

# Tribute

## *Professor Marvin E. Wolfgang 1924 - 1998*

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Professor Marvin E Wolfgang, born 14 November 1924, passed away on 12 April 1998, at the University of Pennsylvania Health System Hospital.

Professor Wolfgang received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, and joined the Department of Sociology at the same University as an Assistant Professor in 1954. His doctoral dissertation on homicide, published with a title *Patterns in Criminal Homicide* in 1958, has become a classic. For research on homicide in particular and violence in general, this book is indispensable. Professor Wolfgang's progress at the University was rapid and he became a full professor in early 1963, just before the publication of his path-setting two volume set of readings, *Sociology of Crime and Delinquency* and *Sociology of Punishment and Corrections*. These two set a trend that led to the publication of dozens of readers in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s around the English speaking world.

It is difficult to list Professor Wolfgang's professional achievements in such a short piece. Only a few scholars in their lifetime can claim to have written one classic in their field. In his remarkable career, Marvin Wolfgang not only wrote several classics, but these have been pioneering works as well. In a foreword to a book recently, Wolfgang defined what a classic is. "A classic", he said, "is a book that is timeless, or nearly timeless, in its insightful perception, one that endures beyond the usual decade of disappearance, one that teachers... will be assigning for young minds of more than one generation to read." His work on homicide, by this definition is a classic. So too is *The Measurement of Delinquency*, which he published with Thorsten Sellin in 1964. This work has not only been replicated in a number of countries but has become a benchmark in measuring crime severity. His work on *Race and Crime* with Bernard Cohen is regarded as a definitive work on the subject since the Second World War. 1967 saw the publication of the *Subculture of Violence* with Professor Franco Ferracuti, again a treatise that remains a tool in explaining criminal violence in the modern world.

Perhaps the most influential of his contributions has been the *Delinquency in a Birth Cohort* (1972) with Figlio and Sellin. It is difficult to identify a single work that has influenced a nation's criminal policy in a way that this has. The idea of studying the socio-legal behaviour of a generation is not entirely a new one. But not until the results of the Philadelphia cohort was published was the influence of such a study so pervasive. The concept of chronic offenders, a small number of offenders committing a disproportionately large number of offences in a community, is a finding that has led to numerous legislative, policy, and research initiatives not only in the United States but around the world, including China where Prof. Wolfgang conducted the Cohort Study. The second Philadelphia Cohort Study with Tracy and Figlio was published in 1990. *Evaluating Criminology and Criminology Index*, both with Figlio and Thornberry, were published in 1975 and 1978 respectively.

Professor Wolfgang played key roles in two of the Presidential Commissions - Co-Research Director with Professor James Short for the Commission on Violence and consultant

to the President Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. Later he served as a member of the President's Commission on Pornography and Obscenity, all in the 1960s. He served in the United States Army during the Second World War and participated in the liberation of Rome.

Professors Wolfgang and Sellin established the Criminological Research Centre in 1961 at the University of Pennsylvania and in the fall of 1962 established a Master of Criminology program within the Department of Sociology, the first of its kind in a major university. From its commencement the program attracted international attention. Of the first eight students who enrolled for this graduate study four were Americans and the other four came from Denmark, India, Japan and Venezuela. Many of Professor Wolfgang's former students currently occupy prominent positions in many countries, spread over all the continents. Professor Wolfgang spent his entire academic life, spanning over more than four decades, at the University of Pennsylvania. He visited Australia twice in the late 1970s.

Professor Wolfgang was very much influenced by a Pennsylvania Quaker upbringing. He was always approachable, liked and respected by his students for his unassuming personality, creativity and breadth of knowledge; he elicited the best out of students. He is survived by his widow Professor Lenora Wolfgang, a scholar of French language, two daughters, and grand children. He will be missed.

Personally, I have lost my guide of 36 years and a warm and caring friend of almost three decades.

### Satyanshu Mukherjee

(Dr Mukherjee studied under Professor Wolfgang at the University of Pennsylvania during the 1960's. He is currently the Principal Criminologist at the Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.)