Wrongful Convictions and Forensic Science: The Need to Regulate Crime Labs

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WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS AND FORENSIC SCIENCE: THE NEED TO REGULATE CRIME LABS

PAUL C. GIANNELLI

DNA testing has exonerated over 200 convicts, some of whom were on death row. Studies show that a substantial number of these miscarriages of justice involved scientific fraud or junk science. This Article documents the failures of crime labs and some forensic techniques, such as microscopic hair comparison and bullet lead analysis. Some cases involved incompetence and sloppy procedures, while others entailed deceit, but the extent of the derelictions—the number of episodes and the duration of some of the abuses, covering decades in several instances—demonstrates that the problems are systemic.

Paradoxically, the most scientifically sound procedure—DNA analysis—is the most extensively regulated, while many forensic techniques with questionable scientific pedigrees go completely unregulated. The regulation of DNA profiling, which has developed gradually over the last twenty years, can serve as a model for other laboratory units. The accreditation of crime laboratories, the certification of examiners, and the standardization and promulgation of written protocols for each technique would go a long way in professionalizing forensic science. In addition, quality assurance programs, including proficiency testing and external audits, should be mandated. Finally, forensic science commissions should be established in every jurisdiction to implement these and other reforms.

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** Albert J. Weatherhead III & Richard W. Weatherhead Professor, Case Western Reserve University. I would like to thank Brandon Garrett for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this Article.
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“At present, forensic science is virtually unregulated—with the paradoxical result that clinical laboratories must meet higher standards to be allowed to diagnose strep throat than forensic labs must meet to put a defendant on death row.”

—Eric S. Lander, molecular biologist, 1989

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2004, the Chief of the Houston Police Department called for a moratorium on executions of convicts from Harris County until after his crime laboratory had completed a review of numerous old case files. This breathtaking development in the county where the most death penalty cases originate is not an isolated incident of laboratory failure. Earlier, the Governor of Illinois had imposed a moratorium on executions in that state due in part to faulty scientific evidence.

The extent of forensic science’s role in convicting the innocent is difficult to gauge, although it is clearly substantial. In *Actual Innocence*, Barry Scheck and his colleagues examined sixty-two of the first sixty-seven DNA exonerations secured in North America through Cardozo Law School’s Innocence Project, concluding that a third of these cases involved “tainted or fraudulent science.” A subsequent review identified forensic science testing errors in 63% of the wrongful convictions and false or misleading testimony by

2. See Maurice Possley et al., *Scandal Touches Even Elite Labs: Flawed Work, Resistance to Scrutiny Seen Across U.S.*, CHI. TRIB., Oct. 21, 2004, § 1, at 1 (“Gov. Rick Perry has rejected a plea from Houston’s police chief to halt executions of inmates convicted in Harris County until the scope of problems at the police crime lab can be determined.”). According to state senator Rodney Ellis, “the validity of almost any case that has relied upon evidence produced by the lab is questionable.” Rodney Ellis, Editorial, *Want Tough on Crime? Start by Fixing HPD Lab*, HOUSTON CHRON., Sept. 5, 2004, at D1.
3. See Adam Liptak & Ralph Blumenthal, *New Doubt Cast on Crime Testing in Houston Cases*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 5, 2004, at A19 (“Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, Texas has executed 323 people, 73 for crimes in Harris County.”).
forensic experts in 27%.\textsuperscript{6} A 2004 \textit{Chicago Tribune} series on crime laboratories reported that an examination of “the 200 DNA and Death Row exoneration cases since 1986 . . . found that more than a quarter involved faulty crime lab work or testimony.”\textsuperscript{7} A 2005 study identified twenty-four prosecutions in which forensic scientists committed perjury.\textsuperscript{8}

The most recent study of 200 DNA exonerations found that forensic evidence (present in 57% of the cases) was the second leading type of evidence (after eyewitness identifications at 79%) used in wrongful conviction cases.\textsuperscript{9} Pre-DNA serology of blood and semen evidence was the most commonly used forensic technique (79 cases).\textsuperscript{10} Next came “hair evidence (43 cases), soil comparison (5 cases), DNA tests (3 cases), bite mark evidence (3 cases), fingerprint evidence (2 cases), dog scent identification (2 cases), spectrographic voice evidence (1 case), shoe prints (1 case), and fiber comparison (1 case).”\textsuperscript{11} This does not mean, however, that the forensic evidence was improperly used. For example, serological testing at the time of many of these convictions was simply not as discriminating as DNA profiling.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, some evidence was clearly misused.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to Houston,\textsuperscript{14} lab problems have surfaced in Baltimore,\textsuperscript{15} Chicago,\textsuperscript{16} Cleveland,\textsuperscript{17} Los Angeles,\textsuperscript{18} Fort Worth,\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Possley et al., \textit{ supra} note 2.
\item Garrett, \textit{ supra} note 5 (manuscript at 24 tbl.2).
\item \textit{Id.} (manuscript at 31).
\item \textit{Id.}
\item This type of evidence involved ABO typing and enzyme/protein analysis. \textit{ See supra} notes 52–58 and accompanying text.
\item The DNA cases involved experts who offered misleading testimony and mischaracterized their own laboratory reports. Two cases involved improper analysis and testimony that resulted in false inclusions. In one case, that of Gilbert Alejandro, the criminalist claimed a DNA match even though neither he nor anyone else had conducted the DNA testing.
\item Garrett, \textit{ supra} note 5 (manuscript at 34). The expert was Fred Zain. For a discussion of Zain, see \textit{infra} notes 52–58 and accompanying text.
\item \textit{See infra} notes 165–207 and accompanying text.
\item \textit{See infra} notes 165–207 and accompanying text.
\item \textit{See} Possley et al., \textit{ supra} note 2 (“In Baltimore County, for instance, officials pledged a review of analyst Concepcion Bacasnot’s cases after DNA Tests in 2003
Montana,\(^{20}\) Oklahoma City,\(^{21}\) San Antonio,\(^{22}\) Seattle,\(^{23}\) Virginia,\(^{24}\) and West Virginia,\(^{25}\) as well as other locations.\(^{26}\)

exonerated an inmate whom her work helped convict of rape. In another case, she said she did not understand the science involved in her work.

16. See Barry Scheck & Peter Neufeld, Editorial, *Junk Science, Junk Evidence*, N.Y. TIMES, May 11, 2001, at A31 (“In Chicago, a police lab analyst, Pamela Fish, left out exculpatory serological results in testimony at a 1992 rape trial, contributing to a wrongful conviction. In 1999, the defendant was exonerated by DNA tests. Questions have now been raised about Ms. Fish’s conduct in a 1986 murder case.”); *infra* notes 150–64 and accompanying text.

17. See Connie Schultz, *City to Pay $1.6 Million for Man’s Prison Time*, CLEV. PLAIN DEALER, June 8, 2004, at A1 (reporting that City of Cleveland agreed to pay Michael Green $1.6 million for the thirteen years he spent in prison for a rape he did not commit, and an independent master was appointed to review a lab examiner’s prior cases).

18. See Anna Gorman, *LAPD Narcotics Analyst Erred: Botched Evidence Raises Question on Credibility. Public Defender’s Office Demands an Accounting*, L.A. TIMES, Sept. 2, 2004, at B1 (noting that Jeff Lowe, who analyzed drugs for the LAPD since May 2003, failed to weigh drugs separately from the containers in which they were seized “in forty-seven cases, leading to a review of 972 that he handled”).

19. See Deanna Boyd, *Crime Lab Subject of Criminal Inquiry*, FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM, April 13, 2003, at 1 (“[A DNA] proficiency test revealed that a senior forensic scientist did not follow proper procedures and protocol. The review will involve almost 100 cases.”).


24. See *infra* notes 208–35 and accompanying text.

25. See Lawrence Messina, *State Police Lab Review Leaves Agency With Another Shiner*, CHARLESTON GAZETTE (Charleston, W. Va.), Mar. 13, 2002, at 1A (“The trooper who discovered one of the more recent scandals at the State Police crime lab was placed on leave Tuesday pending an investigation of his own work there.”); *infra* notes 52–67 and accompanying text.

26. See, e.g., Laura Cadiz, *Maryland-Based DNA Lab Fires Analyst Over Falsified Tests*, BALT. SUN, Nov. 18, 2004, at 1A (reporting that, on November 18, 2004, Orchid Cellmark—the world’s largest private DNA testing firm—announced that it fired analyst Sarah Blair for falsifying test data); Terry Horne, *Crime Lab Boss Placed on Leave,*
Moreover, a series of embarrassing incidents has plagued the FBI Laboratory, this country’s premier forensic facility, leading to the issuance of Inspector General reports that were critical of the explosives unit in 1997 and a DNA unit in 2004. Further, an FBI metallurgist pleaded guilty for giving false testimony concerning comparative analysis of bullet lead in 2003, and a scathing internal report on the Bureau’s misidentification of fingerprints in the Madrid train bombing was issued in 2004.

Some of the crime lab failures involved incompetence and sloppy procedures, while others entailed fraud, but the extent of the derelictions—the number of episodes and the duration of some of the abuses, covering decades in several instances—precludes dismissal.

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29. See Steve Bailey, Prosecutor Challenged in Ragland Murder Case, Cincinnati Post, Sept. 6, 2002, at 13A (“Attorneys for both sides were in court for a hearing in which FBI ballistics expert Kathleen Lundy was scheduled to testify about lying during a preliminary hearing in Shane Ragland’s murder case.”); infra text accompanying notes 254–65.


31. Fred Zain was at the West Virginia lab for ten years. See infra notes 52–58 and accompanying text. Joyce Gilchrist was at the Oklahoma City lab for twenty years. See infra notes 68–124 and accompanying text.
of the controversy as the errant work of only a “few bad apples.”32
Forged fingerprints,33 faked autopsies,34 false laboratory reports,35 and
perjured testimony,36 including the falsification of credentials,37 have
all been documented. Indeed, the Florida Supreme Court felt
compelled to cite the “rising nationwide criticism of forensic

32. This is a claim that some forensic scientists have made. See, e.g., Tanner, supra note 26 (“ ‘There are always bad actors in any profession,’ said Paul Ferrara, director of the Virginia Division of Forensic Science. ‘The difference is that our mistakes do not get buried.’”). But see Janine Arvizu, Forensic Laboratories: Shattering the Myth, 24 THE CHAMPION, May 2000, at 18, 20 (“The problems in these high-profile cases are a clear reflection of the forensic community’s widespread failure to develop and implement effective quality assurance programs.”). Ferrara’s Virginia State Lab would later have its own problems. See infra notes 208–35 and accompanying text.


34. See Richard L. Fricker, Pathologist’s Plea Adds to Turmoil: Discovery of Possibly Hundreds of Faked Autopsies Helps Defense Challenges, A.B.A. J., Mar. 1993, at 24, 24 (“If the prosecution theory was that death was caused by a Martian death ray, then that was what [pathologist] Dr. Erdmann reported.”) (internal quotes omitted); Chip Brown, Pathologist Accused of Falsifying Autopsies, Botching Trial Evidence, L.A. TIMES, Apr. 12, 1992, at A24 (“[F]ormer Dallas County assistant medical examiner Linda Norton was quoted as saying [Dr.] Erdmann routinely performs ‘made-to-order autopsies that support a police version of a story.’ ”); Roy Bragg, New Clues May be Dug from Grave; Furor Touches on Autopsies, Brains, HOUSTON CHRON., Mar. 28, 1992, at A1 (“[C]all him ‘McErdmann …. He’s like McDonald’s—billions served.’ ”) (quoting Dallam County District Attorney Barry Blackwell).

35. See United States v. Gault, 141 F.3d 1399, 1403 (10th Cir. 1998) (“Defendant sought to question Goldston about a former DEA colleague’s submission of falsified reports. The DEA agent, Ann Castillo, had admitted to failing to perform the controlled substance tests upon which her reports were based.”); State v. Ruybal, 408 A.2d 1284, 1285 (Me. 1979) (FBI analyst “reported results of lab tests that he did not in fact conduct”); State v. DeFronzo, 394 N.E.2d 1027, 1031 (Ohio Ct. Com. Pl. 1978) (expert represented that certain lab tests were conducted when “no such tests were ever conducted”).

36. See supra note 29; see also Logerquist v. McVey, 1 P.3d 113, 120 (Ariz. 2000) (en banc) (“It turned out that the witness presenting the dog-scent evidence in Roscoe was a charlatan.”).

37. See United States v. Gale, 314 F.3d 1, 1 (D.C. Cir. 2003) (observing that a government expert, who had testified for years in narcotics cases, “pleaded guilty to having committed perjury about his educational background”); Drake v. Portuondo, 321 F.3d 338, 342 (2d Cir. 2003) (“It is now apparent that Walter’s testimony concerning his qualifications was perjurious.”); Doepel v. United States, 434 A.2d 449, 460 (D.C. 1981) (a FBI serologist testified that he had a master’s degree in science, “whereas in fact he never attained a graduate degree”); Commonwealth v. Mount, 257 A.2d 578, 579 (Pa. 1969) (prosecution expert “had never fulfilled the educational requirements for a laboratory technician”). See generally James E. Starrs, Mountebanks Among Forensic Scientists, in 2 FORENSIC SCIENCE HANDBOOK 1, 7, 20–29 (Richard Saferstein ed., 1988) (discussing false credential cases).
Paradoxically, these scandals are occurring as the power of DNA evidence to identify the guilty and exonerate the innocent is being reported weekly, if not daily, and while the Supreme Court is ratcheting up the standards for the admissibility of scientific evidence in its *Daubert* trilogy. The scandals have prompted Texas and Oklahoma to require their crime laboratories to be accredited, joining New York, which has mandated accreditation since 1994. Moreover, in 2004, Congress required states receiving federal funds to designate an agency to investigate laboratory fraud and misfeasance.


40. See Barbara Novovitch, *Free After 17 Years for a Rape That He Did Not Commit*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 22, 2004, at A18 (discussing the case of Brandon Moon, who was released from prison after seventeen years for a rape that he did not commit; he was the 154th person exonerated by DNA analysis).


42. TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN. art. 38.35 (Vernon 2005) (requiring accreditation by the Department of Public Safety). Texas also created a Forensic Science Commission. *TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN. art. 38.01* (Vernon 2005).

43. OKLA. STAT. ANN. tit. 74, § 150.37 (West 2004) (requiring accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (“ASCLD/LAB”) or the American Board of Forensic Toxicology).

44. N.Y. Exec. Law § 995b (McKinney 2003) (requiring accreditation by the state Forensic Science Commission); *see also CAL. PENAL CODE § 297* (West 2004) (requiring accreditation of DNA units by ASCLD/LAB or any certifying body approved by ASCLD/LAB); *MINN. STAT. ANN. § 299C.156(2)(4)* (West 2007) (specifying that Forensic Laboratory Advisory Board should encourage accreditation by ASCLD/LAB or other accrediting body).

Indiana does not require accreditation but does require “[a] laboratory conducting forensic DNA analysis” to “implement and follow nationally recognized standards for DNA quality assurance and proficiency testing, such as those approved by” ASCLD/LAB. *See IND. CODE ANN. § 10-13-6-14* (LexisNexis 2003).

45. In 2004, as part of the “Justice for All Act,” the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 was amended to require

a certification that a government entity exists and an appropriate process is in place to conduct independent external investigations into allegations of serious negligence or misconduct substantially affecting the integrity of the forensic results committed by employees or contractors of any forensic laboratory system, medical examiner’s office, coroner’s office, law enforcement storage facility, or medical facility in the State that will receive a portion of the grant amount.
In 2005, the Virginia legislature made the Division of Forensic Science a separate agency under the Secretary of Public Safety and created a Forensic Science Board and Scientific Advisory Committee—another byproduct of a lab controversy. While these reforms reflect improvement, they are also long overdue and, more importantly, inadequate. All crime laboratories should be regulated in a comprehensive manner.

Part I of this Article examines a number of laboratory failures. These examples involve both municipal and state facilities, as well as the FBI Laboratory, and they cover a wide variety of techniques, including hair comparisons, serological examinations, drug analyses, fingerprint identifications, and even DNA profiling, the current gold standard in forensic science. In some of these cases, it is difficult to distinguish between malfeasance and misfeasance because the lack of quality assurance protocols creates an environment in which both can flourish undetected for long periods of time. Moreover, some abuses can be traced to the lack of empirical validation of a technique—e.g., microscopic hair comparisons and comparative analysis of bullet lead. These examples demonstrate the need for regulating crime labs.

Part II discusses the regulation of DNA profiling, which has developed gradually over the last twenty years, and can serve as a model for other laboratory units. The complexity of DNA profiling forced the FBI to establish a technical working group on DNA analysis in 1988 in order to promulgate testing standards. In 1994, Congress enacted the DNA Identification Act, which authorized a national DNA database. Significantly, this legislation also created a DNA Advisory Board to promulgate quality assurance standards and

46. Va. Code Ann. § 9.1-1100 (2005) (changing Division of Forensic Science into the Department of Forensic Science). Previously, the Division was under the Department of Criminal Justice Services. Id.
48. See infra notes 208–35 and accompanying text.
50. See infra note 329 and accompanying text.
required proficiency testing of examiners and external audits. This landmark Act was the first federal legislation regulating a forensic science. Other requirements for an effective regulatory scheme include the accreditation of crime laboratories, the certification of examiners, and the standardization and promulgation of written protocols for each technique. Moreover, forensic science commissions should be established in each jurisdiction to implement these and other reforms.

I. CRIME LAB FAILURES

A. West Virginia

One of the most notorious cases of crime lab failure involved Fred Zain, the Chief Serologist in the West Virginia State Police Crime Laboratory, who falsified test results in as many as 134 cases from 1979 to 1989. In reviewing a judicial report on Zain’s decade of misconduct, the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia spoke of “shocking and . . . egregious violations” and the “corruption of our legal system.” The judicial inquiry concluded that “as a matter of law, any testimonial or documentary evidence offered by Zain at any time in any criminal prosecution should be deemed invalid, unreliable, and inadmissible.” The report commented:

The acts of misconduct on the part of Zain included (1) overstating the strength of results; (2) overstating the frequency of genetic matches on individual pieces of evidence; (3) misreporting the frequency of genetic matches on multiple pieces of evidence; (4) reporting that multiple items had been tested, when only a single item had been tested; (5) reporting inconclusive results as conclusive; (6) repeatedly altering laboratory records; (7) grouping results to create the erroneous impression that genetic markers had been obtained from all samples tested; (8) failing to report conflicting results; (9) failing to conduct or to report conducting additional testing to resolve conflicting results; (10) implying a match with a suspect.


54. Id. at 520. As part of the judicial inquiry, the Chairman of the Laboratory Accreditation Board of the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors selected two experts to conduct an analysis of the policies, procedures, and records of the Serology Division during Zain’s tenure. Id. at 503, 510–11.
when testing supported only a match with the victim; and (11)
reporting scientifically impossible or improbable results.\textsuperscript{55}

Numerous defendants were imprisoned based on Zain’s
testimony.\textsuperscript{56} In fact, Zain was such a treasured prosecution witness
that even after he left the state to accept a position in a San Antonio
crime lab, West Virginia prosecutors sent evidence to him for retesting.\textsuperscript{57} The prosecutors relied on him because the remaining
West Virginia serologists were incapable, in their view, of reaching
the “right” results.\textsuperscript{58}

In response to the Zain affair, the West Virginia State Police
revamped its crime lab.\textsuperscript{59} Astonishingly, despite this effort, the lab
continued to fall victim to misconduct. On September 7, 2000, as a
result of an established quality control procedure, Sergeant Timothy
White discovered certain inconsistencies in a lab report prepared by
chemist Todd Owen McDaniel.\textsuperscript{60} When White reported the
inconsistencies, the State Police contacted the FBI and placed five
members of the lab on administrative leave.\textsuperscript{61} When confronted,
McDaniel admitted to skipping required tests on suspected marijuana

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Id.} at 503; see also \textit{In re} Investigation of W. Va. State Police Crime Lab., 445 S.E.2d 165, 167 (W. Va. 1994) (“Trooper Zain’s misconduct was insidious and extensive.”).

\textsuperscript{56} See Giannelli, supra note 49, at 442–49 (examining Zain’s conduct in detail); SCHECK ET AL., supra note 5, at 107–17 (discussing Woodall, Davis, and Harris exonerations).

\textsuperscript{57} See \textit{In re Investigation}, 438 S.E.2d at 512 (noting that a West Virginia serologist sent evidence to Texas for Zain to test). Zain’s work in Texas also proved troublesome: “In the case of Gilbert Alejandro, the expert, Fred Zain, claimed a DNA match when in fact Zain had never conducted any testing beyond initial inconclusive testing and the DNA excluded Alejandro.” Garrett, supra note 5 (manuscript at 35 n.109).

\textsuperscript{58} According to Zain’s subordinate, “several prosecutors expressed dissatisfaction with the reports they were receiving from serology and specifically requested that the evidence be analyzed by Zain.” \textit{In re Investigation}, 438 S.E.2d at 512 n.16.

[Serologist] Myers also testified that after he had been unable to find blood on a
murder suspect’s jacket, it was sent to Texas, where Zain found a bloodstain which
tested consistent with the blood of the victim. . . . [Serologist] Bowles also testified
that at least twice after Zain left the lab, evidence on which Bowles had been
unable to obtain genetic markers was subsequently sent to Texas for testing by
Zain, who again was able to identify genetic markers.

\textit{Id.} at 512.

\textsuperscript{59} See Messina, supra note 25.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Id.} (“The trooper who discovered one of the more recent scandals at the State
Police crime lab was placed on leave Tuesday pending an investigation of his own work
there.”).

\textsuperscript{61} Press Release, W. Va. State Police, New Employees Staff Drug Lab (Oct. 2, 2000),
and cocaine evidence and subsequently pleaded guilty to fraud.\textsuperscript{62} Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") chemists had to take over the drug unit.\textsuperscript{63}

The FBI investigation found that McDaniel was not the only employee who ignored procedures. The report mentioned that White had also violated lab policy,\textsuperscript{64} but he apparently failed to learn from this lesson. In June of 2001, less than a year later, a discrepancy was detected in one of his reports.\textsuperscript{65} Adding to the problem, Captain Rick Theis, director of the lab, neglected to notify the State Police Superintendent, as required.\textsuperscript{66} Both White and Theis were placed on leave.\textsuperscript{67}

\section{Oklahoma City}

Joyce Gilchrist, who began working as a forensic chemist in the Oklahoma City Police Department crime laboratory in 1980, is another prominent illustration of misconduct continuing unchecked for many years.\textsuperscript{68} She was also a prosecution superstar.\textsuperscript{69}

\subsection{Curtis McCarty Prosecution}

In 1982, Gilchrist initially excluded Curtis McCarty as a suspect in a rape-murder investigation based on microscopic hair comparison.\textsuperscript{70} After another suspect identified McCarty as the killer, Gilchrist reviewed a second set of hair samples from McCarty, which she then matched to the crime scene exemplars.\textsuperscript{71}

Two months before trial, the defense requested discovery of all scientific reports as well as access to hair, fiber, and serological

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{62} See Messina, supra note 25.
\item \textsuperscript{63} See New Employees Staff Drug Lab, supra note 61.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Id. A second civilian chemist, Mills Dillard, who was one of the lab members on administrative leave, resigned during the investigation. Id.
\item \textsuperscript{65} See Messina, supra note 25.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{68} See MARK FUHRMAN, DEATH AND JUSTICE: AN EXPOSÉ OF OKLAHOMA’S DEATH ROW MACHINE 232 (2003) (concluding that Gilchrist “appears to have used her lab tests to confirm the detectives’ hunches rather than seek independent scientific results. . . . She treated discovery requests with contempt and kept evidence from the defense. She systematically destroyed evidence at the very time when she knew that much of that evidence might be retested”).
\item \textsuperscript{69} See id. at 70 (noting that after “the successful prosecution of Malcolm Rent Johnson, Joyce Gilchrist’s star began to rise”); see also Bennett L. Gershman, Misuse of Scientific Evidence By Prosecutors, 28 OKLA. CITY U. L. REV. 17, 23 (2003) (using Gilchrist’s conduct as example of abuse of scientific evidence).
\item \textsuperscript{70} See FUHRMAN, supra note 68, at 90.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Id.
\end{itemize}
samples for an independent evaluation. John Wilson, a Kansas City Police Crime Lab examiner, analyzed the evidence after being hired as a defense consultant. Gilchrist sent the samples so that Wilson received them on March 17, 1986, the day McCarty’s trial began. Gilchrist then used her tardiness against the defense by testifying that Wilson could not have conducted a competent examination in the length of time he had the hair slides. Further, after Wilson testified that, according to Gilchrist’s report, none of the pubic hairs found on the victim matched McCarty’s, Gilchrist testified that she had simply failed to include in her report that a pubic hair found on the victim was consistent with McCarty’s hair. Additionally, Gilchrist testified that, based on her examination, McCarty was present at the time of the crime; there was no basis—scientific or otherwise—for this statement. McCarty was sentenced to death.

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals reversed McCarty’s conviction, finding that Gilchrist had improperly delayed sending her report, as well as the sample, to the defense expert. The court also criticized Gilchrist for omitting critical information from the report, labeling her conduct “trial by ambush.” Finally, the court found that Gilchrist had testified beyond the state of the art.

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73. Id.
74. Id.
75. Id. at 1217–18.
76. Id. at 1218.
77. Id.
78. Id. at 1217.
79. Id. (“Ms. Gilchrist’s delay and neglect in not completing her forensic examination and report . . . was inexcusable, since she began her forensic examination in December of 1982.”).
80. Id. at 1218 ("[T]he forensic report was at best incomplete, and at worst inaccurate and misleading. . . . Gilchrist admitted at trial, however, that she failed to include her conclusion . . . in the forensic report given to Mr. Wilson. This significant omission, whether intentional or inadvertent, resulted in a trial by ambush . . . .") (citations omitted).
81. Id. (“We find it inconceivable why Ms. Gilchrist would give such an improper opinion, which she admitted she was not qualified to give.”). McCarty was later convicted at a retrial. McCarty v. State, 904 P.2d 110 (Okla. Crim. App. 1995). However, his conviction was once again vacated during post-conviction proceedings due to Gilchrist’s misconduct. McCarty v. State, 114 P.3d 1089, 1092 n.12 (Okla. Crim. App. 2005) (noting that a departmental “Review Board found the circumstantial evidence indicated Ms. Gilchrist had destroyed the evidence in order to prevent DNA testing”). A third trial was subsequently aborted. See Cheryl Camp, Convicted Murderer Is Freed In Wake of Tainted Evidence, N.Y. TIMES, May 22, 2007, at A16 (reporting that trial judge released McCarty because the “evidence in the case against him had been tainted or destroyed by the actions of a former police chemist, Joyce Gilchrist, who lawyers say switched out samples to get a match”).
This was not the only trial at which Wilson and Gilchrist would clash. Wilson testified against Gilchrist in another case. After examining hair evidence that, according to Gilchrist’s testimony, matched the defendant, Wilson reached the opposite conclusion. After the trial, he registered a complaint against Gilchrist with the Southwestern Association of Forensic Scientists (“SWAFS”), which conducted an investigation and concluded that Gilchrist should distinguish between her personal and scientific opinions. Despite this admonishment, Gilchrist was not otherwise disciplined. In the end, Wilson was the one punished: the Oklahoma City Police Department called Wilson’s supervisor at the Kansas City Police Department, complaining that he had testified against its expert. Kansas City subsequently forbade him from working on private cases.

