



A Celebration in Honor and Memory

April 10, 2015



Philip E. Converse

November 17, 1928 - December 30, 2014





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Order of Speakers

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Tim Converse

Peter Converse





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Philip E. Converse was born in Concord, New Hampshire, in 1928. He completed a B.A. in English from Denison University in Ohio in 1949, and a master's in English literature from the University of Iowa in 1950. In 1951, he married Jean G. McDonnell, a social scientist specializing in survey research and interviewing techniques who served as Associate Director of the Detroit Area Study. After study in France, Converse enrolled at the University of Michigan (U-M), earning a master's in sociology in 1956 and a Ph.D. in social psychology in 1958.

As a young research scientist at the U-M's Institute for Social Research (ISR), Converse collaborated with fellow researchers Angus Campbell, Warren E. Miller, and Donald Stokes in 1960 to write *The American Voter*, a groundbreaking book using data from the National Election Studies that asserted that most voters were surprisingly unsophisticated in their thinking.

Converse honed that idea further in his legendary 1964 article, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In it, Converse concluded that less than four percent of the voting public had a well-formed political belief system and the ability to think abstractly. Instead, he wrote, most voters based decisions at the poll on how they felt a political party treated certain groups, on whether they associated a party with a good or bad event, or on "no shred of policy significance whatever."

Converse became a study director of the Survey Research Center at ISR in 1958. He soon began working with other political scientists and sociologists at ISR, and he went on to head the Institute's Center for Political Studies in 1982. Four years later he became the fourth director of ISR.

During this same period, Converse served on the faculties of U-M's sociology and political science departments, becoming professor of sociology and political science in 1965. Converse was named the Robert C. Angell Professor of Political Science and Sociology in 1975 and the Robert Cooley Angell Distinguished University Professor of Sociology and Political Science in 1982.

During his almost 30 years as a U-M faculty member, Converse was known for his work on a range of political and sociological topics. In addition to *The American Voter*, Converse's books included *Vietnam and the Silent Majority* (coauthored with Milton Rosenberg and Sidney Verba), *The Human Meaning of Social Change* (with Angus Campbell), *The Quality of American Life* (coauthored with Campbell), and the award-winning *Political Representation in France* (coauthored with Roy Pierce).

In 1989, Converse left Michigan to become director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) at Stanford University. But after retiring from CASBS in 1994, he returned to U-M where, as a professor emeritus, he continued his close ties to ISR and the university.

Converse received honorary doctorate degrees from Harvard University, Denison University, and the University of Chicago, and was awarded numerous fellowships, including the Fulbright, Guggenheim, and Russell Sage. He was an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, and the National Academy of Sciences. He also was selected as the 1987 Henry Russel Lecturer, U-M's highest honor given to a senior faculty member.

Converse is survived by his wife Jean, of Ann Arbor, MI, and his sons, Peter, of Park Ridge, IL, and Timothy, of San Francisco, CA. The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the U-M ISR Philip Converse and Warren Miller Fellowship Fund in American Political Behavior.