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## George Dession

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## BUFFALO LAW REVIEW

international episodes. He was well on his way to important discoveries when his untimely death occurred.

DECEMBER 15, 1955.

WILLIAM O. DOUGLAS,  
*Associate Justice, Supreme Court of the United States*

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### GEORGE DESSION

For twenty-five years George Dession taught Criminal Law at the Yale Law School. It was my privilege to work with him for the last five years of his life.

During his first year of teaching, George took advanced work in anatomy, psychiatry, and psychology in the Yale School of Medicine to prepare himself for the law school's program of discipline integration. Thus began a fruitful collaboration with the Medical School, and notably the department of psychiatry, which continued throughout his life. But his broad interests and inquiring mind took him into other fields, such as sociology and anthropology, as well. Although many have advocated interdisciplinary training in law schools, George proceeded to exemplify it in his own person. His courses, seminars and publications always transcended departmental lines. Still, he was no cloistered scholar. He gave himself generously to the public service.

His James McCormick Mitchell Lecture, which is published in this issue of the Review, is the culmination of his years of study and experience. At the time of his death he was busy translating the postulates and principles there expressed into a Correctional Code for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

It is perhaps too soon to appraise the full impact of his work upon basic criminal law theory but his influence upon legal education can be indicated.

In still too many law schools there is a tendency to deny expansion to and even diminish the course hours devoted to criminal law. This is due to at least two factors. First, the view that a course in criminal law should be concerned chiefly with the traditional specific crimes. Second, the belief that graduates will not engage in the practice of criminal law. Indeed, they should not be encouraged to do so because of social disapproval and the hazardous financial returns. That these factors should be major determinants of law school curricula should be of deep concern to any educator. They were rejected by George Dession.

## IN MEMORIAM GEORGE H. DESSION

He knew from experience and observation that law graduates do engage in the practice of criminal law as prosecutors, defense counsel, judges, legislators, and legal reformers. He was also aware that the criminal law has rapidly expanded in state, nation, and world and that criminal sanctions or their equivalents are frequently and increasingly met in the realms of trade and commerce, of labor-management relations, of ideological conflicts, of family relations, and of national security. He felt strongly that a realistic course in criminal law should take cognizance of these developments.

But beyond these, George Dession believed that the criminal law is "one of the most faithful mirrors of a given civilization, reflecting the fundamental values upon which it rests" and that the criminal law is the main day by day safeguard of the common citizen's elementary rights. For these reasons he felt that criminal law courses could be of great philosophical depth and should strive to broaden horizons, deepen thought, and stimulate altruism. He looked upon them as the best possible intellectual basis for a law practice which satisfies urgent human needs and simultaneously exhibits the functioning of professional skills on the highest levels.

In twenty-five busy years he had gone far as a pioneer. His example is one to be cherished by those who believe that the criminal law is an exciting, important and profound subject.

RICHARD C. DONNELLY

*Professor of Law*

*Yale University Law School*

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## GEORGE HATHAWAY DESSION

George Dession brought to its highest development the "functional" or societal approach to the art of the law. His chosen field was criminal law and its administration. He realized, however, that this was not an isolated field, but merely the area in which behavior and social forces come to sharpest focus—just as the emotional and psychological factors which impel all of us come into clearest view in the psychotic personality.

It is for this reason that George Dession's apprenticeship never ceased. He worked prodigiously to obtain a profound understanding not merely of the gross controls represented in the criminal law, but also of the subtle restraints and stimuli by which society bends the individual to its form. He continuously sought to perfect his command of the law and literature of crime and criminology. He