2. Jeffrey Pierce Prosecution

In 1985, Sandra Burton was raped in her apartment. When the police brought Jeffrey Pierce, a landscaper at her apartment complex, to Burton, she said that he was not the rapist. In addition, two witnesses corroborated Pierce’s alibi. Eight months later, however, Pierce was arrested, and minutes after he voluntarily agreed to provide head and pubic hair exemplars, Gilchrist determined that

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82. FUHRMAN, supra note 68, at 95 (discussing the Alvin King Parker case).
83. See McCarty, 765 P.2d at 1219 (“On December 14, 1987, Max Courtney, President of the Southwestern Association of Forensic Scientists, Inc., issued a prepared statement of the Board of Directors concerning allegations of professional misconduct lodged against Ms. Gilchrist. A certified copy of this statement, which was filed with this Court on January 4, 1988, concluded that Ms. Gilchrist had violated the ethical code, but interestingly she was not disciplined. That statement reads in relevant part: ‘Our Professional Conduct Committee thoroughly investigated the allegations against Ms. Joyce Gilchrist and . . . communicated with [her] that she should distinguish personal opinion from opinions based upon facts derived from scientific evaluation . . . . We further conclude that, in our system of jurisprudence, undue pressure can be placed upon the forensic scientist to offer personal opinions beyond the scope of scientific capabilities.’” (citation omitted)).
84. FUHRMAN, supra note 68, at 98.
85. Id.
87. Pierce v. Gilchrist, 359 F.3d 1279, 1282 (10th Cir. 2004).
88. Id.
Pierce’s hairs “matched” the crime scene hairs. Pierce was subsequently convicted and sentenced to sixty-five years in prison.

The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals upheld the conviction, despite several troubling aspects of the case. First, Gilchrist had violated a court order by failing to turn over evidence to the defense. Second, her report was incomplete. While the court acknowledged these deficiencies, it nevertheless concluded that Pierce’s constitutional rights had not been violated.

A later FBI investigation of Gilchrist’s analyses in eight cases determined that she had misidentified hairs in six instances and fibers in another. One of the cases was Pierce’s; the FBI found that none of the hairs taken from Pierce exhibited the same microscopic characteristics as those found at the crime scene. As a result, the Oklahoma City Police Department had the evidence retested by a private DNA laboratory. That testing exonerated Pierce, who is now suing Gilchrist for violating his constitutional rights.

89. Pierce, 786 P.2d at 1258 (“Joyce Gilchrist testified that twenty-eight scalp hairs and three pubic hairs recovered from either S.B., her clothing or her apartment, were microscopically consistent with the characteristics found in Appellant’s hair.”).

90. Id.

91. Id. at 1261 (“Instead of following either the letter of the Order or taking steps to have the Order changed or clarified by the court, she took it upon herself to determine the portions of the Order with which she wished to comply. This was not her decision to make.”).

92. Id. at 1263 n.8 (“Appellant claims that it was error for Gilchrist not to set out in the report, her opinion that the attacker was a non-secretor.”). At trial, Gilchrist testified that Pierce was a non-secretor, a person whose blood type cannot be determined through other body fluids, including semen. Furman, supra note 68, at 203. Between twenty and twenty-five percent of the population falls into this category. 1 Giannelli & Imwinkelried, supra note 12, § 17.09, at 959.

93. Pierce, 786 P.2d at 1263–64. Gilchrist misstated her qualifications. Id. at 1264 (“During the trial, Gilchrist testified that she was a member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Appellant has provided this Court with several letters which reveal that at the time of trial, Gilchrist had been suspended from the organization for non-payment of dues.”).

94. See Special Agent Douglas Deedrick, Summary of Case Reviews of Forensic Chemist, Joyce Gilchrist, Oklahoma City Police Department Crime Laboratory 1 (2001) (concluding that lab notes “were often incomplete or inadequate to support the conclusions reached by the examiner” and finding a lack of documentation “to identify textile fibers” in one of the cases and no indication of “a confirmation or review by another qualified examiner” in hair cases) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

95. Id. at 3 (“[T]hese [pubic] hairs do not exhibit the same microscopic characteristics as the suspect’s known pubic hairs.”).

96. DNA testing was not available at the time of Pierce’s trial in 1986.

97. See Pierce v. Gilchrist, 359 F.3d 1279, 1300 (10th Cir. 2004) (finding that Gilchrist does not have immunity).
3. Alfred Mitchell Prosecution

In *Mitchell v. State*,98 a rape-murder case tried in 1992, Gilchrist testified that Mitchell’s sperm had been detected on anal and vaginal swabs taken from the victim.99 She made this statement despite two key facts: (1) pretrial DNA testing performed by the FBI (at Gilchrist’s request) established the absence of sperm on the swabs, and (2) sperm found on the victim’s panties matched the DNA of her boyfriend.100 Gilchrist did not turn over the FBI report to the defense, although, as the Tenth Circuit subsequently noted, “[t]he results thus completely undermined Ms. Gilchrist’s testimony.”101 The court went on to observe:

Ms. Gilchrist thus provided the jury with evidence implicating Mr. Mitchell in the sexual assault of the victim which she knew was rendered false and misleading by evidence withheld from the defense. Compounding this improper conduct was that of the prosecutor, whom the district court found had “labored extensively at trial to obscure the true DNA test results and to highlight Gilchrist’s test results,” and whose characterization of the FBI report in his closing argument was “entirely unsupported by evidence and . . . misleading.”102

99. Id. at 1199 (“Gilchrist’s findings indicated the presence of sperm in the vaginal and anal canals (the latter consistent with Mitchell). Sperm consistent with Mitchell was also found on the medical examiner’s transport sheet in the area where [the victim’s] genitals lay during transport.”); see also FURHRMAN, supra note 68, at 126 (noting Gilchrist’s testimony that the FBI’s DNA test “had been ‘inconclusive’ ”).
100. Mitchell v. Gibson, 262 F.3d 1036, 1063 (10th Cir. 2001). The appellate court further noted:

[Hand-written notes taken by Ms. Gilchrist during telephone conversations with Agent Vick indicated that the agent had conducted two DNA probes on the samples. These probes showed that the semen on the panties matched that of Mr. Taylor only, that no DNA was present on the rectal swab, and that the only DNA on the vaginal swab was consistent with the victim.]

Id.
101. Id. at 1064 (“An expert testified at the evidentiary hearing that the DNA testing . . . unquestionably eliminated Mr. Mitchell . . . [and Gilchrist’s testimony was] based on the use of test methods Ms. Gilchrist knew were less precise than the DNA tests which eliminated Mr. Mitchell. Moreover, he pointed out that one of the tests she performed in fact excluded Mr. Mitchell.”).
4. Malcolm Rent Johnson Prosecution

In the trial of Malcolm Rent Johnson, another rape-murder prosecution, Gilchrist testified that semen recovered from the victim’s bed was consistent with Johnson’s blood type and that hairs found on the bed matched hair taken from Johnson’s arm. Johnson’s request for a defense expert to counter Gilchrist’s testimony was denied, and he was convicted and then executed on January 6, 2000. When the Gilchrist scandal later erupted, Johnson’s attorneys asked for the evidence to be reexamined. Four police chemists later concluded that there was no sperm present on the slides taken from the victim’s bed. Yet, for her work on the Johnson case, Gilchrist had received a certificate of achievement. Questions about the execution linger.


104. Johnson, 731 P.2d at 1007 (“The techniques used and manner of investigation were discussed on direct and on cross examination. The test results were available for discovery prior to trial. The experts called were forthright concerning their findings and the limitations inherent in the tests and investigation.”). See generally Paul C. Giannelli, Ake v. Oklahoma: The Right to Expert Assistance in a Post-Daubert, Post-DNA World, 89 CORNELL L. REV. 1305 (2004) [hereinafter Giannelli, The Right to Expert Assistance] (discussing the need to bolster the right to defense experts).

105. FUHRMAN, supra note 68, at 253. During the appeals process, Skip Palenik, a forensic scientist, criticized Gilchrist’s trial testimony, stating that she had testified beyond the bounds of accepted science when she claimed to have matched arm hair to the defendant. Id. at 64. According to Palenik, arm hairs are not individual enough for such comparisons. Id.

106. Id. at 65–66. The District Attorney’s office informed them that the evidence no longer existed. Id. at 66. When the defense attorney searched the evidence archives, however, he found the smear slides right where they were supposed to be. Id.

107. Id. at 66–67 (noting that Laura Schile, an OCPD crime lab scientist, “wrote a memo stating that ‘spermatozoon is not present’ on six slides that Gilchrist had said contained semen matching Johnson’s blood type and secretor status. Schile’s conclusions were supported by three other police chemists . . . .”); see also Lois Romano, Police Chemist’s Missteps Cause Okla. Scandal, WASH. POST, Nov. 26, 2001, at A1 (“But last July, in a startling development, the police lab stated in a memo . . . that it had recently reexamined the original slides purportedly containing the sperm and found no sperm there—contrary to Gilchrist’s claims 19 years ago.”).

108. FUHRMAN, supra note 68, at 70.

109. Id. at 68 (“Even David Prater [an assistant D.A.] admits that the ‘Malcolm Rent Johnson case is the one case, out of the ones who have been executed, that is questionable.’ ”); Jim Yardley, Oklahoma Police Lab Scientist Probed; Future Executions Put on Hold, CHI. TRIB., May 2, 2001, at 9 (“State Atty. Gen. Drew Edmondson, whose office began reviewing the capital cases last week . . . said he still wants to review the case of Malcolm Rent Johnson, who was executed in January 2000 for murdering a woman. He did not offer a reason to believe Johnson was wrongly executed but said he wants to more thoroughly examine the case.”).
5. Additional Cases

These cases were not the only ones in which Gilchrist’s work was criticized. In *Fox v. State*, a death penalty case, the appellate court questioned her testimony concerning hair analysis: “The lack of scientific weight of such a conclusion is apparent on reflection by those dealing with similar evidence on a regular basis. But to a lay jury, usually ill-equipped to assimilate hair analysis findings on their own, such an opinion may appear too substantial.” In *Miller v. State*, the court reversed a rape conviction, noting that once again Gilchrist turned over hair evidence to the defense in an untimely manner and omitted crucial conclusions from her report. Mitochondrial DNA analysis later exonerated Miller. Another suspect, Ronnie Lott, whom Gilchrist had cleared, was subsequently convicted of the crime.

6. Other Problems

A January 2001 report by the chief of the laboratory documented additional problems concerning Gilchrist’s job performance,

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110. See, e.g., Cannon v. Gibson, 259 F.3d 1253, 1275 n.22 (10th Cir. 2001) (denying habeas relief, the court wrote: “This court recognizes that recently information has come to light casting serious doubt on the veracity of Gilchrist’s testimony in a large number of criminal prosecutions. . . . In fact, there is serious reason to doubt the veracity of Gilchrist’s testimony in this particular case.”); LaFevers v. Gibson, 238 F.3d 1263, 1266 (10th Cir. 2001). Denying habeas relief in *LaFevers*, the court wrote:

When habeas counsel ultimately succeeded in having Exhibit 83 submitted for DNA testing, the testing revealed that the blood on the pants actually belonged to Cannon, not the victim. . . . LaFevers asserted that . . . (1) [Gilchrist] lied when she asserted that the blood splatters on the pants were not sufficiently large to conduct electrophoresis testing; and (2) she lied when she testified that she had not conducted electrophoresis testing on the pants.

*Id.*


112. *Id.* at 571. The court also noted that “Ms. Gilchrist admitted that an individual could not be positively identified by hair evidence. However, she went on to testify that, ‘[i]n her opinion . . . Mark Fowler and Bill Fox were in contact with John Barrier prior to death.’ ” *Id.* at 571 (alteration in original).


114. *Id.* at 1319–20 (“[I]t was approximately two weeks after the deadline ordered by Judge Owens that Ms. Gilchrist mailed the hair evidence to the appellant’s expert. Thus, appellant’s expert received the evidence six and one-half days before trial began.”).

115. *Id.* at 1320 (“What is even more disturbing . . . is the fact that Ms. Gilchrist’s pretrial forensic report made absolutely no mention of her finding of a ‘unique characteristic’ concerning appellant’s pubic hairs. However, in his opening argument, the prosecutor alerted the jury to the State’s expert’s finding of the ‘unique characteristic.’ ”).

116. SCHECK ET AL., supra note 5, at 87.

including: (1) missing evidence in numerous cases; (2) contamination issues due to evidence being “stacked all over the chemist’s area”; (3) systematic destruction of rape evidence after two years, well before the statute of limitations expired; (4) lack of peer review in many cases; and (5) the absence of proficiency testing, although such testing had been paid for.  

This review came ten years after Professor Starrs had criticized Gilchrist’s work in a forensic science journal. He wrote: “[I]n her missionary zeal to promote the cause of the prosecution she had put blinders on her professional conscience so that the truth of science took a back seat to her acting the role of an advocate.”

Although her conduct had been questioned for over fifteen years, Gilchrist’s supervisors were either unaware of the courtroom controversies or they did not care as long as her testimony resulted in convictions. When interviewed by Dan Rather in 2001, Wilson, the expert who had filed the ethics complaint against Gilchrist, succinctly captured the problem: “The whole criminal justice system has failed.” He then elaborated: “You have to look at the prosecutor’s office. They must have understood what was going on with all those flags being waved. The judges are no different.” Of the twenty-three death penalty cases in which Gilchrist testified, twelve

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120. Id. at 132–33.

121. Memorandum from Captain Byron Boshell, Lab Servs. to Major Garold Spencer, Investigations Bureau, supra note 118, at 10 (“I knew from previous articles published over the years that she had been the subject of scrutiny by the courts, but I assumed they had been addressed by the department and resolved. I later found no indication in her personnel file that they had ever been investigated or addressed administratively.”). On September 25, 2001, Gilchrist was discharged. Gilchrist v. Bd. Rev. Okla. Employment Sec. Comm’n, 94 P.3d 72, 74 (Okla. 2004).


123. Id.; see also FUHRMAN, supra note 68, at 71 (noting that Detective Bemo claimed that Gilchrist began giving the detectives test results that were so good “that he didn’t believe [she] was doing proper lab work, because her results were ‘too good.’ Bemo says that now, but it didn’t stop him and his partner Bill Cook from using Gilchrist’s lab results in many of their cases.”). Fuhrman further notes:

Cook had given Gilchrist the nickname “Black Magic” because she was able to get results that no other chemist could. When Cook and other homicide detectives gave Gilchrist a hair sample from a suspect, they would often let her know that this was the person that they wanted to arrest.

