

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Contrast: An Investigator's Basic Reference Guide to Fingerprint Identification Concepts*

REFERENCE: Coppock, CA *Contrast: an investigator's basic reference guide to fingerprint identification concepts*. Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, LTD. Springfield, IL, 2001, 131 pp., Hard Copy \$35.95, Paper \$22.95.

This book was written as a guidebook to illustrate the basic concepts involved in the science of fingerprints and fingerprint identification and, according to the author, is intended for new and experienced crime scene investigators, patrol officers, attorneys, and students "who seek to add fingerprint identification to their investigative skills." The guidebook is meant to give a general background in fingerprint concepts and the reader should not view himself or herself as proficient in fingerprint identification after reading this book. As the author points out in the introduction, "On the average, it takes about 5 years of training and fieldwork to be considered a proficient and experienced fingerprint specialist." At the very least, a fingerprint identification expert should successfully complete a two to three year training program in all facets of fingerprints at a qualified training laboratory under the guidance of court recognized experts to be considered an expert in latent prints. The author correctly points out that becoming proficient in the area of fingerprints is basically a learned experience from on-the-job training, but that the basis for fingerprint identification and advances in processing techniques makes it desirable to have knowledge in scientific disciplines.

From Chapter 1 "Fingerprints in Context" through Chapter 11 "Computerized Fingerprint Databases," the author is very organized and thorough in presenting detailed information about fingerprints and fingerprint identification. I particularly liked some of the suggestions given by the author to assist in obtaining quality fingerprints from crime scenes: adding moisture by breathing slightly on the print area to assist in powder application, additional

attempts in lifting the latent print (many times the second lift is better than the first), crossing out your own prints which may be left on the lifting tape, lifting the latent print before evaluating the quality, and the use of a good light source in recovering latent prints. I also liked the author's statement in Chapter 5 on Latent Fingerprint Development and Recovery, "Many field officers have been trained for basic crime scene fingerprint processing. However, it has been noted that a fingerprint specialist with fingerprint identification experience will, on the average, recover many more identifiable quality latent prints per crime scene."

A couple of statements presented in the book cause me concern. The first is on page 41, relating to powder development. The author quite rightly states that contrast is the key to development of latent print impressions, but states, "Black fingerprint powder has long been the staple development medium for latent prints." I don't disagree that most patrol officers use black powder more often in processing, but most trained evidence technicians and identification experts are aware of the abrasive qualities of black powder and that care has to be taken so that too much black powder processing does not destroy latent prints. Secondly, in the section on poroscopy, edgeology, and creases the author on page 90 states, "Generally, poroscopy, edgeology, and creases do not play a large role in fingerprint identification. However, when a fingerprint identification contains very few identifiable characteristics, the value of these secondary identification factors is proportionally increased. Essentially, a fingerprint identification of just five characteristics would (should) be substantially supported with additional characteristics with poroscopy, edgeology, and/or creases." Most governmental agencies in the United States do not have a policy relating to a minimum number of points/characteristics (Galton details) required to make an identification but I think a fingerprint expert is flirting with danger if he/she makes an identification with five characteristics even if supported by poroscopy, edgeology, or creases.

In general, this book provides good information on fingerprints, processing, and identification, with the exception of the two areas mentioned above, and is good reading for new patrol officers, crime scene investigators, students, and attorneys.

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