



Breakfast Seminar - 2016

BS5 Back to the Future — A Journey Across the Timelines and Possible Realities for the Future of Forensic Sciences

J.C. Upshaw Downs, MD, GBI ME, 925 A Mohawk Drive, Savannah, GA 31419; and Carla Miller Noziglia, MS*, 305 Ascot Drive, Aiken, SC 29803-7833*

After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the history of the forensic sciences, including important dates and events. Additionally, attendees will learn how different sequences of events may have led to vastly alternate realities — allowing for an informed discussion about how to best guide the future course of forensic sciences.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing important past dates and events and detailing how these events helped shape the present state of the forensic sciences. This knowledge will allow attendees to positively steer the future course of forensic science practice toward the best possible outcome.

Thirty years ago, a film about a time-traveling teenager and mad scientist explored the concept of parallel realities based on skewing past, present, and future timelines dependent on actions in the “then” present. In one journey to our present day (October 21, 2015), a radically different yet oddly familiar and plausible future greets the two partners in time. Unfortunately, the law of unintended consequences has led to a projected future with disastrous results, necessitating intervention in the past. Attempts to change events then lead to further future problems, requiring actions in the past to “correct” the altered future and...the rest, as they say, is history.

The history of forensic science dates to antiquity but a few key dates and events include 1194 (Articles of Eyre re-establishing the office of Coroner in the United Kingdom); 1248 (The Washing Away of Wrongs — medical investigation of death); 1609 (document examination); 1784 (physical matching); 1840 (arsenic poisoning); and 1888 (Jack the Ripper). The modern forensic era extends through Galton’s Fingerprints in 1892. Academic forensic science can be traced to 1902 at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Fingerprint evidence arrived in the United States by way of the 1904 World’s Fair, courtesy of Scotland Yard. Chief August Vollmer, credited by many as “the father of modern law enforcement” soon after (1907) created the first crime laboratories as part of the Berkley, California Police Department, an idea which expanded with his move to Los Angeles in 1923. The Bureau of Investigation (later FBI) created the first national forensic lab in 1926. State crime labs began to be developed in the early 1930s. The same decade saw criminalistics established as an academic discipline. Other developments ensued with the eventual creation of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences in 1948 and the National Association of Medical Examiners in 1966. Advances continued with the passage of time, including the creation of the Federal Rules of Evidence (1975), DNA application to forensics (1980s), National DNA Database (1994), National Commission on the Future of DNA Evidence (1998), Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Act (1999), National Academy of Forensic Sciences Report — Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward (2009), and National Commission on Forensic Science (2013).

Utilizing the time vehicle to consider past actions and consequent future timelines, attendees will be led through several key points: past, present, and future - in the forensic timeline, in order to illustrate where then-current thoughts and/or actions skew the chain of events leading the community astray to an undesired future. Recognizing that certain future consequences can be traced to intersections of significant persons and actions at critical points in time leads to the conclusion that strategy may allow a directed and desired future result. The ultimate goal is to stimulate consideration of alternatives and discussion about the most prudent course for present-day actions to assure the best possible future.

“...[Y]our future hasn’t been written yet. No one’s has. Your future is whatever you make it. So make it a good one...”¹

Reference(s):

1. (Back to the Future, Part III) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099088/quotes>
-

History, Forensic Science, Timeline