Id. at 91.
defendants have been executed. Oklahoma now requires its laboratories to be accredited.\(^\text{124}\)

C. Montana

The problems in Montana surfaced when Jimmy Ray Bromgard, convicted of rape in 1987,\(^\text{125}\) was exonerated by DNA testing sponsored by the Cardozo Law School Innocence Project—after serving fifteen years in prison.\(^\text{126}\) Arnold Melnikoff, the founder and one-time director of the Montana State Police Crime Laboratory, testified about hair analysis at Bromgard’s trial.\(^\text{127}\) Melnikoff used a statistical analysis that he had apparently invented.\(^\text{128}\) According to Melnikoff, “the odds were one in one hundred that two people would have head hair or pubic hair so similar that they could not be distinguished by microscopic comparison and the odds of both head and pubic hair from two people being indistinguishable would be about one in ten thousand.”\(^\text{129}\) There was no scientific basis for these statements.

An independent panel of five trace evidence experts concluded that Melnikoff’s testimony contained “egregious misstatements” and demonstrated a “fundamental lack of understanding” of hair comparisons.\(^\text{130}\) The Innocence Project then sought out other cases in which Melnikoff had testified.\(^\text{131}\) As a result, DNA analysis also

\(^{124}\) See OKLA. STAT. ANN. tit. 74, § 150.37 (West 2004) (requiring accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board or the American Board of Forensic Toxicology).

\(^{125}\) State v. Bromgard, 862 P.2d 1140 (Mont. 1993); see also CNN Presents: Reasonable Doubt: Can We Trust Crime Labs? (CNN television broadcast Jan. 9, 2005) (examining the Bromgard case).

\(^{126}\) See Liptak, supra note 20.


\(^{128}\) Id. (“The 1-in-100 estimate was without any scientific basis . . . .”) (quoting Professor Walter Rowe, George Washington University).

\(^{129}\) Bromgard, 862 P.2d. at 1141.

\(^{130}\) INNOCENCE PROJECT, PEER REVIEW REPORT: MONTANA V. JIMMY RAY BROMGARD 2 (“[T]here are not—and never was—a well established probability theory for hair comparison. . . . If this witness has evaluated hair in over 700 cases as he claims in his testimony, then it is reasonable to assume that he has made many other misattributions.”) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review); see also Liptak, supra note 127 (“An F.B.I. report issued yesterday concluded that the scientist had misidentified the hair samples that were the central evidence in the case.”).

\(^{131}\) Peter J. Neufeld, The (Near) Irrelevance of Daubert to Criminal Justice and Some Suggestions for Reform, 95 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH (SUPP. I) 107, 107 (2005) (“A Lexis search identified two other cases in which the Montana Supreme Court viewed Melnikoff’s hair evidence favorably and affirmed convictions. In both cases, postconviction DNA testing on the original semen samples excluded the convicted offenders, and the men were exonerated.”).
exonerated Chester Bauer, convicted of rape in 1983, and Paul Kordonowy, convicted of rape in 1990. In these two cases, Melnikoff had also used bogus statistical analysis in his testimony. When the state Attorney General refused to investigate past cases, the Innocence Project, along with five former Montana Supreme Court justices, sought review of the more than 200 cases in which Melnikoff had been involved. The Montana Supreme Court, however, used jurisdictional grounds to dismiss a petition that sought an independent audit and retesting of evidence.

Melnikoff had moved on to the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab in 1989. An investigation there revealed additional problems. An internal audit found flaws in thirty out of 100 drug-analysis cases assigned to Melnikoff.

Gilchrist and Melnikoff were not the only experts abusing hair comparison evidence; many of the wrongful conviction cases involved this type of evidence. In Williamson v. Reynolds, a federal district court correctly noted that microscopic hair analysis lacks scientific
support. Williamson was later exonerated by DNA profiling, and
the hair evidence was shown to be “patently unreliable.” Still
another expert testified at Edward Honaker’s trial that the crime
scene hair sample “was unlikely to match anyone” else. Actually,
hundreds or even hundreds of thousands of hair exemplars could
have “matched.” Honaker was also freed by DNA profiling.
Despite this record, courts (including in McCarty in Oklahoma)
continued to admit this suspect evidence. Indeed, one court
judicially noticed the reliability of hair evidence, implicitly finding
this evidence indisputable, and yet there is an embarrassing lack of
basic research on this “well-accepted” technique.

In an FBI study comparing microscopic and mitochondrial DNA
analysis of hair, the former was wrong approximately twelve percent

140. Id. at 1556. The district court had “been unsuccessful in its attempts to locate any indication that expert hair comparison testimony meets any of the requirements of Daubert.” Id. at 1558. The court further observed: “Although the hair expert may have followed procedures accepted in the community of hair experts, the human hair comparison results in this case were, nonetheless, scientifically unreliable.” Id. Nevertheless, the Tenth Circuit reversed on this issue. Williamson v. Ward, 110 F.3d 1508, 1523 (10th Cir. 1997) (holding that due process (fundamental fairness), not the more stringent Daubert, standard applies in habeas proceedings).


143. See id. at 59.


145. See, e.g., State v. Fukusaku, 946 P.2d 32, 44 (Haw. 1997) (“Because the scientific principles and procedures underlying hair and fiber evidence are well-established and of proven reliability, the evidence in the present case can be treated as ‘technical knowledge.’ Thus, an independent reliability determination was unnecessary.”); McGrew v. State, 682 N.E.2d 1289, 1292 (Ind. 1997) (concluding that hair comparison is “more a ‘matter of the observations of persons with specialized knowledge’ than a ‘matter of scientific principles’ ” (internal quotation marks omitted) (quoting Jervis v. State, 679 N.E.2d 875, 881 (Ind. 1997))).


147. See Fed. R. Evid. 201(b) (limiting judicial notice to facts that are not subject to reasonable dispute); Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharm., Inc., 509 U.S. 579, 592 n.11 (1993) (“[T]heories that are so firmly established as to have attained the status of scientific law, such as the laws of thermodynamics, properly are subject to judicial notice under Federal Rule of Evidence 201.”).

148. See Paul C. Giannelli & Emmie West, Hair Comparison Evidence, 37 CRM. L. BULL. 514 (2001) (discussing the DNA exoneration cases in which hair evidence was used to convict the innocent); Clive A. Stafford Smith & Patrick A. Goodman, Forensic Hair Comparison Analysis: Nineteenth Century Science or Twentieth Century Snake Oil?, 27 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 227, 231 (1995–1996) (“If the purveyors of this dubious science cannot do a better job of validating hair analysis than they have done so far, forensic hair comparison analysis should be excluded altogether from criminal trials.”).
of the time—even though, in all cases reviewed, the conclusion had been limited to an “association” (“consistent with” testimony). In the hair cases, the lack of a scientific basis and lab protocols—limiting the conclusions that may be derived from the evidence—camouflaged the misconduct.

D. Chicago

John Willis was convicted of rape in 1992, despite his protests of innocence. Dr. Pam Fish, a serologist in the Chicago crime lab, testified that her tests were “inconclusive”—i.e., that they neither included nor excluded Willis as the source of semen. Willis, dubbed the “beauty shop rapist,” was convicted and sentenced to 100 years of imprisonment. Seven years later, DNA testing exonerated him. At that time, Fish’s lab notes surfaced, indicating that Willis’s blood type (type B) excluded him as the source of the semen (type A). Fish failed to acknowledge this finding in her testimony. After reviewing the file, a respected forensic scientist concluded that “labeling the typing of the semen stains as ‘inconclusive’ misrepresents the laboratory findings.” Willis sued, and the city,

149. Max M. Houck & Bruce Budowle, Correlation of Microscopic and Mitochondrial DNA Hair Comparisons, 47 J. FORENSIC SCI. 964, 966 (2002) (“Of the eighty hairs that were microscopically associated, nine comparisons were excluded by mtDNA analysis.”).
151. Id.
152. Id.
154. Id. (“[Willis] had blood type B and was a secretor—that is, his blood type could be determined from his bodily fluids, such as semen or saliva. The semen taken from the toilet tissue wrapper came from someone with blood type A.”).
155. See SCHOCK ET AL., supra note 5, at 125 (“Fish’s misleading testimony in the Willis case, which led to the conviction of an innocent man and allowed a predator to continue roaming the streets, shows why the state should have turned over all of Fish’s laboratory notes and data, rather than merely presenting her final report.”).
156. Letter from George F. Sensabaugh, Professor, University of California at Berkeley, to Locke E. Bowman, Legal Director, The MacArthur Justice Center, University of Chicago Law School (Oct. 16, 2003) [hereinafter Letter from Sensabaugh] (emphasis omitted) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review). Sensabaugh reached two more conclusions: first, “[g]iven that Dr. Fish had reservations about the reliability of blood group test results and apparently did no retesting, she had an obligation to specify her reservations in the lab report”; and second,

Overall, the documentation of the lab work as described in the three pages of lab notes is inadequate and incomplete. Moreover, the formal lab reports describe results of testing for which there is no record in the lab notes. In short, the documentation in this case falls short of accepted scientific standards.

Id. (emphasis omitted).
county, and state settled for over $2.5 million, without admitting wrongdoing.\textsuperscript{157} \textit{The Chicago Tribune} reported: “By her own account, Fish could have redone the tests in the Willis case to clarify the results, and even her bosses still say she should have.”\textsuperscript{158} Fish was also involved in other wrongful convictions.\textsuperscript{159}

The problems at the Chicago lab were not limited to Fish. Dr. Howard Harris, the former head of the New York City police crime lab from 1974 to 1985 and a former president of the American Society of Crime Lab Directors, was asked to examine the Chicago police crime laboratory in connection with a civil suit. In his findings, Harris described the lab as “disorganized, poorly supervised, almost completely lacking in written procedures and performance standards, and staffed by inadequately trained workers.”\textsuperscript{160} He noted that “records management ‘was relegated to the lowest ranking employees in the laboratory, who were provided with minimal training and seemingly an almost complete lack of written procedures and standards of performance.’”\textsuperscript{161} Further, “[t]here was no system to ensure that all relevant materials were sent in response to a subpoena, and ‘laboratory senior supervisory personnel did not seem to know if there were any records of what was actually sent.’”\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{157} See Mills et al., \textit{supra} note 153.

\textsuperscript{158} Id.

\textsuperscript{159} See Margaret Cronin Fisk, \textit{Lawyer Frees Chicago Trio After Retesting of Lab Sample}, NAT’L L.J., Dec. 17, 2001, at A6 (discussing DNA exonerations of Omar Saunders and Larry Ollins after thirteen years in prison; at trial, Fish had testified there were no stains from a rape kit which included a vaginal swab, but the evidence reportedly showed that the killer was an O-secretor and that none of the defendants were).

Donald Reynolds and Billy Wardell, other rape defendants, were also exonerated by DNA. Wardell v. City of Chi., No. 98 C 8002, 2001 WL 1345960, at *1 (N.D. Ill. Oct. 31, 2001). Reynolds alleged that Fish had falsely testified about the results of blood tests. \textit{Id.} A federal court dismissed Wardell and Reynolds’ lawsuit because plaintiffs failed to show that a municipal policy was involved. \textit{Id.} at *6. Thus, Fish’s culpability was not determined.


\textsuperscript{161} Id.

\textsuperscript{162} Id. The Chicago lab had other problems. Gary Dotson was convicted of the rape of Cathleen Webb. \textit{CONNORS ET AL., supra} note 142, at 51. Six years later she recanted, stating that she had fabricated the charge. \textit{Id.} at 52. Subsequent DNA tests excluded Dotson as the source of the crime-scene semen. \textit{Id.} At Dotson’s 1979 trial, Timothy Dixon testified that seminal material found in Webb’s panties matched Dotson’s blood type. Blake Fleetwood, \textit{From the People Who Brought You the Twinkie Defense; The Rise of the Expert Witness Industry}, WASH. MONTHLY, June 1987, at 33, 37. He failed to disclose, however, that Webb’s own vaginal discharges, not necessarily semen, could have caused the stains. \textit{Id.} Years later when a \textit{Washington Post} reporter asked Dixon why he had not spoken up. He replied: “I guess I wasn’t asked.” \textit{Id.} A DNA scientist later remarked that “Dixon’s trial testimony was ‘exceedingly misleading and, in my judgment, dishonest.’” Mark Thompson, \textit{DNA’s Troubled Debut}, CAL. LAW., June 1988, at 43
In 1996, the Illinois State Police took over the city crime lab, and Fish was named head of the state lab’s biochemistry section.\textsuperscript{163} When the Willis controversy erupted, the State went back and reviewed the cases in which she was involved as a state examiner. In contrast, the city cases were never audited.\textsuperscript{164}

E. Houston

The Houston Police Department Crime Lab is the paradigmatic example of a failed forensic agency. According to a state senator, “the validity of almost any case that has relied upon evidence produced by the lab is questionable.”\textsuperscript{165}

The story began with a television station’s investigation,\textsuperscript{166} which led in turn to a state audit of the lab in December 2002.\textsuperscript{167} The audit revealed a dysfunctional organization with serious contamination issues and an untrained staff using shoddy science.\textsuperscript{168} As described by a later investigation, the DNA unit

was in shambles . . . operating for years without a line supervisor, overseen by a technical leader who had no personal experience performing DNA analysis and who was lacking the

(quotting Edward Blake, Forensic Sciences Associates); see also Jones v. Chicago, 856 F.2d 985, 991 (7th Cir. 1988) (“[P]olice laboratory technician Mary Furlong . . . discovered that George Jones had different semen and blood types from the types found in Sheila Pointer’s vagina. Furlong failed to include this information in the lab report that she was preparing for the prosecution of Jones.”).

\textsuperscript{163.} Possley & Mills, \textit{supra} note 160.

\textsuperscript{164.} Mills et al., \textit{supra} note 153 (“But her former boss, Kearney, acknowledged that a review of all her cases might have been warranted. ‘Maybe we should have gone back and looked at them,’ he said in a recent interview. ‘But it didn’t happen.’ ”).

