



## IN MEMORIAM

Gilbert Geis

Professor of Criminology, Law and Society, Emeritus  
UC Irvine  
1925 - 2012

Gilbert Geis, Professor Emeritus of Criminology, Law and Society at UC Irvine, passed away on November 10, 2012, after a courageous battle with complications from heart surgery weeks earlier. One of the most prolific scholars in all of social science, he published more than 500 articles and book chapters as well as 28 books. Gil had a long and distinguished history of contributions to social policy and practice as well as to criminological scholarship, and was instrumental in the founding of UCI's nationally- ranked Department of Criminology, Law and Society in the School of Social Ecology. He was a member of Lyndon Johnson's President's Commission on Crime, and for over a decade served as the President of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, the largest organization of fraud professionals in the world. The group dedicated its March/ April 2013 issue of *Fraud Magazine*, subscribed to by over 67,000 members worldwide, to his memory. He was also a past president of the American Society of Criminology as well as a recipient of its highest academic honor, the Edwin Sutherland Award. He garnered many other acknowledgements and prizes during his career, and more than a decade ago, colleagues from around the world contributed original pieces to a book in his honor. The preface, written by Joseph Wells, former FBI Supervisory Agent, and retired Chairman of the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, related the highest praise of Gil's major professional influence upon him, in words that ring true to everyone who has ever had the great fortune to work with him.

"In 1992, when our rolls were less than 5,000, I asked Gil to serve as president of the association. He has been a significant influence in the 500 percent growth of the organization since that time. Don't get me wrong – Gil doesn't run things. That's my job. But he tells me how. And no one could have done it better... I have only one regret about my association with Gil; that I didn't meet him sooner. It would have been a particular honor to sit in his classroom hours on end, learning from one of the true masters... I find Dr. Geis immensely stimulating. At a time in life when most would be looking back on their accomplishments, Gil is anxiously looking forward to the next challenge. With his quick wit and razor- sharp mind, he can both educate and entertain — often in the same sentence. But so it is with this man, the preeminent Dr. Gil Geis. There is simply no one like him" (Pontell and Shichor, *Contemporary Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice: Essay in Honor of Gilbert Geis*, 2001: x- xi).

Born Jan. 10, 1925 in New York City, as a teenager Gil worked as an usher on Broadway and collected tickets at NY Yankee and Giant baseball games before becoming a radioman in the Navy during World War II. He attended college under the GI Bill, earning a bachelor's degree at Colgate University in New York, a master's at Brigham Young University in Utah and a Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin- Madison. He held faculty positions at the University of Oklahoma and California State University, Los Angeles, before joining the UCI faculty in 1971 at the urging of the founder of the Program in Social Ecology, Professor Arnold Binder.

Gil retired from UCI in 1987 but remained extraordinarily active as a scholar and a mentor. Many of his students have gone on to major professional and academic careers. Among the many scholars Gil mentored was John Braithwaite, now retired from The Australian National University, and one of the most distinguished criminologists of all time. Among his many awards and honors, In 1980, Gil received the highest recognition for his scholarly work from the UCI Academic Senate, the Distinguished Lectureship Award. In 1967 he received the Distinguished Professor Award at California State University, Los Angeles, and in 1971 he received the Outstanding Professor Award from California State Universities and Colleges. In 1964 he was awarded a Liberal Arts Fellowship in Law and Sociology at Harvard Law School. In 2008, the National White-collar Crime Consortium of the National White-Collar Crime Center named its distinguished scholarship award in his honor.

In 1967 Gil published what was to become a seminal study in criminology, three decades after Edwin Sutherland's introduction of the concept of white-collar crime had passed without any serious additional research or fanfare. With the publication of "The Heavy Electrical Equipment Antitrust Case of 1961" which appeared as an invited chapter in the text, *Criminal Behavior Systems: A Typology*, edited by Marshall Clinard and Richard Quinney (1967), white-collar crime scandals were back on the criminological radar. Ironically perhaps, given the widespread academic obsession with peer-reviewed journal articles, this seminal work appeared as a chapter, yet, according to all authoritative accounts, was responsible for resurrecting interest in the topic of white-collar crime, and remains as one of the most cited works in the field of criminology. This single piece of scholarship helped spawn a new generation of researchers whose primary agenda was the study of white-collar and corporate crime. They included scholars from the disciplines of law, business, sociology, criminology, and criminal justice. The importance of Gil's professional contribution to the interdisciplinary study of white-collar crime in this regard cannot be overstated, and has been recognized throughout the world.

As Gil documented, the climate of ferocious competition that existed among large electrical equipment companies including Westinghouse and General Electric had led firms to conspire rather than to compete in ruthless price wars that hurt profits. Instead of submitting competitive sealed bids for lucrative government contracts, executives began holding secret meetings at which they would agree in advance on prices and divide up the contracts among their respective firms. The companies had effectively formed an illegal cartel - a flagrant violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Gil found strong support for Sutherland's theory of differential association in the responses of executives to their offenses. The rationalizations used to justify their crimes strongly reflected attitudes learned within their corporate subcultures. Equally important, Geis' path breaking work documented the vast inequalities in the criminal justice system when it came to the sanctioning of powerful defendants, which in this case included both individuals and companies. Ultimately, fines totaling about \$2 million were handed out - mostly to GE and Westinghouse. Given the pecuniary magnitude of the crimes which cost billions of dollars over a number of years (over a half-decade ago), the amount seems insignificant. Gil noted that "a \$400,000 fine levied against General Electric would be equivalent to a man earning a \$175,000 a year receiving a \$3 parking ticket."

