



### **B170 The Evolution of Latent Print Testimony**

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After attending this presentation, attendees will possess a long-range perspective of where latent print testimonial practices have been, where they are headed, and why they are headed there. Attendees will understand the hallmarks of the “dogma” versus the “transparent” expert and will be aware of the main arguments and literature supporting change in the way reports and testimony are presented. Attendees will also understand some potential barriers to this change and the research that is needed to reduce or remove those barriers.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by embracing the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) meeting theme, *Our Future Reflects Our Past: The Evolution of Forensic Science*, to examine both the past and the future of latent print testimony and reflect on how we are currently working to bridge that gap while still testifying every day during a time of change. This presentation will provide a context to the several philosophies of latent print reporting and testimony that are currently being used by different laboratories and practitioners.

Friction ridge comparison testimony in the United States has long been characterized by speaking in absolutes: fingerprints are unique, the Analysis, Comparison, Evaluation-Verification (ACE-V) methodology has a zero error rate, and the testimony presented by the expert should be regarded as an incontrovertible fact. Once the National Research Council released their watershed Report in 2009, questioning and criticizing these clear overstatements of the strength of the evidence, many commentators and professional organizations recommended that the friction ridge community rethink the way their evidence was presented in reports and in court. Yet change has been slow to come. While some agencies have begun a shift in the way they present their findings, many others still testify the same way, or nearly the same way, they always have. Differing schools of thought have evolved regarding how latent print conclusions ought to be presented, and these are causing a philosophical rift in the community.

This presentation offers the historical context of where American friction ridge testimony has been, lays out the arguments for why it needs to change, describes some recent efforts to improve, and highlights some likely directions for the future of friction ridge reporting and testimony in the United States. This presentation will include examples of some new modes of reporting and testimony, along with discussion of challenges that may accompany those new styles, such as concerns about juror comprehension and examiners’ discomfort with leaving absolute source attribution behind without a quantitative model to support a probabilistic conclusion, and will also examine some of the recent literature that surrounds the issue of new styles of testimony.

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### **Latent Print, Reporting, Testimony**