



William H. “Bill” Friedland

5/27/23 - 2/20/18 age 94

From UC Santa Cruz Public Affairs--

William H. “Bill” Friedland, professor emeritus of community studies and sociology at UC Santa Cruz, whose life and career encompassed the major social movements of the 20th century, from labor struggles during and after World War II, to farm worker and youth movements of the 1960s, to the agriculture-food awareness of today, died at his Santa Cruz home Feb. 20 at age 94.

Friedland joined UC Santa Cruz in 1969 as founding chair of the Community Studies department, a unique and innovative experiential learning degree program that features a six-month field study with organizations committed to social justice.

In a [note on the Community Studies website](#), current program director Mary Beth Pudup wrote: “Bill was everything to Community Studies: founding visionary of experiential education for social justice; audacious scholar of international agro-food systems, staunch advocate that the University of California serve the needs of all the state’s peoples regardless of their rank or race.”

He first visited the young campus in 1967, invited to deliver a colloquium while on sabbatical to research agricultural labor in California. At the time he was teaching at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations where he founded the Cornell Migrant Labor Project that offered undergraduates an opportunity to use field study methods typically experienced only at the graduate level, a precursor to Community Studies at UCSC.

Agriculture, production, and globalization

Friedland’s academic research focused on agricultural production and globalization, and the impact of mechanization on farmers, farm workers, and rural communities. He was a pioneer in the study of food distribution systems and revealed the cozy relationship between UC’s agricultural researchers and the state’s powerful farming interests. His work influenced a generation of scholars.

“Bill was one of the key rural sociologists whose work motivated me to pursue this career and still shapes the ways I think about dynamics of technological change in agriculture and its implications for farm labor and rural communities,” said Douglas Jackson-Smith, president of the Rural Sociological Society, and professor and assistant director at the School of Environment and Natural Resources at Ohio State University. “His scholarship and voice within the community of rural sociologists will be dearly missed.”

“Bill Friedland was one of the key scholars who built the Sociology of Agriculture and Food as a field within the discipline of sociology,” said Keiko Tanaka, professor of rural sociology at the University of Kentucky and RSS president-elect. “Bill was also an excellent mentor to many younger RSS members.”

Rural intellectual community

Friedland found his intellectual community in the Rural Sociological Society (which he had first avoided because he saw little value in the rural) after attending a meeting in 1978. “I finally found a community of interest,” he wrote in *Our Studies Ourselves: Sociologists’ Life and Work*, “social scientists focused on agriculture and concerned to understand the socioeconomic forces of agriculture and seeking to change them.”

The society named Friedland its Distinguished Rural Sociologist in 2012, one of many accolades he garnered during an academic and activist career that extended more than 25 years past his formal retirement from teaching at UCSC in 1991. The society honored Friedland and his body of work at its annual meeting and conference in 2005.

"His contribution was to look at the people in agriculture—the farmers and the farmworkers—at a time when power was being concentrated in global agricultural corporations. Everyone accepted that bigger was better until Bill came along and asked, 'Better for whom?'" conference organizers noted at the time.

Friedland's many publications include *From Columbus to Conagra: The Globalization of Agriculture and Food*, *Manufacturing Green Gold: The Conditions and Social Consequences of Lettuce Harvest Mechanization*, and *Destalking the Wily Tomato: A Case Study in Social Consequences in California Agricultural Research*. He spent more than 20 years researching a book on the California wine industry.

Consequences of mechanization

Friedland is perhaps best known for his study of the consequences of the mechanization of tomato harvesting. Mechanization ushered in a new era of efficiency, but, as Friedland documented, the workforce collapsed from 50,000 laborers to 18,000, and the number of growers shrank from 4,000 to 600, weeding out those who could not afford a \$35,000 harvester. Meanwhile, total acreage doubled.

At UCSC, besides teaching, research, and running Community Studies, Friedland also served for a time as dean of the Social Sciences Division and helped create what is now Rachel Carson College.

“Bill's campus legacies are numerous and his intellectual impacts are immense,” Pudup said. “He will forever remain a central figure in UCSC history. His presence and stature in the field of sociology made UCSC a hotbed of agro-food studies long before any of the people working today were around,” she said.

Friedland's impact has been felt beyond the classroom as well, given his role as a Santa Cruz resident for 49 years. Countless of his students have served in local organizations and political posts. Mike Rotkin who worked with Friedland as a graduate student, coordinated the Community Studies field study program, and served several terms as a Santa Cruz City Councilmember and mayor, said Friedland's study of homelessness led to a more sympathetic approach by the city. And one of his courses led to a complete revision of the transportation system in Santa Cruz in the early 1970s, Rotkin said.