\textsuperscript{165.} Rodney Ellis, \textit{supra} note 2. Similarly, the chair of the legislative committee investigating the lab has stated: “It’s a comedy of errors, except it’s not funny.” Adam Liptak, \textit{Houston DNA Review Clears Convicted Rapist, and Ripples in Texas Could Be Vast}, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 11, 2003, at A14 (quoting State Representative Kevin Bailey).

\textsuperscript{166.} See \textsc{Michael R. Bromwich, Third Report of the Independent Investigator for the Houston Police Department Crime Laboratory and Property Room 1} (2005) [hereinafter \textsc{Third Houston Report}], available at http://www.hpdlabinvestigation.org.

\textsuperscript{167.} \textsc{Texas DPS Crime Lab Headquarters & Tarrant County ME Crime Lab, Quality Assurance Audit for Forensic DNA and Convicted Offender DNA Databasing Laboratories: Houston Police Department Crime Laboratory—DNA/Serology Section} (2002) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review).

\textsuperscript{168.} \textit{Id.; see also} Nick Madigan, \textit{Houston’s Troubled DNA Crime Lab Faces Growing Scrutiny}, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 9, 2003, § 1, at 20 (reporting that operations were suspended in December after an audit found numerous problems, “including poor calibration and maintenance of equipment, improper record keeping, and a lack of safeguards against contamination of samples. Among other problems, a leak in the roof was found to be a potential contaminant of samples on tables below.”).
qualifications required under the FBI standards, staffed by underpaid and undertrained analysts, and generating mistake-ridden and poorly documented casework.169

As a result of these findings, the crime lab was not allowed to perform DNA testing for several years.170

Some defendants who were convicted based on evidence provided by the lab have been exonerated. For example, Josiah Sutton171 was convicted of rape in 1999 based on flawed DNA evidence.172 Retesting freed him.173 In 2004, six independent experts determined that a second man, George Rodriguez,174 had been convicted on serological testimony that was “false and scientifically unsound.”175 Rodriguez had an alibi and the police had evidence pointing to another person, whose DNA was later matched to the crime.176 A panel of experts suggested that similar problems in other cases should be expected.177

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169. THIRD HOUSTON REPORT, supra note 166, at 5.
172. See Adam Liptak & Ralph Blumenthal, New Doubt Cast on Testing in Houston Police Crime Lab, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 5, 2004, at A19 (“[P]rosecutors in Mr. Sutton’s case had used [DNA] to convict him, submitting false scientific evidence asserting that there was a solid match between Mr. Sutton’s DNA and that found at the crime scene. In fact, one of every eight black people, including Mr. Sutton, shared the relevant DNA profile. More refined retesting cleared him.”); see also Roma Khanna & Steve McVicker, Police Chief Shakes Up Crime Lab: 2 Officials Quit, Others Disciplined, HOUSTON CHRON., June 13, 2003, at 1A (“Christi Kim is a DNA analyst who tested the DNA used to convict Josiah Sutton . . . . Police investigators cited her for incorrectly documenting the results of DNA profiles, failing to report the full set of DNA results in an unnamed case and making an incorrect data entry in an unnamed capital murder case.”).
173. See Liptak & Blumenthal, supra note 172.
175. EDWARD T. BLAKE ET AL., PEER REVIEW REPORT TEXAS V. GEORGE RODRIGUEZ 6 (2004) (on file with the North Carolina Law Review); see also Liptak & Blumenthal, supra note 172 (reporting that the panel of experts wrote “that a crime laboratory official—because he either lacked basic knowledge of blood typing or gave false testimony—helped convict an innocent man of rape in 1987”).
176. See Liptak & Blumenthal, supra note 172.
177. See Sylvia Moreno, Police Lab’s Troubles Grow: Problems in Houston Lead to Moratorium on Executions, WASH. POST, Oct. 2, 2004, at A3 (“[T]his week, the district attorney’s office announced that a new, independent analysis of chemical testing used to convict Rodriguez found the testing was inaccurate.”).
Other revelations concerned the toxicology and ballistics units of the lab. Moreover, these problems were compounded by the district attorney’s failure to recuse himself from the case, as twenty-two judges had requested. Two grand juries looking into the role of the prosecutors in the lab cases rejected the assistance usually provided by the D.A.’s office and called their own witnesses, thus becoming that rare phenomenon: a “runaway” grand jury.

Texas now requires its labs to be accredited, and Houston commissioned an independent investigation of its laboratory. In the first three months, that investigation found myriad deficiencies. First, four instances of “dry labbing” (reporting results without doing tests) in the drug section were disclosed. These incidents were apparently well known within the lab. One of the two examiners involved was still employed by the laboratory, having been reinstated

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179. Problems in the firearms identification section have also been reported. Nanon Williams was convicted of a 1992 drug-related murder, and a lab expert testified that the victim was shot with a .25 caliber bullet. Six years later, reviewing the case, the same expert determined the bullet was a .22 caliber from a co-defendant’s gun. He admitted that he had never tested that weapon. Possley et al., *supra* note 2. The Houston Chronicle further noted:

[T]he attorneys handling his appeal discovered that before Rousseau’s trial, HPD’s ballistics lab had matched the bullet that killed [the victim] to bullets from another killing . . . . [A]bout one month after Rousseau was sentenced the police crime lab matched bullets from both shootings to a gun found on Juan Guerrero, who was convicted of the other murder. Prosecutors never turned over the crucial findings that would have supported Rousseau’s innocence as required, his attorneys said.

Roma Khanna & Steve McVicker, *Fingers Pointed at HPD Crime Lab in Death Row Case*, HOUSTON CHRON., April 24, 2003, at 1A.

180. Roma Khanna & Steve McVicker, *DA Office Kept in Dark on Lab, Rosenthal Says*, HOUSTON CHRON., July 11, 2003, at 27A (“Rosenthal also adamantly refused to recuse himself from investigations of the lab’s problems, allowing for the appointment of a special prosecutor, despite the urging of 22 state district judges and others.”).


182. See TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN. art. 38.35 (Vernon 2005) (requiring accreditation by the Department of Public Safety to admit “[p]hysical evidence subjected to forensic analysis, and testimony regarding the evidence” in a criminal proceeding).

183. See THIRD HOUSTON REPORT, *supra* note 166.


185. Id. at 12 n.9 (noting that discussions with witnesses “plainly established” the facts).
by the police chief after being removed from his position by the lab.\textsuperscript{186} This examiner filed a harassment complaint against one of his superiors who had discovered the malfeasance. They both received the same disciplinary sanction.\textsuperscript{187}

Second, the technical leader in the DNA unit had been removed and never replaced, leaving a six-year vacancy in an important supervisory position.\textsuperscript{188} Matters were further exacerbated when the lab reassigned him to head the quality assurance program, a critical job that he did—by his own admission—in a lackluster fashion.\textsuperscript{189} In short, having failed in one job, he was “booted upstairs.”\textsuperscript{190}

Third, serious backlog problems with the processing of rape kits remained unaddressed. In March 2002, a lab supervisor “estimated that there were 19,500 sexual assault kits received by HPD that had never been processed, some dating as far back as 1980.”\textsuperscript{191} The lab was analyzing only “known suspect” cases—i.e., persons already arrested.\textsuperscript{192} Thus, the lab was not entering the profiles from “cold cases” into the national DNA database, the Combined DNA Index System (“CODIS”),\textsuperscript{193} where they might have generated a cold hit. Consequently, rapes occurred that probably could have been prevented. Even with arrestees, the lab was incredibly slow. For example, when Lynn Jones was charged with the sexual assault of a child, he remained in jail for nine months before the DNA tests that would eventually exonerate him were performed.\textsuperscript{194}

Fourth, in 2001, Tropical Storm Allison badly damaged thirty-four homicide and sexual assault case files due to a leaking roof.\textsuperscript{195} According to the investigation’s report, in 2003, “several Crime Lab employees told internal affairs investigators that this biological evidence had become so saturated with water that they observed

\textsuperscript{186} Id. at 12.

\textsuperscript{187} Id. at 13.

\textsuperscript{188} Third Houston Report, supra note 166, at 21.

\textsuperscript{189} See id. at 30 (“By Dr. Shama’s own admission, he did approximately a year’s worth of work in the four-plus years he remained in the position; a more exacting assessment, would put the volume of work performed by Dr. Sharma at much less than that.”). Sharma was reassigned due, in part, to conflicts with superiors. Id.

\textsuperscript{190} Id. at 29–30.

\textsuperscript{191} Id. at 47–48.

\textsuperscript{192} Id. at 47.

\textsuperscript{193} See id. at 48 (noting that “cold case” rape kits must be outsourced to other laboratories”).

\textsuperscript{194} Id. at 22.

\textsuperscript{195} Id. at 45.
bloody water dripping out of the boxes containing the evidence and pooling on the floor.”

Fifth, the laboratory “stopped performing lab-wide quality control audits in 1997,” and audits performed in the DNA unit (as required by federal standards) were superficial at best. The report noted that, although the DNA unit had successfully passed its internal reviews in 2000 and 2001, the 2002 external audit (using the same quality assurance standards) painted “a very different picture.” Indeed, the section was shut down after this audit.

Sixth, the laboratory director was oblivious to these problems. The investigation also identified poor proficiency testing results and the failure of staff to meet educational requirements.

The final report concluded that forty-three of the 135 DNA cases reviewed had “major issues,” four of which involved death row inmates. The report recommended that a special master be appointed to review these cases, as well as 180 suspect blood cases from the 1980s and early 1990s, for which convicts are still serving time. These 180 cases represented twenty-one percent of those reviewed—“an extraordinarily high and extremely disturbing proportion of cases in which to find problems of this magnitude.” Local officials, however, rejected this recommendation, arguing that the prosecutor and courts could handle these cases.

196. Id. at 45.
197. Id., Executive Summary, at 5.
198. Id.
199. Id.
200. Id. at 51.
201. “On December 13, 2002, the audit team briefed Mr. Krueger on its findings. Mr. Krueger recalls that the audit team told him the DNA Section was in shambles. He told us that he was completely surprised by this report . . . .” Id. at 50–51.
202. Id. at 61 (“We found numerous errors in the typing results in the serology proficiency tests.”).
203. Id. at 65. The report noted:

Mr. Bolding, who had served as the technical lead [sic] of the DNA/Serology Section [since 1996], lacked sufficient training and education in statistics. Our preliminary reviews suggest that in several cases involving mixtures, the DNA analysts performed the statistical calculations incorrectly. We also already have encountered deficiencies in the documentation contained in analysts’ case files.

204. FINAL HOUSTON REPORT, supra note 170, Executive Summary, at 4.
205. Id., Executive Summary, at 12.
206. Id., Executive Summary, at 11.
F. Virginia

In 1984, Earl Washington, Jr., a mentally retarded farmhand with an IQ of sixty-nine, was convicted of the rape-murder of Rebecca Williams and sentenced to death.208 Although Washington “confessed” to the crime, he also confessed to several other offenses that the police soon determined he could not have committed.209 In addition, his blood type (type O) did not match the type developed from a semen stain (type A), a fact that his trial attorney overlooked.210

In 1993, Governor Douglas Wilder ordered DNA testing, which was conducted by Jeff Ban, a state analyst.211 On January 14, 1994, nine days before Washington’s scheduled execution, Wilder commuted his sentence to life imprisonment.212 The Governor’s office, however, refused to give the DNA report to the defense attorneys, leaving them to wonder what type of results could have led to a commutation but not a pardon.213 In a bizarre turn of events, the lab director, Paul Ferrara, gave the DNA report to a documentary filmmaker in 1999.214 The previously-withheld report excluded


209. Washington’s incriminatory statements mainly consisted of affirmative responses to detectives’ statements. Freedman, supra note 208, at 1092–93. The detectives claimed these statements revealed knowledge that only the perpetrator could have known. Washington v. Wilmore, 407 F.3d 274, 276 (4th Cir. 1995). In a later civil action against the detectives, a document surfaced that supported Washington’s claim that his statements had been misrepresented at his criminal trial: “[Detective] Wilmore said that he felt like either he or Hart must have mentioned the shirt to Washington before Washington said he left the shirt at the scene, and that his testimony in the record did not accurately reflect that the shirt had been first mentioned by the police.” Id. at 277 (citation omitted). The district court denied summary judgment because “Washington had proffered evidence from which a reasonable juror could conclude that Wilmore possessed nonpublic information about the crime and falsely represented that Washington had volunteered that information during interrogation.” Id. at 278. The Fourth Circuit affirmed. Id. at 284. Washington later won a $2.25 million lawsuit against Wilmore’s estate. See Jerry Markon, Wrongfully Jailed Man Wins Suit: Va. Officer Falsified Confession, Jury Rules, WASH. POST, May 6, 2006, at B1.

210. The victim’s husband was also type O. Washington v. Murray, 4 F.3d 1285, 1286 (4th Cir. 1993) (finding no violation of Sixth Amendment right of effective assistance of counsel).

211. See Possley et al., supra note 2.

212. Id.

213. EDDS, supra note 208, at 161.

Washington as a suspect. Ban had eliminated Washington as the source of semen on a blanket but found a vaginal swab less clear. This interpretation was incorrect, a mistake that extended Washington’s incarceration by six years.

By this time, newspapers began to clamor for more information, leading another governor, James Gilmore, to order further testing, this time with a more sophisticated technique, Short Tandem Repeats (“STRs”). Surprisingly, Ban was once again chosen to conduct the tests. An unknown profile was detected on the blanket and matched the profile of Kenneth Tinsley, a twice-convicted rapist. Gilmore then pardoned Washington, who had spent seventeen years in prison. The pardon, however, was not based on a finding of actual innocence, but rather on reasonable doubt.

