

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Forensic Evidence in Court: A Case Study Approach*

REFERENCE: Lissitzn CB. *Forensic evidence in court: a case study approach*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2008, 383 pp.

A successful cold case prosecution vindicating a 1973 murder victim's death now serves as an instructional aide in this undergraduate primer on law and forensic science. The author, who describes her experience in both criminal law and forensic science as limited, was inspired to write this textbook by the conviction of Edward Grant for the 29-year-old murder of "Penny" Serra in New Haven, CT. Grant was not the only suspect or the first person to be accused of murdering Serra. On the eve of the 1987 trial of an earlier defendant, the case was dismissed when last-minute serological testing excluded him. While forensic science exculpated the 1987 defendant, new forensic technology inculpated the true killer in 1997, when a fingerprint analyst with the Connecticut Forensic Science Laboratory entered latent prints from the crime scene into AFIS and got a cold hit on Grant's fingerprint. Armed with the fingerprint match, a search warrant was obtained for Grant's blood, and a subsequent analysis revealed his known DNA and DNA found on a handkerchief left at the crime scene had a common origin. Grant was convicted after a 2002 jury trial of stabbing Serra through the heart and leaving her to die on the cold cement floor of a parking garage stairwell.

The author uses *State v. Grant*,—A.2d—, 2008WL1722005 (Conn.), as a template for an introductory tour of criminal law and procedure and their intersection with forensic science. In addition to the text and a soon to be published teacher's manual, there are six trial court memoranda regarding pretrial motions and an appellate court opinion available online, providing substantial, additional material for classroom discussion. The CBS television program *60 Minutes* also ran an exposé on the case in 1987, at about the time the infamous criminologist Henry Lee began a reconstruction of the crime scene, later including the case in one of his books.

While the legal analyses in the text focus mostly on Connecticut law, as would be expected with the *Grant* case as a backdrop, examples of the use of forensic evidence span highly notable cases

from across the country. The author discusses six common types of forensic evidence, four of which were featured in the *Grant* case: latent fingerprint identification, DNA analysis, blood spatter analysis, and eyewitness identification expert testimony. The author also discusses handwriting analysis and the polygraph to illustrate her view. Following an overview of the *Grant* case in the first chapter, the author then discusses the nature of forensic evidence in the next four sections that includes the handling and analysis of forensic evidence from collection to trial, the rules of evidence, and the standards for admissibility of expert testimony. A transitional chapter introduces the student to the scientific method in the forensic sciences and provides a foundation for the succeeding chapters pertaining to the scientific evidence used in the *Grant* case.

Sandwiched between the author's discussion of the polygraph and the chapter involving "closing statements [sic] through appeal," is a chapter devoted to DNA's role in exonerations. The Innocence Project is appropriately recognized for its significant contributions to exonerations of the factually innocent, but unfortunately misnames one of the Project's cofounders and provides an incomplete website for the Project. There are several other errors throughout the book, but none that materially detract from the book or distract the reader for long.

Each chapter begins with an overview and set of teaching objectives. The contents of the chapters are true to their objectives. However, for many of the objectives classroom instruction and student discussion will be required for a complete fulfillment of the objectives. To assist the instructor, there are sets of discussion questions at the end of the chapters to help stimulate discourse and study.

After presenting each stage of the *Grant* case, the author gives the reader a glimpse into several jurors' assessment of the scientific evidence in the case. Perhaps, a news reporter summarized the public perception of the evidence best by exclaiming "blood doesn't lie."

This text is a readymade course-in-a-box for an undergraduate, introductory course in law and forensic science. It gives the student an insight into criminal procedure and a peek at forensic science. Just add enthusiasm and you are ready to go.

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