Labor organizing

Friedland was born to Russian Jewish immigrants on Staten Island, N.Y. After graduating high school and lasting a single semester at a Staten Island college, he spent 10 years in Detroit working on automobile assembly lines and as a labor organizer. He and a colleague collected labor movement songs and recorded two albums, "Songs of the Wobblies" and "Ballads for Sectarians" that can be found online at <https://archive.org/details/SongsOfTheWobblies> Returning to college in the mid 1950s, he received his bachelors and masters degrees from Wayne State University in Detroit and his Ph.D. at UC Berkeley before joining first Cornell and later UC Santa Cruz.

"Community Studies provided a highly satisfying environment for teaching," Friedland wrote in *Our Studies Ourselves*. "Because of its field study orientation and focus on social change, it attracted dedicated students who wanted to do something in the real world."

Friedland is survived by his wife, Joan, son Liam (Uba), daughters Fiona (Steve), and Nicole (Mike), and grandson Skyler.

A memorial is being planned for May 27 which would have been his 95th birthday.

Obituary from Santa Cruz Sentinel--

William (Bill) Herbert Friedland spent almost every day of his 49 years in Santa Cruz engaged in what he loved: thinking about ideas, learning, teaching, and doing his part to change the world. Bill shuffled off this mortal coil on February 20, 2018.

Bill was born to Anna and Barnett Friedland, Russian Jewish immigrants, in Staten Island, New York, May 27, 1923. He graduated from Curtis High School in January 1940, and subsequently studied for a single semester at Staten Island's Wagner College.

Bill initially found little engagement in academic life. With his growing interest in the rights of the working class, Bill relocated to Detroit, Michigan, which at the time was a major, industrial, working-class city. Bill spent over a decade in Detroit, working initially on the auto assembly lines, but most importantly as a union organizer. During this period, Bill began to collect and play songs of the labor movement, and with a CIO colleague he recorded two albums: “Songs of the Wobblies” and “Ballads for Sectarians”.

Growing increasingly disenchanted with the labor movement and disgusted by Senator Joe McCarthy’s political witch-hunts, Bill relocated to Europe expecting to make his life there. At a Thanksgiving day celebration in Paris held by some fellow expats, Bill met his future wife Joan. Bill returned to the USA and re-entered college in 1954 at Wayne University in Michigan, finishing his Bachelors and Masters degrees in two academic years. Bill was subsequently admitted to the Berkeley Sociology graduate program in 1956. In 1958, Bill married Joan, and the two of them traveled to Tanganyika on a Ford Foundation grant where they would spend the next 16 months while Bill did field research on emerging African trade unionism for his PhD.

Upon returning to Berkeley in 1961 to write his dissertation, Bill was recruited to join the faculty at Cornell University’s School of Industrial and Labor Relations. At Cornell, he founded the Cornell Migrant Labor Project, an innovative educational experience that offered undergraduate students an opportunity to utilize field study methods typically offered only at the graduate level. The program ultimately won research and funding support from the U.S. Department of Labor.

In 1967, while on sabbatical in California to research California agricultural labor, Bill was invited to present a colloquium at UCSC on the Cornell Migrant program. Bill

was actively recruited to join UCSC during the 1967-68 period, and he began the 1969 Fall semester as the founder of Community Studies. A key focus of this new degree program was to have students do a 6 month field research project within a group or organization that was typically overlooked by the UC system. This often meant organizations that served the economically disadvantaged, racial minorities, or other powerless groups within society. Bill's own research program studied agricultural production and globalization, and the impact of mechanization on farmers, farm workers, and rural communities. He was a pioneer in the study of food distribution systems, and his work in this area influenced a generation of scholars. Bill also played an important role in California and local Santa Cruz politics. His research challenged the pro-agribusiness bias in UC's agricultural schools and forced a focus on farmworkers and small farmers. In addition to mentoring several students who became Mayors of Santa Cruz and thousands of students who went on to direct non-profits in Santa Cruz and throughout California and the U.S., his study of homelessness in Santa Cruz led to a more sympathetic approach by the City. One of Bill's courses at UCSC led to a complete revision of the transportation system in Santa Cruz in the early 1970s. Bill taught, researched, and published for 22 years at UCSC until his retirement in 1991 at the age of 70. Following retirement, Bill continued his intellectual pursuits and was actively engaged as a research professor well into his late 80's. In 2012 he was named a Distinguished Rural Sociologist by the Rural Sociological Association. Bill is survived by his wife Joan, son Liam (Uba), daughters Fiona (Steve) and Nicole (Mike), and his favorite grandson Skyler. He will be missed.

Donations may be made in Bill's honor to a non-profit of your choice.