



Physical Anthropology Section – 2005

H90 The Louisiana Identification Data Analysis Project (IDA): A Comprehensive Analysis of Missing and Unidentified Cases

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The goal of this presentation is to present the forensic community with information about an effort to solve long-term, unresolved cases. The outcome of the presentation includes the potential for cooperative efforts among forensic scientists to share resources and methods that may assist with such cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by providing information about the Louisiana IDA project, a method for establishing a central location for identification data (including both missing persons and unidentified remains). The Louisiana IDA project may be used as a template for forensic scientists in other areas of the country who are addressing the same identification issues. Finally, the IDA project has potential for providing the public with resolution of unidentified and missing persons cases.

Thus far, the focus of research in the field of forensic anthropology has included the proliferation of principles and methodologies whose applications result in the successful resolution of cases of unidentified remains (Krogman and Iscan 1986). Additionally, many authors have presented case studies which highlight unusual techniques and/or applications that have led to identifications (Bennett and Benedix 1999 and Walsh-Haney *et al.* 1999). Yet, unresolved missing persons and unidentified remains cases are rarely discussed in presentations and literature (Grisbaum and Ubelacker 2001 and Marks 1995). Additionally, many states lack a centralized location for information on missing people and unidentified remains. This results in a breakdown of communication among different agencies that deal with these types of cases and ultimately leaves unresolved cases open for long periods of time.

The Louisiana Identification Data Analysis Project (IDA) initiated at the Louisiana State University Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services Laboratory (LSU FACES Lab) involves the systematic collection and storage of traditional identification profile information along with DNA profile data on Louisiana's cases of missing persons and unidentified remains. Throughout the history of the LSU FACES Lab there have been 91 cases of unidentified remains (with varying degrees of completeness) that have been analyzed to an exhaustive degree yet have never been identified. These unidentified individuals are from many locations across the state of Louisiana and from other states as well. Many of them have unique characteristics (such as tattoos, healed skeletal fractures, and dental restorations/features) that could corroborate or negate their potential identity when compared with information about missing people. Also, some Louisiana agencies have retained or buried unidentified remains that have never been evaluated by an anthropologist and/or odontologist.

To initiate the IDA project, data on approximately 400 missing persons and unidentified remains cases from across Louisiana and the country was collected. This number represents only a fraction of these types of cases from Louisiana and the nation. Through the IDA project, the Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services Laboratory is becoming the central location for data on Louisiana's missing and unidentified people. It is hypothesized that some identifications could be resolved by providing a centralized location for the information on these cases. Currently, the researchers are continuing to compare the data on missing people from across the state and country with known cases that have been found but are unresolved. The systematic data collection on Louisiana's missing people and unidentified remains has begun using the WINID3 software package, a Windows-based dental and demographic program. Additionally, bone, hair, and tooth samples are being provided to the North Louisiana Criminalistics Laboratory for DNA profiling of the unidentified remains. Concurrent with the analysis of accessible cases, the database is being built by gathering additional information on other missing persons from across Louisiana. Finally, the authors aim to collect biological and DNA profile information of all people missing from Louisiana.

The goal is to resolve as many of these cases of unidentified remains and missing persons as possible. As the Louisiana database continues to build, the authors wish to invite other anthropologists to consider this model and join in this substantial effort.

References:

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Forensic Anthropology, Unidentified Remains, Missing Persons