



A21 Integrating Forensic Anthropology and Cold Case Databases: A Look at Resolved Unidentified and Missing Persons Cases in Louisiana

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the effective role of forensic anthropology in the development of a localized database for long-term unidentified and missing persons cases, commonly referred to as “cold cases.”

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating the importance of a collaboration between forensic anthropology, law enforcement, and the public for the successful resolution of cold case unidentified and missing persons investigations at a local level.

Enacted in 2006 by Louisiana state legislative action, the Louisiana Repository for Unidentified and Missing Persons Information program is administered by the Louisiana State University Forensic Anthropology and Computer Enhancement Services (LSU FACES) Laboratory. In addition to the formal Repository database, anthropologists also maintain a comprehensive and fully searchable website that is available to the public (identifyla.lsu.edu). The website contains biographical and anthropological information for unidentified and missing persons cases within Louisiana that users can search specifically or browse generally.

While national and international databases are available to the public (e.g., NamUs, Doe Network), the additional option of a state-level database allows those who have a more specific inquiry to focus a search that may otherwise seem overwhelming in the larger databases. A goal of the LSU FACES Laboratory is to diligently collect anthropological and biometric data for unidentified remains and biographical information about missing persons from Louisiana law enforcement agencies to augment the Repository. The Repository aims to assist in the resolution of cold cases by employing anthropological methods that link biological data of unidentified remains with the sociocultural knowledge of local communities with missing loved ones.

Attendees will be presented with two examples of Louisiana cold cases, both spanning approximately 35 years, that were resolved with the help of information gained from public use of the Repository website. The first example outlines a case of unidentified human remains discovered in 1981. Anthropological data and forensic images were disseminated to the public until a similarity was detected by a citizen between a facial approximation created at the LSU FACES Laboratory and a missing persons report of a young Michigan woman last heard from in Louisiana. The second example regards the search results of a Tennessee woman curious about the enigmatic background of her deceased mother. Only knowing that her mother was from Louisiana, the woman perused the Repository website and found an image that helped direct her search. While widespread media attention can be helpful in resolving such cases, many unidentified and missing persons cold cases do not get publicized in the national media. For the cases highlighted here, neither of which garnered national attention, local communities and individuals searching with a Louisiana focus were able to use the Repository website, ultimately aiding in the resolution of these cases.

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss methods used by the LSU FACES Laboratory and the Repository for the resolution of unidentified and missing persons cases through the continued devotion of forensic anthropologists, law enforcement agents, coroner’s offices, and local communities to maintain the accessibility and visibility of Louisiana cold cases.

Database, Cold Cases, Forensic Anthropology