times, whatever). Others read a writing like "Objections" and see a political racist argument because (insert argument here).

Another example of how one might interpret Catt's rhetoric regarding immigrants: She wasn't attacking the immigrants but was instead attacking illiteracy and corruption at the polls because she believed in an educated electorate (insert argument here). Catt perpetuated a negative stereotype of immigrants in nativist arguments in an attempt to argue that women voters were needed to offset the illiterate, ignorant vote (insert argument here).

Please, we need discussion on a structure going forward in a which that focuses on the conflict and on resolution.