



### **F11 A Case Report of Three Beheadings in Puerto Rico**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have learned about three beheading cases on the island of Puerto Rico, where identification of the head through dental means was necessary.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by presenting three different cases of beheadings with three different motives for these crimes (a theft, a drug-related crime, and a hate crime), thus presenting different crime scenarios where dental identifications are needed.

Beheading is defined as: "separating the head from the body." It can occur unintentionally (for example, in a traffic accident) or it can be done intentionally as means of murder or execution. Intentional beheading is known to have been commonly used in the past since it was a simple method of execution as swords were easily available. Considered a noble death in early England, it might have been preferred by prisoners to other forms of execution.

If a single blow is sufficient to completely decapitate the person, it may be considered a "humane" method of execution of a prisoner. However, for it to be so, since the cervical muscles and vertebrae are strong, a skilled headsman is required, if an unsharpened instrument is used or a person without skill commits the act, several strikes may be needed to decapitate. Thus causing the victim prolonged suffering. Some of the most famous people to be beheaded in history were John the Baptist, Anne Boleyn, Charles I, and Mary, Queen of Scots.

In our society, cutting a person's head off is considered barbaric. Since few things make a greater impression on the public than seeing a severed head, decapitation's shock value has been used to strike fear in enemies and/or ensure obedience to whoever commits or orders this act. Such is the case of a 17-year-old male who was found decapitated in a bush-filled area. Identification of the head was achieved through dental photographs and dental record comparison. The body was identified by DNA analysis.

Another incident was the crime of a 19-year-old transsexual who presented a partially burned and dismembered body, that had been beheaded. Identification of the head was achieved through dental record comparison as well.

In the last case to be presented, the victim of a theft was stabbed multiple times and beheaded in his home by his nephews. The head was placed in a different room in the house from the body and dental records were used to make the identification of the head.

These cases will be presented to familiarize the forensic odontology community with uncommon cases that require the identification of only a human head through dental means.

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#### **Beheading, Dental Identification, Puerto Rico**