



Forensics Under Fire: Are Bad Science and Dueling Experts Corrupting Criminal Justice?

Jim Fisher

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Television shows like *CSI*, *Forensic Files*, and *The New Detectives* make it look so easy. A crime-scene photographer snaps photographs, a fingerprint technician examines a gun, uniformed officers seal off a house while detectives gather hair and blood samples, placing them carefully into separate evidence containers. In a crime laboratory, a suspect's hands are meticulously examined for gunshot residue. An autopsy is performed in order to determine range and angle of the gunshot and time-of-death evidence. Dozens of tests and analyses are performed and cross-referenced. A conviction is made. Another crime is solved. The credits roll.

The American public has become captivated by success stories like this one with their satisfyingly definitive conclusions, all made possible because of the wonders of forensic science. Unfortunately, however, popular television dramas do not represent the way most homicide cases in the United States are actually handled. Crime scenes are not always protected from contamination; physical evidence is often packaged improperly, lost, or left unaccounted for; forensic experts are not always consulted; and mistakes and omissions on the autopsy table frequently cut investigations short or send detectives down the wrong investigative path.

In *Forensics Under Fire*, Jim Fisher makes a compelling case that these and other problems in the practice of forensic science allow offenders to escape justice and can also lead to the imprisonment of innocent people. Bringing together examples from a host of high-profile criminal cases and familiar figures, such as the JonBenet Ramsey case and Dr. Henry Lee who presented physical evidence in the O. J. Simpson trial, along with many lesser known but fascinating stories, Fisher presents daunting evidence that forensic science has a long way to go before it lives up to its potential and the public's expectations.

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