

REPORT OF THE 2011 JOSEPH B. GITTLER AWARD COMMITTEE

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The committee received three nominations for the award recommending the candidacies of Wendy Chapkis, Frances Fox Piven, and Nancy Wonders. The committee felt that all three were deserving nominees but in the end, Dr. Fox Piven outscored the other two based on our criteria. While Dr. Chapkis and Dr. Wonders were separated by a mere 1 point based on our rating system (see attachment), Dr. Fox Piven outscored her closest competitor by 9.5 points.

Dr. Fox Piven has spent almost 50 years applying her academic training to the ethical resolution of the problem of poverty in the United States. Throughout her career, Dr. Fox Piven has combined a commitment to contributing to scholarship within both the fields of political science and sociology with a long and impassioned career in political action and advocacy. Along with her iconic texts, *Regulating the Poor*, *Poor People's Movements*, and *The Mean Season*, Fox Piven has also taken her scholarship to the streets, as it were, throughout her career. In 1966 she helped found the National Welfare Rights organization, a protest movement of poor women. In 1982 she co-founded Human SERVE (Service Employees Registration and Voter Education), an organization with the goal of increasing voter registration by linking voter registration offerings with the use of social services or state Departments of Motor Vehicles. Human SERVE's initiative was incorporated by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. She is also a former national Board member of the American Civil Liberties Union, Chair of the Committee on Poverty and Civil Liberties, and has served on or advised the Boards of over 30 local and national organizations over the course of her professional career.

As Dr. Barbara Katz Rothman wrote in her support of Dr. Fox Piven's nomination,

It is with an enormous fullness of heart that I offer Frances Fox Piven in nomination for the Gittler Award of the Society for the Study of Social Problems...She has, as you well know, served as President of our own Society, as well as President of the American Sociological Association, and Vice President of the American Political Science Association. Her academic credentials are absolutely impeccable –a PhD from the University of Chicago, and she has taught at Boston University, Columbia University, New York University Law School, the Institute of Advanced Studies in Vienna, the University of Amsterdam, and the University of Bologna.

But the Gittler Award is focused not on scholarship per se, but more specifically on significant scholarly achievements in the ethical resolution of social problems. And this is where Frances Fox Piven's work is particularly brilliant, dealing with issues of social class that are inherent ethical problems, and offering us –as so little sociological work actually does – ways out, ethical resolutions...

It's unfortunate that it took the focus on her work by the extreme right to awaken a younger generation of scholars to an appreciation of what she has done, and in turn an awareness of what they themselves can do as ethical, public, responsive and responsible social scientists. I'd hate to think that we owe anything at all to the Glenn Becks of the world, but perhaps, in some strange way, we do. I'd love to think I'd have had the good sense to write this letter of nomination without the absurdities of the past year. But sadly probably not – I take the power of the work, the woman and the scholar almost for granted, part of the glorious worlds of SSSP and CUNY as well.

So let us take this moment to stop, appreciate and value that work, acknowledge it as the rare and wonderful thing it is: an intelligent, analytic, sociologic response to social problems, wrestling with the ethical dilemmas and offering appropriate responses. This is what the Joseph B. Gittler award is for, and no one, absolutely no one of us, could possibly be more deserving than Frances Fox Piven.

Currently, Dr. Fox Piven is a Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the City University of New York's Graduate Center. Over the past year, she has faced vitriolic attacks from right wing pundits like Glenn Beck and faced numerous death threats with the poise, intellectual rigor, and moral toughness that have characterized her long and illustrious career.

We feel Dr. Fox Piven exemplifies all the qualities the Gittler award was created to recognize and honor and are pleased we had the opportunity to select her for the award.

Although we only had three nominees this year, they were all very strong contenders with distinguished careers. This was largely in part due to the active solicitations for nominees on the part of the award committee and the extension of the deadline to May 6th. That being said, we concur with the recommendation put forth by last year's committee that a strategy of actively soliciting nominations should be set in place by future committees from the very beginning of their tenure on the committee. We would like to suggest two more recommendations that might help achieve this outcome. First, each year the committee's report to the Board should be shared with the incoming chair of the Gittler Committee so that she/he might learn from the previous committee's experiences. Second, when soliciting committee members, they should be told that the active solicitation of nominees will be part of the duties they may have to perform. We believe that if these recommendations are implemented then an extension of the deadline should not be necessary.

Thank you for the honor of having us serve on the Gittler Award Committee this year. It has been a rewarding – if somewhat humbling- experience.