

Susan Cotts Watkins, Sociology

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DEATHS

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Susan Watkins

Susan Cotts Watkins, an emeritus professor of sociology and demography in the School of Arts and Sciences, died on August 26. She was 85.

Dr. Watkins attended Swarthmore College in 1956 and earned her PhD from Princeton University in 1980, with a dissertation titled *Variation and Persistence in Age Patterns of Marriage in Europe, 1870-1960*. While there, she was awarded the Porter Ogden Jacobus Fellowship, the highest honor of the Graduate School at Princeton University. After three years as an assistant professor at Yale University, Dr. Watkins joined the University of Pennsylvania's department of sociology as an assistant professor in 1982; she also became a faculty member of Penn's Population Studies Center. She became an associate professor in 1989 and a full professor in 1998. She also held a joint appointment as a lecturer in the English Language Programs. Dr. Watkins retired from Penn in 2007 and took emeritus status.

Dr. Watkins's research focused on demographic and social change driven by local social networks, with significant work in reducing fertility rates and combating the AIDS epidemic in Africa. In 1994, she began the Kenya Diffusion and Ideational Change Project, which studied social networks, family size, and sexual behavior in Kenya. Five years later, she launched the Malawi Journals Project, a survey that explored sexual trends in Malawi with the aim of informing AIDS mitigation. In 2017, she co-wrote with Ann Swidler the book *A Fraught Embrace*, which detailed these and other projects and postulated that altruists in Africa should not try to impose Western ideas on African populations, but should rather help Africans accomplish their own goals. Dr. Watkins also widely published her research in peer-reviewed journals.

Throughout her career, Dr. Watkins received several accolades, including two University Research Foundation awards from Penn in 1989 and 1991, the Otis Dudley Duncan Award in 1992 from the Sociology of Population Section of the American Sociological Association (for her book *From Provinces to Nations: The Demographic Integration of Western Europe, 1870-1960*), the Irene Taeuber Award in 2005, and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 2009. After retiring from Penn, she served as a visiting scholar at the California Center for Population Research at the University of California, Los Angeles.