

## BOOK REVIEW

*Margaret Black,<sup>1</sup> A.A.*

### A Review of *The Study of Latent Fingerprints—A Science*

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**REFERENCE:** Clements, W. W., *The Study of Latent Fingerprints—A Science*, Charles C Thomas, 2600 S. First St., Springfield, IL 62794-9265, 1987, 136 pp.

The contents of this book were not in agreement with what the author stated in the preface, "This book deals directly with latent (finger) print identification." It is overflowing with experiences the author has had in the Latent Print Section of the Los Angeles Police Department. It was difficult to identify the audience to which the material was addressed. The author suggests instructors will be using it, presumably as a textbook; however, the lack of illustrations of certain topics (incipient ridges, abnormal ridge structure, fingerprint reversals, and so forth) could baffle someone unfamiliar with these areas of fingerprint science. When deciding not to include additional illustrations, the author should have taken into consideration that besides instructors, others may have an occasion to read the text.

The book was written almost entirely in narrative form. The author spends a great deal of time relating the details of cases which do not relate to the study of fingerprints. On pps. 58 to 60, the author states that the investigator does not need to know the "intimate details" of a rape scene, however, he goes on to recount exactly that! He also describes circumstances of residential burglaries where the victims are apparently famous people, suggesting that all "VIP's" are given different service and consideration. The author refers a great deal to the policies and procedures followed by his fingerprint section and are often in disagreement with how other law enforcement agencies operate. This is obvious as the reader is advised what a first-time latent print witness will encounter in court (p. 90) and that residential burglary investigations "shouldn't involve more than twenty minutes . . . to a half hour tops" (p. 55).

No significantly new findings or knowledge was presented in the text. Too much was devoted to the five-finger classification system which it is almost entirely outdated, especially in the State of California. The author had an opportunity to expound upon additional fingerprint processing techniques, namely cyanoacrylate fuming and laser examinations, but did not do so. Each was mentioned only briefly. No mention was made of gentian violet, small particle reagent (molybdenum) processing, or other recent and advanced processes.

The arrangement within the text of crime scene information and various types of fingerprint processing information is incongruous. Following his explanations of only nine types of crime scenes, the author briefly explains three types of fingerprint processing techniques.

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One must refer to the section, "Business Burglary," to learn how to process with powder and lift a latent. The crime scene explanations should be contained within one chapter. Likewise, all fingerprint processing techniques should be contained in an additional chapter. Included in the section, "Ninhydrin Processing of Homicide Scene," the author makes statements concerning crime scenes requiring more work than vehicles, that an investigator usually must work alone at scenes, and a reminder to obtain elimination prints at scenes, all of which do not belong in this section.

With the exception of a very few references to other publications in the text, there is no bibliography present. Much of the author's knowledge and information is undoubtedly based upon his own involvement with crime scene investigation and fingerprint examination.

I question the inclusion of such slang words and phrases as, "blue-suiter," "brass," "higher-ups," "damn," "wall-to-wall cops," "what the hell!". This type of vocabulary lessens the professionalism the author may have been trying to achieve.

Factual errors abound. Mark Twain has not significantly contributed to the advancement, study, or development of the fingerprint science and does not belong in the History of Fingerprints. The author states there are only three areas to process for fingerprints on stolen vehicles, of which the trunk, hood, or items inside the vehicle (such as tools, stolen merchandise, and so forth) are not included. The author also states that ninhydrin is mixed in acetone or alcohol, although, in fact, few agencies use these solvents as they cause inks to run. In reference to examining vehicles wherein a homicide victim is found, the author states, ". . . there is no need to obtain the victim's latent prints." Fingerprint technicians cannot determine, at the time of the vehicle examination, which latents are whose. Secondly, if prints were found in the glove box or on the rear view mirror, for instance, light may be shed upon the circumstances of the crime. The author goes on to state, "You can be sure the vehicle (in which a homicide victim is found) either belongs to the victim or has been stolen." Could not the vehicle have belonged to the suspect?

The author appears to be enthusiastic about the subject of this book, however, I regret that I would not be as enthusiastic about recommending it to an instructor or novice in the field of fingerprint science.