



SCHOOL OF THE HUMANITIES

To the members of the Messiah College Community, and to the friends of the School of the Humanities and the Center for the Public Humanities:

On Tuesday, October 11th, The Center for the Public Humanities will host Dr. Frances Fox Piven of the City University of New York as our speaker for this year's American Democracy Lecture. The lecture has generated some conversation and expressions of concern as those who hear about the lecture wonder why this particular speaker was chosen and how such a lecture might fit the mission of Messiah College. In the spirit of welcoming informed debate, the School and the Center appreciate such expressions of concern and the opportunity to address them.

First, the Center for the Public Humanities and the School of the Humanities at Messiah College consistently seek to fulfill the mission of the college. In order to educate students who can thoughtfully engage and serve the church and society, students must encounter many different points of view, and they must be guided and nurtured as they reflect on, assess and apply those points of view. The programming of the Center for the Public Humanities, including the American Democracy Lecture, has consistently pursued and achieved this goal. We have invited and engaged with thinkers and activists from across the political spectrum, including a number of conservative luminaries such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Gertrude Himmelfarb, as well as political centrists such as John J. Dilulio and James Leach. Dr. Piven, at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from more conservative thinkers to be sure, is thus one of many different speakers we have invited to help us as we pursue our educational mission.

The variety of speakers—who, indeed, would disagree among themselves on any number of things—suggests that an invitation to a speaker does not imply an endorsement by the college. Students and faculty are given the opportunity to engage all points of view, including some points of view that may be at odds with other distinctive commitments at Messiah College. To nurture and guide that engagement, as we have on many other occasions, the American Democracy program this year will provide a talk back session in which faculty and students will have the opportunity to respond to and critique Dr. Piven's presentation so that students can think through as many dimensions of the issues as possible. It is important to note that Dr. Piven's lecture is not mandatory for students; it is a voluntary opportunity for anyone who is interested in hearing and responding to the topic of the presentation.

Dr. Piven's lecture is just one part of a broader campus conversation this fall exploring capitalism and its role in American society. On November 9, the Messiah College Honors Program is sponsoring a debate examining the question "Is Capitalism Moral?" between Jim Wallis, founder and president of Sojourners, and Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute. Collaboratively these events and the question-and-answer sessions that follow provide students with the opportunity to hear a broad range of perspectives on the interplay of democracy and capitalism in our society—and equip them to ask critical questions, form their own perspectives and express counter viewpoints in respectful, effective ways.

Speakers are brought to campus who we believe have something to contribute to the community's engagement with the important issues of the day. Among her many accomplishments Dr. Piven is Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the Graduate School at the City University of New York. She has held a number

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of appointments at major universities including CUNY, 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. She has been both Vice-President of the American Political Science Association and President of the American Sociological Association. In addition, her work has been recognized by the larger society in her receipt of government and professional honors. She is perhaps best known for efforts to expand and secure voting rights. It is in recognition of this distinguished career that Dr. Piven has been invited to share her reflections on the relationship between the practices of corporations and the health of our democracy—a topic that has been widely discussed in the media in recent years following the ongoing financial crisis that has affected our economy and our politics.

Of course, in the past year Dr. Piven has also been the focus of a great deal of heat and controversy in the increasingly divided and divisive world of television and internet media. It is not our role to mediate all that divisiveness, but I will say we are confident that Dr. Piven is not coming to campus to incite students to riot or other forms of violence. Indeed, we expect she will offer a thought-provoking view regarding the relationship of corporate practices to American democratic life. Our goal is not to endorse or refute Dr. Piven's views, but to give them the thoughtful consideration that ought to characterize all practices of an academic institution.

In that spirit, the Center for the Public Humanities and the School of the Humanities certainly invite and encourage your participation on Tuesday night, October 11th, and in the talk-back session with faculty and students on Wednesday afternoon from 4-5 p.m. in Boyer 131. More information regarding Dr. Piven's lecture can be found on the website of the School of the Humanities and on that of the Center for the Public Humanities. In addition, I would be very happy to talk with any of you about Dr. Piven or any of our other programming associated with the School of the Humanities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Powers", written in a cursive style.

Peter Kerry Powers
Dean of the School of the Humanities

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