

Article Title: [‘Forensic Science Needs a Lot Less Fingerprint-Pointing and a Lot More Solutions’](#)

Origin: ‘The Prosecutor’

Date Published: April / May / June 2010

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Article’s Subject Matter:

The article is based on a speech that was delivered June 2010 by Joseph Bono, president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences at Fordham University Law School in New York. The speech addresses forensic science in the legal system. This article touches on the NAS report, the Innocence Project, Mayfield Case, Daubert, Frye, error rate, true science, Inter-Agency Working Groups (IWG’s).

Key Points in Article

- Defense arguments have forced us to take a long hard look at what we are doing in forensic science.
- Many forensic scientists are incapable of justifying their conclusions or method if they must go beyond explaining charts, tables and photographs.
- The Innocence Project in the United States is using DNA to exonerate people where exculpatory evidence exists.
- Faulty forensic science was not responsible for many of the convictions that the Innocence Project is looking into.
- Conclusions in science are based on the technology and protocols of the time and were rendered with strong caveats.
- The rules of evidence and appellate court decisions are responsible for the admissibility of forensic science testimony in court and not the NAS report.
- The statement “I’m right because I’ve been doing this for 30 years” or “Based on my training and experience...” no longer hold as the definitive response.
- In fingerprint identification there are no standardized quantitative thresholds for a conclusion, and there should be. For example, how much of the friction ridge pattern is required for an association of a fingerprint to an individual? Or is this even possible when minimal detail is discernable?
- Certain arguments used against forensic science have taken on a life of their own and have no scientific meaning in the realm of applied science one is error rate.
- In the legal setting truth may be determined by the most passionate argument.
- There are experts that are defining the rules for forensic sciences to suit their own agendas.

Fallacies and Issues

- Statement on the Mayfield case put weight on the fact that the FBI did not have the original as being the cause of the false identification, where a lower quality image should have resulted in a non match or an inconclusive decision.
- This is a discussion about the issues raised in the NAS report, but it does not provide the answers. It is only a starting point.

Considerations

- This article touches on many of the issues raised by Brian Yamashita during the AFITC. This would be a good document for the new Fingerprint Issues Working Group that is being formed.