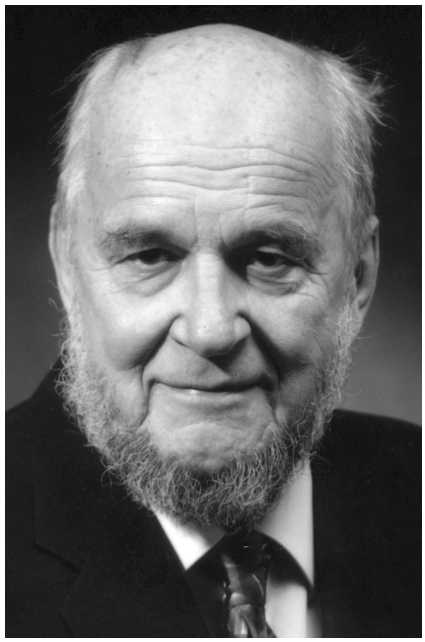
George W. Albee (1921–2006)



George W. Albee, a past President of the American Psychological Association (APA) and lifelong advocate of the importance of social change to deal effectively with mental disorders, died in his home in Longboat Key, Florida, on July 8, 2006, after a short illness. Family members gathered at his home to be with him at his death.

His impact on psychology is reflected in the many awards he received in his lifetime, which included the APA Distinguished Professional Contribution Award in 1975, the American Psychological Foundation Gold Medal Award for Life Achievement in Psychology in the Public Interest in 1993, and the Lifetime Achievement Award in Applied Preventive Psychology in 1997. He was a member of nine APA divisions and a fellow of four of them: Divisions 12 (Society of Clinical Psychology), 27 (Society for Community Research and Action: Division of Community Psychology), 35 (Society for the Psychology of Women), and 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues). With his passing, psychology lost one of the staunchest advocates of prevention as the most important approach to dealing with psychological ills. He was also a lifelong advocate for the disenfranchised.

George's belief that most psychological distress was a result of adverse social conditions—such as poverty, racism, and sexism—and not biology, undergirded his tireless fight for a psychology of prevention. His students could quote in their sleep his mantra "No mass disorder afflicting humankind has ever been brought under control by attempts at treating the individual," and many took up his call and pursued careers in public health.

George was born on December 20, 1921, in St. Mary's, Pennsylvania. After attending local schools, he graduated from Bethany College in West Virginia in 1943 and served three years in the Army Air Forces during World War II. He earned his master's degree (1947) and doctoral degree (1949) from the University of Pittsburgh with a dissertation titled "The Relation of Certain Socio-Cultural Experiences to Delusions in Schizophrenia." He completed a predoctoral clinical internship through the Veterans Administration (VA) and was among the first wave of psychologists to receive training in VA hospitals. After graduation, he joined the research staff at the Western Psychiatric Institute in Pittsburgh. His early research investigated various aspects of schizophrenia and laid the groundwork for his belief in the social causes of mental illness.

He began his lifelong association with the APA in 1951 when he joined its staff as assistant executive secretary. At the time, the APA was housed in seven rooms of the old American Association for the Advancement of Science building, and APA's entire professional staff consisted of four people: Fillmore Sanford, Jane Hildreth, Margaret Harlow, and Albee. Among his responsibilities were public information, public relations, and placement. He started the APA Employment Bulletin to assist with the latter. He hired Michael Amrine, an experienced science writer, to run the press room at the 1952 annual convention. Amrine ended up staying at APA for 17 years, and he and Albee collaborated on numerous public information projects.

George received a Fulbright Fellowship that took him to Helsinki University in 1953. He returned the following year to join the faculty at Western Reserve University (later Case Western Reserve University) in Cleveland, Ohio. There he rose through the ranks to professor and chaired the psychology department three different times. In 1958, he was named the George Trumbull Ladd Distinguished Professor of Psychology.

While at Case Western Reserve, he collaborated with Ellen Lane and their students to publish a lengthy series of studies on the childhood intellectual development of adult schizophrenics. Later, he and Marguerite Dickey published the first study of human resources in the mental health professions. Following that work, George was appointed to head the Task Force on Manpower of President Eisenhower's Joint Commission on Mental Health and Illness in 1958. The report of the work of that commission, which was published separately as "Mental Health Manpower Trends" in 1959, was considered by Nicholas Hobbs to be one of the three most influential publications of the decade. The work of the commission led to the Community Mental Health Act and the

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development of modern community mental health centers. George was recalled to service by President Carter and served as coordinator of the Task Panel on Prevention of the President's Commission on Mental Health from 1977 to 1978.

