



**Action of the 2010-2011 American Sociological Association Council on A  
Response to Attacks on Professor Frances Fox Piven**

**By Unanimous Email Vote  
February 1, 2011**

Present by Vote: Cecelia Menjivar, David Snow, Debra Minkoff, Edward E. Telles, Erik Wright, Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Jennifer Lee, John Logan, Joya Misra, Kate Berheide, Mario Luis Small, Omar M. McRoberts, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotela, Randall Collins, Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Rosanna Hertz, Sandra Smith, Sarah Fenstermaker, Sarah Soule.

ASA Executive Officer Sally T. Hillsman provided the following background information by email.

Background

The ASA President, President-Elect, Immediate Past President and Executive Officer put a statement on the ASA website last week so there would be an immediate response from ASA officers while ASA crafted a potential statement to be made by Council on behalf of the Association. In addition, there are a number of other social science associations that have made statements and some of these, as well as other associations, are willing to consider joining a statement by the ASA Council. The draft statement is written to reflect a joint statement by associations.

Proposed Actions:

Council members were asked for two separate votes:

- (1) approving the draft statement; and
- (2) approving it as a potential joint statement with co-signers.

Action Steps

Members were asked to reply by Noon on February 1 2011.

Council Members' Responses

During the voting period, council member Mario Small offered a friendly amendment to the draft statement that was seconded by Sarah Fenstermaker. All members of Council voted affirmatively for the amended draft and for the option of a making it joint statement.

**Motion: To approve the amended statement (below) regarding the attacks on Frances Fox Piven, and to seek co-signing associations.**

Passed unanimously

## **The Freedom to Conduct Research, Write, and Share Ideas Without Fear of Violence is Fundamental to American Democracy**

### ***A Response to the Recent Attacks on Professor Frances Fox Piven***

For many years, the academic community in the United States has stood firm in its support of scholars across the world who have been threatened or endangered by their scholarship, research, and writing. We must do the same for scholars in the United States.

We, the leadership of major scholarly associations, express our collective outrage at the recent, repeated attacks on Professor Frances Fox Piven. These attacks have been based on rhetoric, rather than substance, and have incited threats of violence, rather than encouraging open debate. Radio and television personality Glenn Beck has accused Professor Piven of creating a plan to “intentionally collapse our economic system,” as reported by the *New York Times*; and he has included her in a list of the nine “most dangerous people” in the world. While Mr. Beck has not directly called for violence against Professor Piven, his attacks have created a space for threats of violence to emerge. Over the past several months, Professor Piven has received a flood of hate mail and menacing internet postings, including death threats. The Center for Constitutional Rights has identified many of the violent posts by commentators in Mr. Beck’s website, including the following: “I am all for violence and change Frances: Where do your loved ones live?” The rhetoric has become sufficiently overheated that the potential for physical violence is real.

Dr. Piven, a Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the City University of New York Graduate Center who holds a PhD from the University of Chicago, is one of the nation’s most thoughtful commentators on the country’s social welfare system. She has been elected President of the American Sociological Association, Vice President of the American Political Science Association, and President of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

We call on public officials, political commentators, and others in the media to help discourage the rhetoric of hate and violence that has escalated in recent months. We vigorously support serious, honest, and passionate public debate. We support serious engagement on the research of Professor Piven and of others who study controversial issues such as unemployment, the economic crisis, the rights of welfare recipients, and the place of government intervention. We also support the right of political commentators to participate in such debates. At the same time, we insist that all parties recognize the rights of academic researchers not only to gather and analyze evidence related to controversial questions, but also to arrive at their own conclusions and to expect those conclusions to be reported accurately in public debates.

Both scholars and commentators, regardless of political orientation, strive to serve the public good. We can only benefit from their work when all parties respect the rights of others to disagree without fear of violent reprisal. We call on all parties to condemn the recent escalation of violent rhetoric, which does nothing to serve democracy.

Council, American Sociological Association  
Co-signers to be added