Still, the matter would not rest. Ban’s STR interpretation next came under attack. The defense hired Edward Blake, a prominent DNA scientist, who tested duplicate slides from the Medical Examiner’s Office and excluded Washington as a possible match. He found that Ban’s report was “logically incoherent” and “fundamentally flawed.” The Innocence Project called for an audit, but the laboratory director balked, rejecting the criticism as “unfounded” and labeling Blake a “hired gun.” Other experts,

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215. EDDS, supra note 208, at 150 (noting Erlich’s conclusion “that these test results cast very significant doubt about Mr. Washington’s contribution to the sample”).
216. Id. at 170–71.
217. Id. at 170.
218. EDDS, supra note 208, at 171–76.
219. See Possley et al., supra note 2.
220. Id.
221. Id.
222. See EDDS, supra note 208, at 185.
223. See Possley et al., supra note 2.
225. Possley et al., supra note 2.
however, disagreed, one arguing that the incident should have been reported as a quality breach under the lab’s accreditation standards.\(^\text{226}\)

On September 30, 2004, Governor Mark Warner ordered an audit of the Washington case by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (“ASCLD/LAB”), which made several findings, including that Ban had erroneously interpreted the DNA tests.\(^\text{227}\) In addition, “[p]resses from outside the laboratory and excessive managerial influence from within the laboratory during the STR analyses phase had a detrimental affect on the analyst’s decisions, examinations and reports in this case.”\(^\text{228}\) This pressure led to deviations from normal protocols.\(^\text{229}\) (The pressure was to obtain a result, not to reach a particular result.)

The governor also ordered the lab to review old case files in which serological, but not DNA, analysis had been conducted.\(^\text{230}\) This review was the first random-sample case audit, albeit limited, in the country.\(^\text{231}\) As a result, five convicts have been exonerated,\(^\text{232}\) and a more sweeping review is now underway.\(^\text{233}\) Meanwhile, the Virginia legislature made the Division of Forensic Science a separate agency


\(^{227}\) ASCLD VA. REPORT, supra note 217, at 16 (“The analyst’s reported conclusions in the September 8, 2000 Certificate of Analysis with regard to the sperm fraction of Item 58 vaginal smear are incorrect.”). ASCLD also disagreed with the lab’s internal audit: “It should be noted that the internal DFS auditors agreed with the reported results in the September 8, 2000, Certificate of Analysis as they pertained to the exclusion of listed suspects, saying the results were scientifically supported by the data in the case file. ASCLD/LAB disagrees.” Id. at 13.

\(^{228}\) Id. at 17.

\(^{229}\) Id. at 13. The erroneous conclusion resulted in part on “deviations from the standard protocol.” Id.

\(^{230}\) Michael D. Shear & Jamie Stockwell, DNA Tests Exonerate 2 Former Prisoners: Va. Governor Orders Broad Case Review, WASH. POST, Dec. 15, 2005, at A1. Evidence in the old cases existed only because a lab analyst, Mary Jane Burton, meticulously retained evidence samples from 1973 to 1988, even though she was not required to. Id.


\(^{233}\) Shear & Stockwell, supra note 230. This review, however, has not progressed as quickly as it should have. See Candace Rondaux, Virginia DNA Review Hobbled: As Crime Lab Chief Steps Down, Slow Pace Is Criticized, WASH. POST, Dec. 27, 2006, at B1 (“We could see as many as 30 possible exonerations when this is all over with.” (quoting lab director Paul Ferrara)).
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under the Secretary of Public Safety and created a Forensic Science Board and a Scientific Advisory Committee.

G. FBI Laboratory

Although the FBI crime laboratory is widely regarded as the premier forensic facility in the country, it too has had its problems.

1. Explosives Unit

The Department of Justice’s 1997 report on the FBI laboratory, issued by the Inspector General (“I.G.”), documented numerous deficiencies, including inaccurate testimony, testimony beyond the competence of examiners, improperly prepared laboratory reports, insufficient documentation of test results, inadequate record management and retention, and failure to resolve serious and credible allegations of incompetence. For example, in the Oklahoma City bombing case, the report found that an examiner’s conclusion about the identity of the explosive charge was speculation and “tilted in such a way as to incriminate the defendants.” This presented

234. VA. CODE ANN. § 9.1-1100 (2005) (changing Division of Forensic Science into the Department of Forensic Science). Previously, it was under the Department of Criminal Justice Services. Id.

235. Id. §§ 9.1-1111 to -1112.


237. See generally 1997 I.G. REPORT, supra note 27, Executive Summary, pt. I; see also JOHN F. KELLY & PHILLIP K. WEARNE, TAINTING EVIDENCE 2 (1998) (concluding that FBI examiners “had given scientifically flawed, inaccurate, and overstated testimony under oath in court; had altered the lab reports of examiners to give them a pro-prosecutorial slant; and had failed to document tests and examinations from which they drew incriminating conclusions, thus ensuring that their work could never be properly checked”); Bales, supra note 236, at 53 (“[T]he report did contain deeply disturbing findings of inadequate procedures, insufficient supervision, and improper conduct.”).

238. 1997 I.G. REPORT, supra note 27, Executive Summary, pt. I.

239. Id., Executive Summary, pt. IIII. Scott Bales noted:

[T]he report concluded that an examiner from the lab’s explosives unit had erred by purporting to identify the particular explosives used in the [1993] World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings. The error stemmed from the examiner’s reliance on information that was tied to suspects but not relevant to his scientific analysis.

Bales, supra note 236, at 52. The New York Times further explained:

Two laboratory workers said [the chief laboratory examiner] had changed their dictated reports, in violation of F.B.I. policy. They said he made slight alterations
federal prosecutors with a significant dilemma, which they solved by going outside the country to obtain a bomb expert from the Ministry of Defence in the United Kingdom.

The report’s recommendations are riveting in their simplicity. They include: (1) seeking ASCLD/LAB accreditation; (2) requiring examiners in the Explosives Unit to have scientific backgrounds in chemistry, metallurgy, or engineering; (3) mandating that each examiner who performs work prepare and sign a separate report instead of a composite report “without attribution to individual examiners”; (4) establishing report review procedures by unit chiefs; (5) preparing adequate case files to support reports; (6) monitoring court testimony in order to preclude examiners from testifying to matters beyond their expertise or in ways that are unprofessional; and (7) developing written protocols for scientific procedures.

2. DNA Unit

A second I.G. Report (2004) focused on Jacqueline Blake, who was hired by the FBI in 1988 as a serologist. From March 2000 to June 2002, she worked with DNA-Polymerase Chain Reaction

in the wording of reports to eliminate uncertainties in the explosives evidence and making it easier for prosecutors to present the evidence as unequivocally consistent with the Government’s theory of the case.


240. See United States v. Nichols, 169 F.3d 1255 (10th Cir. 1999) (upholding Nichols’s conviction despite a defense challenge to refusing a witness’s testimony that would have criticized the FBI’s handling of the case); United States v. McVeigh, 153 F.3d 1166 (10th Cir. 1998) (upholding McVeigh’s conviction despite challenges to evidentiary rulings).

241. Nichols, 169 F.3d at 1261–62 (“Mr. Nichols next contends the district court erred when it permitted Linda Jones, a forensic explosives expert from the Ministry of Defense in England, to give opinions about the type and size of the bomb that destroyed the Murrah building.”).

242. See generally 1997 I.G. REPORT, supra note 27, Executive Summary, pt. VII (summarizing these recommendations). With respect to the fourth recommendation, the report commented: “Our central point is that peer review by qualified personnel is an essential aspect of a high-performing forensic science laboratory. The Rudolph matter, certain conclusions in the Oklahoma City report, and other cases demonstrate the importance of vigorous, substantive peer review.” Id. Addressing the fifth recommendation, it elaborated:

The Rudolph files and some of Martz’s work underscore the importance of case files containing all of the documentation necessary for another appropriately qualified examiner to be able to understand and replicate the examiner’s data and analysis. We encountered the problem of incomplete or missing documentation in many case files.

Id.

For two years, while performing analyses on crime scene evidence in more than 100 cases, she failed to complete negative control tests, a required part of the lab protocol designed to identify whether contamination has been introduced into the process. This omission “rendered her work scientifically invalid and unusable in court.” In addition, she falsified lab documents to conceal her misdeeds. In May 2004, she pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of providing false information in her lab reports.

Several aspects of this affair warrant further attention. First, although the FBI was an accredited laboratory by this time and thus subject to audits, Blake’s malfeasance was not revealed through established safeguards, but rather by accident. As the I.G. Report observed, “weaknesses in DNA [Unit I] procedures and protocols allowed a technician routinely to disregard required steps in the analysis of DNA, even while the Unit received clean audit reports from both internal and external auditors and while the Unit was accredited by ASCLD/LAB.”

Second, in reviewing the laboratory’s protocols, the I.G. Report identified several significant problems:

1) the protocol lacks sufficient detail;
2) the protocol fails to inform the exercise of staff discretion;
3) the protocol fails to ensure the precision of manual notetaking; and
4) the protocol is outdated.

By itself, however, the failure to process the negative controls does not change the test results or lead to a particular testing outcome (e.g., creating a match between a known and unknown evidence sample). The retesting of evidence in Blake’s cases to date indicates that, while she did not properly conduct the contamination testing, the DNA profiles that she generated were accurate.

In some cases, however, her testing consumed all the available DNA in the case.

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244. Id. at i.
245. Id.
246. Id. Blake was a technician, not an examiner, and therefore did not testify.

247. Id. at i.
248. Id. at ii.
249. Id. (“In April 2002, a colleague of Blake was working late one evening after Blake had left the Laboratory for the day, and noticed that the testing results displayed on Blake’s computer were inconsistent with the proper processing of the control samples.”).
250. Id. at 21. Blake also failed to run the negative controls in her qualifying and proficiency tests, but this was not detected at the time.
251. Id. at 130.
Third, the FBI’s response to this incident proved insufficient in some important respects. The agency’s audit covered only the two years when Blake worked as a PCR Biologist but should have extended to the prior twelve years, when she was a serologist and then a Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism (“RFLP”) analyst. In addition, the Office of General Counsel failed to appreciate the seriousness of the problem when informed of it.

3. Comparative Bullet Lead Analysis

a. The Examiner

As part of her job responsibilities, Kathleen Lundy, an FBI examiner, performed comparative bullet lead analysis (“CBLA”), a process that compares trace chemicals found in bullets at crime scenes with ammunition found in the possession of a suspect. For over thirty years, FBI experts had testified about bullet lead composition, a technique that was first used in the investigation into President Kennedy’s assassination. The technique was not seriously challenged until a retired FBI examiner, William Tobin, began questioning the procedure in scientific and legal journals, as well as in-court testimony.

252. Id. at 67.
253. Id. at 65 (“[T]he Laboratory did not receive the quality of legal services that one would expect from FBI OGC, and Laboratory management was not sufficiently assertive when soliciting legal advice.”).
254. NAT’L RESEARCH COUNCIL, FORENSIC ANALYSIS: WEIGHING BULLET LEAD EVIDENCE 1–2 (2004). The Council is the research arm of the National Academies, formerly the National Academy of Sciences. Various analytical techniques (e.g., neutron activation analysis, inductively coupled plasma-atomic emission spectrometry) have been used to determine the concentrations of seven elements—arsenic (As), antimony (Sb), tin (Sn), copper (Cu), bismuth (Bi), silver (Ag), and cadmium (Cd)—in the bullet lead alloy of both the crime-scene and suspect’s bullets.” Id. at 2. Statistical tests are then used to compare the elements in each bullet: “If any of the fragments and suspect’s bullets are determined statistically to be analytically indistinguishable for each of the elemental concentration means, they probably came from the same ‘source.’ ” Id.
255. See generally Erik Randich & Patrick M. Grant, Proper Assessment of the JFK Assassination Bullet Lead Evidence from Metallurgical and Statistical Perspectives, 51 J. FORENSIC SCI. 717 (2006) (discussing the original analysis of the bullet fragments).
In *Ragland v. Commonwealth*, 258 a Kentucky murder case, Lundy got herself in trouble while testifying at a pretrial admissibility hearing. 259 She stated that the elemental composition of a .243 caliber bullet fragment removed from the victim’s body was “analytically indistinguishable” from bullets found at the home of the defendant’s parents. 260 Lundy further testified that the Winchester Company purchased its bullet lead in block form prior to 1996 and then remelted it at its manufacturing plant. 261 During cross-examination at trial, however, Lundy admitted that she knew prior to the hearing that Winchester had purchased its lead in billet form in 1994. 262 This was not a minor point. Millions more bullets could have the same “source” if they were last melted by a secondary smelter instead of by Winchester. 263 Lundy subsequently admitted to her superiors that she had lied, 264 and on June 17, 2003, she pleaded guilty to testifying falsely and was sentenced to a suspended ninety-day jail sentence and a $250 fine. 265

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258. 191 S.W.3d 569 (Ky. 2006).
259. Id. at 580; see Dan Eggen, *FBI Laboratory Moves to New Home*, WASH. POST, Apr. 25, 2003, at A21 (discussing Lundy’s erroneous testimony and her subsequent indictment); Joseph Gerth, *Judge Rules Attorney’s Office Can Remain on Ragland Case*, LOUISVILLE COURIER-J., Oct. 19, 2002, at B4 (addressing the aftermath of Lundy’s false testimony); John Solomon, *FBI Lab Still Plagued by Problems*, CINCINNATI POST (Ohio), Apr. 16, 2003, at 20 (“Weeks after testifying at a court hearing in a Kentucky murder, FBI scientist Kathleen Lundy told her superiors a secret. She knowingly gave false testimony about her specialty of lead bullet analysis.”).
261. Id. at 580.
262. Id. (“Lundy admitted that her testimony at the *Daubert* hearing was false and that she knew prior to the *Daubert* hearing that Winchester purchased its bullet lead in billets in 1994.”).
263. The court noted this point in *Ragland*:

   The significance of the difference is that Winchester’s furnace has only a 15,000-pound capacity whereas some secondary smelters melt lead in crucibles having up to 200,000-pound capacities. Lundy testified that approximately one million bullets can be manufactured from a 15,000 pound melt. If so, approximately thirteen million bullets can be manufactured from a 200,000 pound melt, significantly increasing the number of bullets that would be analytically indistinguishable . . . .