In 1961, 45 executives from 29 corporations were indicted for criminal conspiracy. All either admitted their guilt or pleaded *nolo contendere* ("no contest," or stating that they would not contest the charges against them). Thirty-one were convicted, of whom seven received jail sentences of 30 days. The other twenty-four convicted defendants were given suspended sentences. One aspect of this case which has long intrigued researchers was the unanimous rejection of any criminal self-identity among those convicted. For example, an officer of the Allis-Chalmers Corporation explained that he had participated only because he had believed it had been part of his duty. In a memorable quote, one General Electric executive described the agreements as "illegal but not criminal." Yet, as Geis documented, the dynamics of the conspiracy - the clandestine meetings, the frequent use of public telephones, the fake names and secret codes - reveal techniques and behaviors that are strikingly characteristic of organized criminal behavior.

Other Major Work on White-Collar Crime:

Since the writing of that path-breaking piece, Geis's work in white-collar crime was prolific and varied. It includes research on the deterrence of corporate crime, consumer fraud laws, victimization, the psychology of white-collar offenders, corporate violence, punishment issues, white-collar crime seriousness, medical fraud, legal and regulatory issues, fraud examination, organizational deviance, as well as a number of general pieces on white-collar crime.

After his initial foray into the topic, he did not return to the subject of white-collar crime for five years, during which time he wrote on other issues in crime and criminal justice, including victim compensation and victimization, female offenders, drugs, victimless crimes and rape. He resumed his work on corporate crime in 1972, focusing on punishment, and in the following year published the first major criminological piece on the deterrence of corporate crime in a book co-edited by Ralph Nader, whose own 1965 book, "Unsafe at Any Speed," about the resistance of the auto industry to providing safe vehicles, had brought him national fame as a corporate reformer. This was followed by collaborative work with Herbert Edelhertz, a lawyer and applied social scientist, on criminal law and consumer crimes, and an overview piece on white-collar crime published in a leading criminological text. The late 1970s marked the point at which Geis began to concentrate his work in the areas of white-collar and corporate lawbreaking. Among other topics, he published on corporate violence, the white-collar offender, and fraud against the elderly, and produced a classic reader on white-collar crime with Robert Meier which was updated with Lawrence Salinger in 1995. In the early 1980s he collaborated with John Braithwaite (who, only a few years earlier had begun what was to be a stellar career in criminology) on a classic piece that was published in the journal, *Crime and Delinquency*, "On Theory and Action for Corporate Crime Control" (Braithwaite and Geis, 1982). The paper suggested that corporate crime is a more feasible and significant crime control target than traditional crime, and argued that the discredited doctrines of crime control by public disgrace, deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation can be successfully applied to corporate crime. That same year he published a major treatise on white-collar crime and the first in a series of a dozen articles and chapters on medical fraud emanating from a study funded by the National Institute of Justice on which he collaborated with Henry Pontell and Paul Jesilow (Pontell, Jesilow and Geis, 1982). That work culminated in the publication of the University of California Press book, *Prescription for Profit: How Doctors Defraud Medicaid*, the first major scholarly work on health care fraud (Jesilow, Pontell and Geis, 1993). In 1983 Geis collaborated with then-graduate student at the University of California, Irvine, Colin Goff, on the now-classic introduction to the "uncut version" of Sutherland's book, *White-Collar Crime*, published by Yale University Press, and included the names of offending corporations that the original publisher had not allowed to be printed in the 1949 edition because of fear of lawsuits (Geis and Goff, 1983). The authors provide an authoritative social history of the events that led Sutherland to focus scholarly attention on white-collar crime and to challenge mainstream criminological theories. Among his numerous books and articles since is a major study with Mary Dodge of the crimes committed at the University of California, Irvine medical school's fertility clinic, *Stealing Dreams: A Fertility Clinic Scandal* (Geis and Dodge, 2003), an historical and analytical overview in *White-Collar and Corporate Crime* (Geis, 2007) which will soon be reissued by Oxford University Press, and edited volumes including a special issue of *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (Jesilow and Geis, 1993), and *International Handbook of White-Collar and Corporate Crime* (Pontell and Geis, 2007). His last book was *White-Collar and Corporate Crime: A Documentary and Reference Guide* (2011).

Gil collaborated with numerous scholars throughout the world and wrote dozens of articles and numerous books with faculty and students at UCI. His research on white-collar crime spawned a new generation of scholars around the world who have greatly broadened the scope of criminology. The profound impact of Gil's work was shown in a remark made some 30 years before his death by former Yale sociologist Stanton Wheeler, who told his law students on the first day of their white-collar crime seminar, "The only reason we are here today is because of Gil Geis." He was not only a giant in the field whose keen sense of justice and humanity was evident in everything he wrote, but an ideal mentor, colleague and dear friend to many. His legacy will continue to guide scholars for many years to come.

Henry N. Pontell  
Professor of Criminology, Law and Society

Paul Jesilow  
Professor of Criminology, Law and Society