Dear Mr. Ailes, Mr. Beck, and members of the board:

The American Political Science Association is deeply troubled by the personal attacks upon, and in particular the death threats directed against, Professor Frances Fox Piven (professor of political science and sociology at the City University of New York, Graduate Center). Dr. Piven is a past vice president of our association as well as a past president of the American Sociological Association and of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

Francis Fox Piven is a distinguished social scientist who is well-known and highly regarded for her contributions to social theory, and her studies of poor people's movements and the welfare state. She is also a public intellectual who participates in public discussions about such matters as welfare and economic conditions. These are controversial subjects where a wide range of opinions is to be expected. Indeed, scholarly research and inquiry thrives on the expression of different views about everything from empirical evidence and public policy to the reading of texts. But such exchange and debate can only take place in a climate of tolerance and civility where it is ideas that are challenged and debated, without the persons expressing them being personally vilified or threatened. Physical security is fundamental to freedom of speech and the exchange of ideas.

Similarly, in a democracy citizens hold widely differing opinions about many different topics and vigorous debate about controversial matters is part of the lifeblood of any thriving democracy. Freedom of expression is a value central to both democracy and scholarly work and in both cases death threats have no place. In the era of electronic communication, insults, intimidation and threats are easy to broadcast, but they are much less likely in a tolerant and civil climate. The media and its commentators have a special responsibility to help create and uphold the conditions necessary for democratic free expression. We call upon all those who have singled out Professor Piven to put forward their views in a manner that fosters constructive debate.

Carole Pateman
President, on behalf of the Council of the American Political Science Association