   *Id.* at 576.
264. See Charles Piller & Robin Mejia, *Science Casts Doubt on FBI’s Bullet Evidence*, L.A. TIMES, Feb. 3, 2003, at A1 (reporting that, in a sworn affidavit, Lundy “admitted that her trial testimony was untruthful” and that she “blamed her conduct partly on a sense of crisis in her work, fed by ‘new and repeated challenges to the validity of the science associated with bullet lead comparison analysis’”).
265. Mark Pitsch, *Ex-FBI Scientist Pleads Guilty*, LOUISVILLE COURIER-J., June 18, 2003, at B1; see also Maurice Possley, *Study Shoots Holes in Bullet Analysis by FBI*, CHI. TRIB., Feb. 11, 2004, § 1, at 14 (noting Lundy’s conviction and fine as an example of why bullet lead analysis has fallen under intense scrutiny in recent years); *Prosecutors
b. The Technique

The underlying problems with CBLA went beyond Lundy's prevarication. Although CBLA evidence had been used in trials for over three decades, few studies had been published on the technique. Nevertheless, until recently, the courts admitted this evidence. The published cases reveal a wide variety of interpretive conclusions. In some cases, experts testified only that two exhibits were “analytically indistinguishable.” In other cases, experts concluded that samples could have come from the same source or “batch”; in still others, experts stated that the samples came from the same source. The testimony in a number of cases went further and referred to a “box” of ammunition (usually fifty loaded cartridges, sometimes twenty). For example, two specimens:

- could have come from the same box;
- could have come from the same box or a box manufactured on the same day;
- were consistent with their having come from the same box of ammunition;
- probably came from the same box;
- must have come from the same box or from another box that would have been made by the same company on the same day.

Challenged in Ragland Murder Case, CINCINNATI POST (Ky.), Sept. 6, 2002, at 13A (“Attorneys for both sides were in court for a hearing in which FBI ballistics expert Kathleen Lundy was scheduled to testify about lying during a preliminary hearing in Shane Ragland’s murder case.”).

266. The overwhelming majority of cases were homicide prosecutions, some of which were capital cases. Because there are few federal homicide prosecutions, CBLA evidence was most commonly used in state prosecutions. See infra notes 267–75 and accompanying text.

269. See United States v. Davis, 103 F.3d 660, 673–74 (8th Cir. 1996); People v. Lane, 628 N.E.2d 128, 131 (Ind. 1994).
271. See State v. Grube, 883 P.2d 1069, 1078 (Idaho 1994); People v. Johnson, 499 N.E.2d 1355, 1366 (Ill. 1986); Earhart v. State, 823 S.W.2d 607, 614 (Tex. Crim. App. 1991) (en banc) (“He later modified that statement to acknowledge that analytically indistinguishable bullets which do not come from the same box most likely would have been manufactured at the same place on or about the same day; that is, in the same batch.”), vacated, 509 U.S. 917 (1993).
Several other (and different) statements appear in the opinions. An early case reported that the specimens “had come from the same batch of ammunition: they had been made by the same manufacturer on the same day and at the same hour.” One case reports the expert’s conclusion with a statistic. In another case, the court discussed the expert’s testimony using the expressions “such a finding is rare” and “a very rare finding.” In still another case, the expert “opined that the same company produced the bullets at the same time, using the same lead source. Based upon Department of Justice records, she opined that an overseas company called PMC produced the bullets around 1982.” Thus, FBI experts ignored the limitations of the technique in many cases. Further, as these cases demonstrate, the testimony was not consistent among the Bureau’s own experts, suggesting that the FBI was not monitoring the trial testimony.

In 2004, a National Research Council report undercut much of the FBI expert testimony: “The available data do not support any statement that a crime bullet came from a particular box of ammunition. In particular, references to ‘boxes’ of ammunition in any form should be avoided as misleading under Federal Rule of Evidence 403.” The most disturbing case is Earhart v. State, a…

274. See United States v. Davis, 103 F.3d 660, 666 (8th Cir. 1996) (“An expert testified that such a finding is rare and that the bullets must have come from the same box or from another box that would have been made by the same company on the same day.”); Commonwealth v. Daye, 587 N.E.2d 194, 207 (Mass. 1992) (“Special agent John Riley at the Federal Bureau of Investigation testified that two bullet fragments found in [the victim’s] body came from the same box of ammunition or from different boxes that were manufactured at the same place on or about the same date as a bullet retrieved from [the defendant’s basement.]”); State v. King, 353 N.C. 457, 465, 546 S.E.2d 575, 584 (2001) (“[Kathleen Lundy] opined that, based on her lead analysis, the bullets she examined either came from the same box of cartridges or came from different boxes of the same caliber, manufactured at the same time.”).


276. Earhart, 823 S.W.2d at 614.

277. Davis, 103 F.3d at 666.

278. Id. at 667.

279. People v. Villarta, No. H021354, 2002 Cal. App. Unpub. LEXIS 4776, at *15 (Cal. Ct. App. Jan. 17, 2002). In recent years, the testimony became more limited. A 2002 FBI publication states the conclusion as follows: “Therefore, they likely originated from the same manufacturer’s source (melt) of lead.” Charles A. Peters, The Basis for Compositional Bullet Lead Comparisons, FORENSIC SCI. COMM., July 2002, http://www.fbi.gov/hq/lab/isc/backissu/july2002/peters.htm (emphasis added). Testimony to the same effect has also been proffered. Transcript of Record at 6, Commonwealth v. Wilcox, No. 00CR2727 (Ky. Cir. Ct. Jefferson County Feb. 28, 2002) (trial testimony of Charles Peters, FBI examiner) (“Well, bullets that are analytically indistinguishable likely come from the same molten sources of lead, uh, as opposed to bullets that have different compositions come from different, uh, melts of lead.”).

280. NAT’L RESEARCH COUNCIL, supra note 254, at 7.
capital murder case in which the CBLA evidence apparently played a significant role. The transcript contains the following expert testimony: “We can—from my 21 years experience of doing bullet lead analysis and doing research on boxes of ammunition down though the years I can determine if bullets came from the same box of ammunition . . . .” The amount of bullets that can be produced from a melt, however, “can range from the equivalent of as few as 12,000 to as many as 35 million 40-grain, .22 caliber longrifle bullets.” Earhart was subsequently executed.

In 2003, a federal district court excluded CBLA testimony under the Daubert standard, and in 2005, a New Jersey appellate court reversed a conviction involving CBLA evidence, finding it was “based on erroneous scientific foundations.” The FBI discontinued CBLA testing in 2005, although the Bureau maintained that the test was

281. 823 S.W.2d 607 (Tex. Crim. App. 1991). The court summarized the flawed testimony:

He concluded that the likelihood that two .22 caliber bullets came from the same batch, based on all the .22 bullets made in one year, is approximately .000025 percent, ‘give or take a zero.’ He subsequently acknowledged, however, that the numbers which he used to reach the .000025 percent statistic failed to take into account that there are different types of .22 caliber bullets made each year . . . .

Id. at 614 (emphasis added).

282. See Earhart v. Johnson, 132 F.3d 1062, 1068 (5th Cir. 1998) (denying habeas relief, the court noted: “Given the significant role the bullet evidence played in the prosecution’s case, we shall therefore assume Earhart could have made a sufficient threshold showing that he was entitled to a defense expert under Texas law.”).

283. Transcript of Record at 5248–49, State v. Earhart, No. 4064, Dist. Ct. Lee County, 21st Judicial Dist., Texas (testimony of John Riley). Riley testified:

Well, bullets that are . . . analytically indistinguishable compositions . . . typically are found within the same box of ammunition and that is the case that we have here. Now, bullets that are the same composition can also be found in other boxes of ammunition, but it’s most likely those boxes would have been manufactured at the same place on or about the same date.

Id. at 5258. But see Transcript of Record, supra note 279, at 1–2 (Daubert testimony of Charles Peters). In a Daubert hearing, Peters noted:

We have never testified, to my knowledge, that that bullet came from that box. We’d never say that. All we are testifying is that that bullet, or that victim fragment or something, the bullet, either came from that box or the many boxes that were produced at the same time.

Id. (emphasis added).

284. NAT’L RESEARCH COUNCIL, supra note 254, at 6.


Other courts rejected this type of evidence the following year. Other courts rejected this type of evidence the following year.

4. Fingerprint Unit

a. The Mayfield Affair

Like many other forensic sciences, fingerprint comparisons gained judicial acceptance long before the demanding Daubert standard became operative. Numerous attacks, albeit unsuccessful, have been launched against fingerprint evidence in recent years. In many of these cases, FBI examiners testified that there is a “zero error” rate in fingerprint examinations. Although courts have accepted this astounding statement, the investigation of the terrorist train bombing in Madrid on March 11, 2004, which killed 191 and

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289. See Ragland v. Commonwealth, 191 S.W.3d 569, 580 (Ky. 2006) (noting that “[i]f the FBI Laboratory that produced the CBLA evidence now considers such evidence to be of insufficient reliability to justify continuing to produce it, a finding by the trial court that the evidence is both scientifically reliable and relevant would be clearly erroneous”); Clemons v. State, 896 A.2d 1059, 1070 (Md. 2006) (“CBLA is not admissible under the Frye-Reed standard because it is not generally accepted within the scientific community as valid and reliable.”); id. at 1078 (“Based on the criticism of the processes and assumptions underlying CBLA, we determine that the trial court erred in admitting expert testimony based on CBLA because of the lack of general acceptance of the process in the scientific community.”). Other defendants have not been as fortunate. See Commonwealth v. Fisher, 870 A.2d 864, 871 (Pa. 2005) (“The CBLA evidence, at best, established a possible connection between Appellant and the bullets recovered from the victim’s body.”); see also United States v. Davis, 406 F.3d 505, 509 (8th Cir. 2005) (“Davis’s trial counsel cannot be said to be ineffective for failing to challenge the FBI’s methodology on a basis that was not advanced by the scientific community at the time of trial.”).

290. The first reported case was People v. Jennings, 96 N.E. 1077 (Ill. 1911).

291. See generally Simon A. Cole, *Grandfathering Evidence: Fingerprint Admissibility Rulings from Jennings to Llera Plaza and Back Again*, 41 AM. CRIM. L. REV. 1189 (2004) (discussing the post-Daubert fingerprint challenges); Jennifer Mnookin, *Fingerprint Evidence in an Age of DNA Profiling*, 67 BROOK. L. REV. 13, 43 (2001) (“[W]hat is striking, even astonishing, is that no serious effort to challenge either the weight or admissibility of fingerprint evidence ever emerged—until 1999.”); Sandy L. Zabell, *Fingerprint Evidence*, 13 J.L. & POL’Y 143, 170 (2005) (“The argument that no latent print has ever been found to match the rolled print from a different person is . . . misleading because no systematic search for such pairs on the entire databank of millions of fingerprints has ever been performed.”).

injured 2,000, undermined this claim. The FBI got it wrong, misidentifying Brandon Mayfield, a Portland lawyer, as the source of the crime scene prints.

To its credit, the FBI initiated an investigation using outside experts. The resulting report raised a number of disquieting issues. First, the “dissimilarities [between prints] . . . were easily observed when a detailed analysis of the latent print was conducted.” In short, it was not a difficult fingerprint to interpret. Second, the mistake was attributed in part to “confirmation bias”—a well-established phenomenon that is frequently ignored in forensic work. In other words, once the examiner made up his mind, he saw what he expected to see during reexaminations. Third, a review by another examiner was not conducted blind—i.e., the reviewer knew that a positive identification had already been made—and thus was also subject to the influence of confirmation bias. Fourth, the culture at the laboratory was poorly suited to detecting mistakes. As the report noted, “[t]o disagree was not an expected response.” Fifth, proficiency testing was apparently not sufficiently rigorous. Surprisingly, the report repeatedly alluded to the need to be cautious due to the “inherent pressure of a high-profile case,” leaving one to wonder about the routine case.

The I.G. also reviewed the Mayfield case. Among other things, the I.G. Report concluded that “the misidentification could


295. See infra notes 399–413 and accompanying text (discussing cognitive bias).

296. Id. at 714.

297. Id. at 713.

298. Id. at 715. Indeed, a third expert, from outside the FBI, also confirmed the identification. Id. at 709.

299. See infra notes 399–413 and accompanying text (discussing cognitive bias).

300. Id. at 713.

301. Id. at 716 (“Verifiers should be given challenging exclusions during blind proficiency tests to ensure that they are independently applying ACE-V methodology correctly . . . .”).

302. Id. at 713, 716.


304. The I.G. Report also highlighted the lack of blind verification: “[U]nder procedures in place at the time of the Mayfield identification, the verifier was aware that
have been prevented through a more rigorous application of several principles of latent fingerprint identification.”

In addition, a significant cause of the misidentification was ‘reasoning ‘backward’ from features that were visible in the known prints of Mayfield.”

As the Report explained: “Having found as many as 10 points of unusual similarity, the FBI examiners began to ‘find’ additional features in [the print] that were not really there, but rather were suggested to the examiners by features in the Mayfield prints.”

After noting the controversy among examiners about Level 3 details, the Report concluded that the examiners “apparently misinterpreted distortions in [the print] as real features corresponding to Level 3 details seen in Mayfield’s known fingerprints.” Furthermore, the FBI Lab ignored the possibility that it had erred: “FBI examiners did not attempt to determine the basis of the [Spanish National Police’s] doubts before reiterating that they were ‘absolutely confident’ in the identification on April 15, a full week before the FBI Laboratory met with the SNP.”

an identification had already been made by a prior FBI examiner at the time he was requested to conduct the verification.”

Id. at 10–11.

305. Id. at 6.

306. Id. at 7.

307. Id.

308. Id. at 8 (“Because Level 3 details are so small, the appearance of such details in fingerprints is highly variable, even between different fingerprints made by the same finger. As a result, the reliability of Level 3 details is the subject of some controversy within the latent fingerprint community.”). Level 1 details are general ridge patterns—whorls, loops, and arches. Level 2 features involve ridge characteristics, such as ridge endings, bifurcations, islands, and dots. Level 3 features are “even smaller details of the number and shape of the [sweat] pores on the ridges.” GIANNELLI & IMWINKELRIED, supra note 12, § 16.07[a], at 897.

