Social control in the 16th century became more standardized due to the exploits of Jonathan Wild (1682–1725), the “Thief Taker General of Great Britain and Ireland.” Social science disciplines today that are concerned with crime and its control can look to Richard A. Wright, the “Evaluator General of Criminology and Criminal Justice Science.” More than any other social scientist, Professor Wright has analyzed pedagogical and scholarship issues with the objective of professional standards in mind. Primarily through content and citation analysis, he has assessed the substantive quality of a range of media spanning the disciplines. His work has cast a wide net: the evaluation of texts and scholarly books, the rank ordering of journals, and the determinations of the relative prominence of individual scholars. Along with a plethora of book reviews and review essays, he has published over 60 articles in numerous journals, and he has written and coauthored such hard-hitting books as In Defense of Prisons (1994).

However, like the tactics employed by the old English thief-taker Wild, Wright’s “taking” of low-level scholarship frequently has bred controversy. The foremost example is his recent review essay of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences/Anderson Monograph Series, entitled “Criminal Justice Without Much Science.” Published in The Criminologist, the official newsletter of the American Society of Criminology, the piece received widespread attention and generated response in both the criminal justice and criminology fields.

I recently reached Professor Wright in his office at the University of Scranton (Pennsylvania) to discuss his work. Below are excerpts from that conversation in which he addressed his rather unique and sometimes controversial role as a standard-bearer and his views on the state of criminal justice and criminology.

J. Mitchell Miller: Richard, I’d like to begin by asking you to define your work.
RICHARD A. WRIGHT: I see myself as an analyst of the trends, developments, and perspectives in criminology over the last 75 years and in criminal justice over the last 25 years. That is kind of a public relations line.

MILLER: How did you get started evaluating criminological and criminal justice research?

WRIGHT: I started out, about 1984, by writing a piece looking at women and crime issues in criminology textbooks. It's interesting because it was a modest piece only trying to measure over a couple of different time periods. I was trying to look at how much page coverage textbooks devoted to women and crime topics. I was basically trying to bring up to date an earlier Journal of Criminal Justice article on that topic. Initially, I had a lot of trouble even publishing it. I finished writing it sometime late in 1984 and sent it to several journals. They rejected it. Eventually, I got it published in a highly modified form in Teaching Sociology in 1987. That was the first piece I wrote that was a content analysis of textbooks. But it got me started. It's titled “Are Sisters in Crime Finally Being Booked?” It's a fairly widely cited piece. I still see it mentioned often in feminist criminology work. But that's the way I got started doing that line of research.

MILLER: Were you taught the mechanics of content analysis in graduate school?

WRIGHT: Actually, I wasn't. I picked it up sort of happenstance on my own in a haphazard fashion. I started to do content analysis in a very different format. Almost 25 years ago, when I was a junior at James Madison University, I wrote research methods papers using content analysis. I just worked on a couple of those research papers for class using content analysis and was intrigued by it. So, I've actually been doing it quite a number of years and (I'm) often going back looking at the things I wrote about even when I was still an undergraduate student.

MILLER: How did you first apply content analysis to the evaluation of scholarship?

WRIGHT: Well, it's funny. Content analysis had been applied in a variety of different areas of evaluating scholarship. It's been really extensively applied over the years to feminist studies. I think this is probably why I got into it so strongly. There have been feminist researchers who have been using content analysis to evaluate high school textbooks and children's books since the 1970s. The use of content analysis in