

Robin Murphy Williams Jr. (1914-2006)

Robin M. Williams Jr., sociologist, died on June 3, 2006 at Irvine Regional Hospital in Irvine, California; the cause of death was complications from emergency surgery. He was 91.

Robin Murphy Williams was born on October 11, 1914 in Hillsborough, NC, son of Robin M., Sr. (a farmer) and Mabel (a homemaker). He received his B.S. in 1933 from North Carolina State College; his M.S. in 1935 from N.C. State and the University of North Carolina; his M.A. in 1939 from Harvard University; and his Ph.D. in 1943 from Harvard University.

In 1939, he married Marguerite York, formerly of Cary, N.C. His son, Robin M. III, was born in 1942 and died in 1984. He is survived by his beloved wife and life partner, Marguerite; his daughters Nancy Elizabeth O'Connor of Santa Fe, N.M. and Susan York Williams of Binghamton, N.Y.; his sister Helen Coble of Mebane, N.C.; and grandchildren Julia, Tara, Tyler, and Robin O'Connor.

During World War II, he served in the Special Services Division of the US War Department in Washington, D.C. and the European Theater of Operations from 1942 to 1946. As an Army researcher on the frontlines, he was a contributor to the classic work, *The American Soldier*.

For much of his long and distinguished career at Cornell University (from 1946 to 1985, then emeritus from 1985 to 2003), he was a member of the Sociology Department. He served as chair of that Department from 1956 through 1961, and was appointed the Henry Scarborough Professor of Social Science in 1967. After becoming Professor Emeritus in 1985, Dr. Williams continued to teach at both Cornell University and the University of California, Irvine. His research fostered understanding of some of the most difficult problems of American society. He devoted much of his career and writing to studies of intergroup tensions, race relations, war and peace, ethnic conflict, and altruism and cooperation.

At his death, Dr. Williams was a distinguished visiting professor at UCI where he had spent much of the last 16 years of his academic career; during the 2006 spring quarter and just prior to his surgery, he was teaching a course entitled "Altruism and Cooperation."

Dr. Williams was a member of the American Philosophical Society, the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Science, the National Research Council, and the Pacific Sociological Association, among others. He was a Past-President of the American Sociological Association, Past-President of the Eastern Sociological Association, Founding Editor of *Sociological Forum*, and the Co-Chair of the Committee on the Status of Black Americans. Dr. Williams' many awards and honors include the Commonwealth Award for Distinguished Service, the American Sociological Association's Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award, and the Robin M. Williams, Jr. Distinguished Lectureship Award established by the Eastern Sociological Association.

His best-known works include *The American Soldier* (Vols. 1-11, 1949); *Schools in Transition* (1954); *What College Students Think* (1960); *The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions* (1947);

Strangers Next Door (1964), *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation* (1st edition, 1951; 2nd edition, 1960; 3rd edition, 1970); *Mutual Accommodation: Ethnic Conflict and Cooperation* (1977); and most recently, *The Wars Within: Peoples and States in Conflict* (2003). He was also a co-editor of *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society* (1989). He was the author as well of some hundred and fifty articles, monographs, and chapters in edited volumes.

Dr. Williams was renowned and highly respected for his love of teaching; wit and humor; treasure trove of anecdotes and one-liners; indefatigable attention to and insightful writing about and research into global affairs, intergenerational conflict, and social justice; and inspirational and kindly mentoring of innumerable students and colleagues. He adored and was adored by his family; he enriched the lives of his wife, children, and grandchildren. His memory will continue to inspire those who knew him.

A memorial celebration will be held on Wednesday, June 7 from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. at the Bren Events Center's Berry Terrace. Burial will take place at East Lawn Cemetery in Ithaca, N.Y. at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, June 12, with a gathering to follow. People with questions about directions to the cemetery may contact the Bangs Funeral Home in Ithaca, which is making the arrangements (607-272-1922). In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to either Amnesty International or Doctors without Borders.