INTRODUCTION: GEDENKSCHRIFT IN HONOR OF WILLIAM R. FREUDENBURG, A LIFE IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

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It is a privilege to serve as editor for volume 21 of *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy* (*RSPPP*) honoring the life and work of Dr. William R. Freudenburg. This *Gedenkschrift,* or commemorative volume, not only reflects Bill's productive scholarly career and the immense esteem his colleagues have for him, but how his theoretical insights prove valuable − enduring − to the investigation of a wide variety of pressing social problems and public policies.

Bill Freudenburg is perhaps best known as an environmental sociologist. Through his research on environmental and technological risk, critique of federal outer continental oil leasing policies, and with colleagues, the Exxon-Valdez oil spill, the Hurricane Katrina and BP Oil disasters, Bill's research exemplified the sociological imagination. Taking the interdisciplinary road in his research, Bill at times adopted the role of historian, ecologist, philosopher, and political scientist; much like Max Weber before him, Bill also pondered on "the possibility of democracy" (Freudenburg, 2001, 2009). His conceptually rich work is filled with remarkable language that

floats theory and sustains fresh ways of analyzing social dilemmas. Not only was Bill concerned with the role that language plays in the framing of social problems and public policies, he was an active participant in creating new vocabulary to drive theory.

For example, Bill integrated biology-based metaphors in proposing "density of acquaintanceship as a type of 'cell division'" (1986a); in another work, he (1993) argued for specificity in language for the "failure of those institutional actors those institutions to carry out their responsibilities with the vigor necessary to merit the societal trust they enjoy" (p. 909). In a 1995 Plenary Address given at Mid-South Sociological Association annual meeting, he made a call for "linguistic clarity" in sociological writing. In 2002, Bill wrote of the "politics of language" in "how we divide our concepts" that surround categories to which "analytical differences" are played out in the scholarly literature around discussions of "environment" and "natural resources" (pp. 232−235, 236).

However, it is Bill's investigations into *information* that I find most compelling. I'll go out on a limb in sharing that I believe *all* of Bill's theoretical work, including those crafted with colleagues, are about information (as knowledge constructed and communicated). I'm not aware if any of Bill's colleagues (or critics) have pointed this out, but to me, Bill as social scientist is also an information theorist and a sociologist of knowledge. Whether the density of acquaintanceship as info sharing (perhaps a tip to Simmel's work on gossip?), "planning for surprises" in The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process (Freudenburg, 1986a), or writing that "information, like any other form of ammunition, is generally judged not in terms of its sophistication but in terms of its likely effectiveness in battle" (1986b, p. 323), Bill probed the ways institutions analyze data and the knowledge they produce to stay the course, even under conditions where information is uncertain, missing, nonexistent, controlled, asymmetric, biased, and/or plagued by Type I and Type II errors. Information-laden language traverses his scholarly work.

On a personal note, I can't claim a longstanding relationship with Bill, but came to know him through his ideas; Bill's research was critical to me as a concerned citizen struggling to understand policy failings and the ethics of risk assessment, and as a graduate student, anxious to make interdisciplinary connections between the Big Outside and theory, his work supported my own thinking. A few years ago as guest editor of volume 19 of *RSPPP* on government secrecy, I got to know Bill only for a little while. Bill, even as he battled illness, focused on assisting me in fleshing out the volume. From a January 29, 2009, email to me, Bill writes not just of the

problem of government secrecy but a subject that he spent most of his career documenting*, recreancy*, or speaking simplistically, institutional failures. In its own way, this simple email underscores secrecy's association with failures, which in itself is a monumental push in theory building. Bill's note as written to me:

> It seems to me that the <u>topic</u> you propose − government secrecy − not only has a reasonable fit with the overall theme of *RSPPP*, involving topics that lie at the confluence of "social problems" and "public policy," but also has considerable potential for contributing to thinking on something that Ted and I have been trying to encourage ever since we took over the editorship during the late Pleistocene − greater attention to "social problems" that are the result of failures not by the poor and powerless, but by those who are big and powerful. It's not AS hard to get those kinds of pieces published today as it was when I was just starting out, but Ted and I believe there's still a need to draw more attention to "institutional failures," as we call them. And a whole special issue is an even better way to draw attention to that topic than would publishing the same number of articles in a more scattered fashion. So you should consider this note from me to be all the encouragement you need to move forward aggressively.

In the end, I can't do justice to the range and influence of Bill's work in this introduction. Nor do I want to try. The individuals who know him best offer the finest accounts of Bill's life in social research. Contributors to volume 21 carry Bill's ideas onward in their own innovative interpretations of his work, and in doing so suggest to future scholars new visions and applications.

Arrangement of This Volume

Volume 21 is arranged in several distinct sections that represent Bill's life and research. The first section, *Reminiscences*, includes personal and professional accounts by long-term colleagues Riley Dunlap, Thomas Heberlein, Scott Frickel, and Thomas Rudel. These accounts are not only moving; they also illustrate the trajectory of Bill's academic career and its influence on the evolution of his ideas and collaborations.

The second section, *Bill's Theories in Motion*, focuses on specific "conceptual tools" (Rudel, this volume) and theories that Bill developed in his single authorship and with colleagues. The first chapter in this section by Christine Shearer, Debra Davidson, and Robert Gramling discuss the "double diversion" and energy policy, while Daina Harvey and Andrew Varuzzo apply the theory to study of access to the urban tree canopy in Worchester, Massachusetts. Ann Ruzow Holland follows with discussion of disproportionality in land use planning and the Adirondack Park.

Bill's theory of recreancy and the failure of institutions to carry out their responsibilities are a huge part of volume 21: Ted Youn explores what constitutes a social problem, or to state directly, the "special kind of social problem" that concern the "potential failure of public institutions to fulfill their obligations to the broader society … specifically the obligation to protect the environment and the health of present and future generations of the citizenry" (Freudenburg & Youn, 1999, p. 2). Following Youn, Michael Edelstein, in a comprehensive study of the Total Tar Sands Upgrader Project, Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, documents emergency response planning and its influence on local residents of the Heartland. In the following chapter, Charles Geisler and Ben Currens investigate peak farmland, the "dematerialization of the global land base," and recreancy, while Susan Maret links recreancy, atrophy of vigilance, and bureaucratic slippage to the September 11, 2001 attacks. The last chapter in this section by Margarita Alario focuses on "weapons of mass distraction" or the role of language (and power) in framing climate science and denial.

The third and last section of volume 21 features research that Bill was increasingly concerned with pursuing. It also includes some of his collaborative works that were left to completion by his colleagues after his death. The first chapter in this section by Christine Shearer, Jennifer Bea Rogers-Brown, Karl Bryant, Rachel Cranfill, and Barbara Herr Harthorn discusses gender and risk perceptions regarding nanotechnologies. The next chapter, written by Mary B. Collins and William R. Freudenburg, reports on the "temporal myopia" of federal partnerships with nuclear power and nanotechnology. In the following chapter, Frank Howell, William R. Freudenburg, and Gregory A. Works investigate the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) alongside the Environmental Kuznets Curve, the ecological modernization hypothesis, and indicators of inequality. The concluding work is a preface written by Bill for an upcoming book *Robbing Nature's Bank*. In the preface, Bill discloses his terminal illness and his push to write "*about* the earth, and about what we humans are doing to it." The preface is reprinted unedited in its entirety with a short commentary by Bob Gramling. As always, Bill's provocative ideas leave us thinking, especially about the "things we can do *as individuals* wind up missing about 90% of all environmental problems."

Taken together, these chapters honor Bill Freudenburg's life and legacy by way of his social research.

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