As a result of his experience and research in mental health, George became convinced of two things: first, that mental health problems were not the same as medical problems and could not be addressed by the same methods, and second, that there would never be sufficient human resources to treat all the "cases" of mental illness. He believed strongly that preventing problems was more effective, efficient, and humane in the long run than attempting to treat them with inadequate resources. Eventually, his work as an advocate for prevention would have both a national and international influence.

George joined the faculty at the University of Vermont in 1971 and remained there until he retired in 1992. He established the Vermont Conferences on Primary Prevention at the University of Vermont, which held annual conferences for 17 years and published the proceedings, works that were seminal in promoting prevention programs around the world. Several of his students have become internationally recognized experts in prevention and mental health policy. George served as a mentor in prevention for his junior colleagues as well.

Trained at a time when psychology was seen as the stepchild of psychiatry, George advocated for independent training centers for psychologists and for legal recognition of psychologists. Never afraid of controversy, he published many articles demonstrating the inadequacy of the sickness model of psychopathology, noting instead the contribution of social and political factors to their development. He taught that poverty, racism, and sexism were far more strongly associated with mental illness than were microbes, genes, or twisted molecules. He was an advocate for social change and for strengthening individual resources for coping with adversity.

In line with these views, he even took on the psychological establishment and published articles recommending that psychotherapy not be paid for by medical insurance, correctly predicting that insurance companies would then begin to dictate how psychotherapy should be practiced. He was adamantly opposed to the current move to obtain prescription privileges for psychologists, a practice he saw as antithetical to a psychological practice and a boon to the pharmaceutical industry, which already dominates psychiatric practice.

When George retired from the University of Vermont, he moved to Longboat Key, Florida. He was appointed courtesy professor at the Florida Mental Health Institute and visiting professor at the University of South Florida, where he continued advocating for prevention. Recently, the University of South Florida's National Institute on Multicultural Competence dedicated its Student Mentoring/Early Career Professional Leadership Development Training Program to George with these words: "This new intervention is dedicated to the life and legacy of George Albee, whose advocacy for prevention in the fields of counseling and psychology underlies the principles and spirit of the Student Mentoring and Early Career Professional Leadership Development Training Program."

George was an avid cook, gardener, and "rancher" (pigs, a cow, chickens), and he lived a green life long before doing so became part of a social movement. Early mornings in Vermont would see him making the rounds of the supermarkets in his red pickup truck, collecting their discarded food for feeding to his pigs, or fertilizing his gigantic poppies with sawdust and animal droppings from the psychology department's animal colony. His garden supported many tables each fall, and his contributions of tomatoes were legendary. He reached the national finals of a cooking contest with his recipe for "Marco Polo Pot Roast" and published a paper, jointly authored with his wife Margaret Tong, on Chinese cooking for Vermonters (titled "Woodstoves and Woks").

As Steve Goldston, Justin Joffe, and I wrote in 1992, in a Festschrift for George to celebrate his 70th birthday,

> [We] have also been invited along with George—to write articles and books, to plan conferences, to kill and dress chickens that were no longer layers, and in myriad other ways to walk with him in his path and to see the world through his lenses: a world free from exploitation and domination of one group by another, a world in which each person has the freedom and the resources to develop her or his resources to the fullest, a world in which the highest goal would be one person's concern and regard for others. . . . [W]ith George's invitation comes the unwritten command to fight the good fight, to smite the unrighteous, to educate the Philistines—with energy, commitment, and enthusiasm.

As far as a life so varied and energetic can be reduced to words, that chapter captures some of the main themes and contributions of George's professional life and a little of what he was like—some of his humor, his humanity, his dedication to improving the lot of humankind, his intellectual energy, and his wide-ranging curiosity.

George was a frequent contributor to an eclectic array of publications: His letters to Ann Landers resulted in an article titled "Ann and Me," and he also wrote a humor column for the *Longboat Observer* for several years. But most important, until the end, he wrote about, advocated, and truly battled for prevention. Albee's memorial service at the University of Vermont on August 20, 2006, began with a five-minute slide show compiled by his daughter-in-law Beth Donovan. The photographs of George in those slides ranged across the years—from an image of him as a baby on his mother's lap, through his time in uniform during World War II, then farming his land, debating, cooking, milking a cow, receiving APA awards, to very recent portraits surrounded by his grandchildren—and were accompanied by a recording of Frank Sinatra singing "My Way," written by Paul Anka. As we listened to Sinatra, some of us couldn't help but think that the words might have been written for George himself:

> I've lived, a life that's full, I've traveled each and every highway.
> And more, much more than this,
> I did it my way.

Albee is survived by his wife, Margaret Tong; his children, Luke Albee, Alec Albee, Marina Albee, and Sarah Albee Willson; and 10 grandchildren.

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