



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

MURDER AND MAYHEM

## Killer should rest in obscurity

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I am aware of the often difficult determination about which individuals deserve, through good deed or bad, to be featured on the obituary page. Well, it must have been a really slow day (did death really take a holiday?) for the *Globe* to include a *New York Times* [story](#) about the passing of Canadian serial killer Clifford Olson.

Few Americans would have recognized Olson's name or face from the picture that accompanied the story. Arguably, he is (and now was) Canada's most infamous serial killer of all time -- if not in fact than at least in his own mind. Of course, most people on this side of the border pay very little attention to what goes on in Canada.

Suspected of killing 11 children in British Columbia during the early 1980s, Olson believed that the police had the goods on him, so he decided that he might as well turn his defeat into advantage. In a bizarre and controversial plea bargain, Olson confessed to murder and led the police to the bodies of his victims in exchange for a \$100,000 ransom. He had struck a deal by which his wife and son would receive \$10,000 in trust for each buried corpse he helped locate; he graciously threw the 11th in for free. Olson was later asked to reveal information about other missing children, not for a fee but for the sake of the worried parents. In true sociopathic style, he responded, If I gave [expletive deleted] about the parents, I wouldn't have killed their kids.

Olson did not go quietly into cell-block obscurity. Rather, he routinely communicated with the outside world for the purpose of self-promotion. In fact, he used to call me (collect) from time to time on his cell phone, seeking out further attention. Not only did he reach out to journalists and authors, he wrote letters to the families of his victims describing in sickening detail what he did to and with their children.

Olson was so universally detested, even inside prison by other sex offenders, that the door to his prison cell had to be covered with a protective shield to protect him from the human excrement often flung his way. In true narcissistic style, he saw things differently, bragging that he was as feared, as fearsome and as famous as Hannibal Lecter from *Silence of the Lambs* whose shielded door protected visitors from him.

Ultimately, the most disgraceful aspect of the Olson situation was not the blood money offered by the Canadian government, but the celebrity that the killer sought and received. One would have hoped that his death would be a tiny footnote to history, not a feature on the obituary page.

Clifford Olson. May you rest in obscurity. *Note: Although Olson died on September 30, 2011, the story of his death did not run in the Globe until today (October 12th).*