309. 2006 I.G. REPORT, supra note, 303, at 10. The I.G. made several recommendations that went beyond the Bureau’s internal report:

These include recommendations that the Laboratory [1] develop criteria for the use of Level 3 details to support identifications, [2] clarify the “one discrepancy rule” to assure that it is applied in a manner consistent with the level of certainty claimed for latent fingerprint identifications, [3] require documentation of features observed in the latent fingerprint before the comparison phase to help prevent circular reasoning, [4] adopt alternate procedures for blind verifications, [5] review prior cases in which the identification of a criminal suspect was made on the basis of only one latent fingerprint searched through IAFIS [Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System], and [6] require more meaningful and independent documentation of the causes of errors as part of the Laboratory’s corrective action procedures.

Id. at 14.
b. Other Mistakes

The Mayfield imbroglio was not the only fingerprint mishap recently reported.310 Stephan Cowans was released after serving six years in a Massachusetts prison for the nonfatal shooting of a police officer.311 His was the first conviction overturned on DNA evidence in which fingerprint evidence had been crucial in securing the wrongful conviction.312 Commenting on the case, Professor Mnookin wrote: “[T]he fingerprint community has little motivation to investigate how often they make mistakes. Fingerprint examiners regularly assert in court that the technique is error-free and that fingerprint matches are a sure thing…. [F]ingerprints cannot possibly be as perfect a technique as the experts presently claim.”313

Riky Jackson’s prints were similarly misidentified. He was convicted of murder in 1997 based on bloody fingerprints discovered on a window fan.314 The police expert, Anthony Paparo, matched eleven friction points to Jackson’s prints.315 At trial, Paparo and two other prosecution experts testified to a match. In contrast, two defense experts, both retired FBI examiners, testified that there was no match.316 Nevertheless, Jackson was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment.317 Frustrated, the defense experts filed a complaint with the International Association of Identification concerning the

310. See Simon A. Cole, More Than Zero: Accounting for Error in Latent Fingerprint Identification, 95 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 985, 1001–16 (2005) (collecting twenty-two cases involving mistakes). Other problematic fingerprint cases include Imbler v. Craven, 298 F. Supp. 795 (C.D. Cal. 1969) (expert failed to observe an exculpatory fingerprint in a murder case, in which the death penalty was imposed), aff’d, 424 F.2d 631 (9th Cir. 1970) and State v. Caldwell, 322 N.W.2d 574, 586 (Minn. 1982) (“The fingerprint expert’s testimony was damning—and it was false.”). See also Michael Specter, Do Fingerprints Lie?, NEW YORKER, May 27, 2002, at 96 (discussing a holding by a Philadelphia judge that limited the use of fingerprint evidence due to scientific fallibility); James E. Starrs, A Miscue in Fingerprint Identification: Causes and Concerns, 12 J. POLICE SCI. & ADMIN. 287 (1984) (discussing the misidentification of fingerprints in State v. Caldwell).


312. See Elizabeth F. Loftus & Simon A. Cole, Letter, Contaminated Evidence, 304 SCIENCE 959, 959 (2004) (“[F]orensic scientists remain stubbornly unwilling to confront and control the problem of bias, insisting that it can be overcome through sheer force of will and good intentions.”).


315. Id.


317. Id.
prosecution experts' testimony. This triggered an FBI review, which concluded that the government experts had erred. Jackson was released from prison.

c. Lack of Research

Another distressing revelation surfaced in United States v. Mitchell, the first post-Daubert attack on fingerprint evidence. In March 2000, the National Institute of Justice (“NIJ”), the research arm of the Department of Justice, released a solicitation for fingerprint research. The “Introduction” to the solicitation stated that Daubert “require[d] scientists to address the reliability and validity of the methods used in their analysis. Therefore, the purpose of this solicitation is to . . . provide greater scientific foundation for forensic friction ridge (fingerprint) identification.” After the Mitchell trial, the defense attorney learned that the solicitation had been postponed, arguably so it could not be used in Mitchell to support the defense challenge. The Third Circuit commented on the testimony of Dr. Richard Rau, the NIJ official who coordinated the drafting of the solicitation for the Department of Justice:

We are deeply discomforted by Mitchell’s contention—supported by Dr. Rau’s account of events, though contradicted by other witnesses—that a conspiracy within the Department of Justice intentionally delayed the release of the solicitation until after Mitchell’s jury reached a verdict. Dr. Rau’s story, if true, would be a damning indictment of the ethics of those involved.

318. Id.
320. Id.
321. 365 F.3d 215 (3d Cir. 2004).
323. See Robert Epstein, Fingerprints Meet Daubert: The Myth of Fingerprint “Science” Is Revealed, 75 S. CAL. L. REV. 605, 628 n.122 (2002) (“Internal documents of the NIJ presently on file with the author . . . reveal that the Institute was ready to publish the Solicitation in September of 1999, but that at the FBI’s request, publication was delayed until after Mitchell’s trial.”). Epstein was the defense counsel in Mitchell.
324. Mitchell, 365 F.3d at 255. The court also noted:

[Mitchell’s] most damaging evidence came from Dr. Richard Rau of the NIJ, who coordinated the drafting of the solicitation. Rau testified to conversations at a September 1999 meeting among himself, Donald Kerr (the Assistant Director of the FBI in charge of the FBI crime laboratory), David Boyd (the Deputy Director of the NIJ), and others. Rau claimed that at that meeting Kerr and Boyd agreed to withhold release of the solicitation until the end of Mitchell’s trial. In response
Moreover, a subsequent attempt to establish an empirical basis for fingerprints was thwarted. An editorial in the prestigious scientific journal *Science*, entitled “Forensic Science: Oxymoron?” and written by the editor in chief, discussed the cancellation of a National Academies project designed to examine various forensic science techniques, including fingerprinting, because the Departments of Justice and Defense insisted on a right of review that the Academies had refused to other grant sponsors.\(^{325}\) In sum, not only is there a lack of empirical support for fingerprints,\(^{326}\) but the proponents of the technique are undercutting efforts to establish such a basis.\(^{327}\)

II. REGULATING CRIME LABORATORIES

A. The DNA Model

As the above cases demonstrate, the problems with crime labs are systemic. Regulation is the answer, but there is no need to start from scratch. DNA labs are presently regulated and can serve as a model for all crime laboratory units.\(^{328}\)

In 1988, the FBI established the Technical Working Group on DNA Analysis Methods (“TWGDAM”) to develop quality control...

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\(^{326}\) See Donald Kennedy & Richard A. Merrill, *Assessing Forensic Science, ISSUES SCI. & TECH.*, Fall 2003, at 33, 34. The authors note:

The increased use of DNA analysis, which has undergone extensive validation, has thrown into relief the less firmly credentialed status of other forensic science identification techniques (fingerprints, fiber analysis, hair analysis, ballistics, bite marks, and tool marks). These have not undergone the type of extensive testing and verification that is the hallmark of science elsewhere.

\(^{327}\) Congress appropriated $1,500,000 to the National Academies to create an independent Forensic Science Committee to study forensic science and issue a report. See H.R. REP. NO. 109-272, at 121 (2005) (Conf. Rep.); S. REP. NO. 109-088, at 46 (2005). A committee has recently been appointed.

standards for DNA labs. Moreover, the National Academies issued two reports on the subject, noting the importance of certain practices: “No laboratory should let its results with a new DNA typing method be used in court, unless it has undergone . . . proficiency testing via blind trials.” Perhaps the most important development was the passage of the DNA Identification Act of 1994. It authorized the creation of a national database for the DNA profiles of convicted offenders as well as one for crime scene profiles: the Combined DNA Index System (“CODIS”). Bringing CODIS online was a monumental endeavor, and its successful operation required an effective quality assurance program. To effectuate this goal, the statute created a DNA Advisory Board (“DAB”) to assist in promulgating quality assurance standards. The Act also required proficiency testing for analysts in the FBI as well as those in labs participating in the national database or receiving federal funding. DAB Standard 13 implements these requirements.

329. TWGDAM would later function under the statutorily-created DNA Advisory Board (“DAB”). It was renamed Scientific Working Group on DNA Analysis Methods (“SWGDAM”) in 1999 and replaced the DAB when the latter expired. See infra notes 457–65 and accompanying text (discussing the Board’s composition).

330. NAT’L RESEARCH COUNCIL, DNA TECHNOLOGY IN FORENSIC SCIENCE 55 (1992) [hereinafter NRC I REPORT]; see also NAT’L RESEARCH COUNCIL, THE EVALUATION OF FORENSIC DNA EVIDENCE 73 (1996) [hereinafter NRC II REPORT]. The Council is the Academies’ research arm. The FBI requested and funded both reports.


332. OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GEN., U.S. DEP’T OF JUSTICE, AUDIT REPORT, THE COMBINED DNA INDEX SYSTEM ii (2001) [hereinafter I.G. REPORT] (“[T]he integrity of the data contained in CODIS is extremely important since the DNA matches provided by CODIS are frequently a key piece of evidence linking a suspect to a crime.”).

333. 42 U.S.C.A § 14131(a) (West 2005). The legislation contained a sunset provision: DAB would expire after five years unless extended by the Director of the FBI. The Board was extended through the sixth year to complete tasks and the Scientific Working Group on DNA Analysis Methods (“SWGDAM”) again took over responsibility. NORAH RUDIN & KEITH INMAN, AN INTRODUCTION TO FORENSIC DNA ANALYSIS 176, 180 (2d ed. 2002).

334. 42 U.S.C.A § 14132(b)(2) (West 2005) (requiring external proficiency testing for CODIS participation); id. § 1433(a)(1)(A) (requiring external proficiency testing for FBI examiners). The statute was subsequently amended to require accreditation, which in turn mandates proficiency testing.

335. DNA Advisory Board, Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Testing Laboratories, Standard 13 (1998), available at http://www.fbi.gov/hq/lab/fsc/backissu/july2000/codis2b.htm (“Examiners and other personnel designated by the technical manager or leader who are actively engaged in DNA analysis shall undergo, at regular intervals of not to exceed 180 days, external proficiency testing in accordance with these proficiency standards. Such external testing shall be an open proficiency testing program.”). An open test is a non-blind test. See RUDIN & INMAN, supra note 333, at 180 (“The power of the DAB has been substantial, primarily because any agency requesting
DAB also promulgated standards governing (1) analytical protocols, (2) equipment calibration and maintenance procedures, and (3) administrative and technical reviews of test results. Among other requirements, labs must (a) review their procedures “annually or whenever substantial changes are made to protocol(s),” and (b) compare their results with available National Institute of Standards and Technology (“NIST”) reference materials or “standards traceable to NIST standards.” The DNA Act, however, suffered from one significant drawback: it failed to require the accreditation of DNA labs, an omission rectified by the enactment of the “Justice for All Act of 2004.”

DNA cases, however, make up only a small portion of crime lab work—under four percent—and only a few jurisdictions require accreditation of labs conducting other forensic examinations. Thus, the paradox: the most scientifically sound procedure—DNA analysis—is the most extensively regulated, while many forensic techniques with questionable scientific pedigrees are completely unregulated.

As a discipline, forensic science has been moving toward the accreditation of laboratories, the certification of examiners, and the standardization of procedures. These requirements should be

336. DNA Advisory Board, supra note 335, Standard 9 (analytical procedures), Standard 10 (equipment calibration and maintenance), and Standard 12 (administrative and technical review of all case files).

337. Id., Standard 9.5.

338. In an attempt to address this deficiency, the preface to the DAB Standards recommended that “forensic laboratories performing DNA analysis seek such accreditation with all deliberate speed.” Id., Preface. Some states require accreditation of DNA labs. See, e.g., CAL. PENAL CODE § 297 (West Supp. 2007) (requiring accreditation by ASCLD/LAB or any certifying body approved by ASCLD/LAB); see also supra note 44 (discussing Indiana’s accreditation requirement).


341. See infra notes 353–56 and accompanying text.

342. See Bashinski & Peterson, supra note 340, at 577–78.
mandatory, not permissive. Self-regulation is a lofty ideal but not nearly enough to ensure the integrity of a crime laboratory’s work product.\textsuperscript{343} An effective quality assurance program requires written procedures and a designated professional who is specifically responsible for the implementation of the program, as the DAB standards mandate for DNA analysis.\textsuperscript{344} An enforcement mechanism, such as accreditation, also needs to be in place.

\section*{B. Accreditation of Crime Laboratories}

Citing clinical laboratories, which are regulated under the Clinical Laboratory Improvements Act of 1988,\textsuperscript{345} commentators have argued that crime laboratories should also be regulated.\textsuperscript{346} Currently, ASCLD/LAB operates an accreditation program for public and private crime laboratories.\textsuperscript{347} Requirements include ensuring the integrity of evidence, adhering to valid and generally accepted procedures, employing qualified examiners, and operating quality

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{343} See Stacey, supra note 30, at 717 (“Many agencies are slow to [report erroneous identifications] or refuse to admit that errors have occurred.”).
\item \textsuperscript{344} See generally DNA Advisory Board, supra note 335, Standard 3 (1998) (requiring a quality assurance program).
\item \textsuperscript{345} Pub. L. No. 100-578, 102 Stat. 2903 (codified as amended in 42 U.S.C. § 263a (2004)).
\item \textsuperscript{346} See, e.g., Randolph N. Jonakait, Forensic Science: The Need for Regulation, 4 HARV. J. L. & TECH. 109, 191 (1991) (“Current regulation of clinical labs indicates that a regulatory system can improve crime laboratories.”); Lander, supra note 1, 505 (“At present, forensic science is virtually unregulated—with the paradoxical result that clinical laboratories must meet higher standards to be allowed to diagnose strep throat than forensic labs must meet to put a defendant on death row.”); Jack B. Weinstein, Science, and the Challenges of Expert Testimony in the Courtroom, 77 OR. L. REV. 1005, 1011 (1998) (“Accreditation of laboratories presenting research in courts should provide a minimum standard for gauging the credibility of the research and testimony offered.”); see also Scheck & Neufeld, supra note 16 (“There is a model for improvement. The 1988 Clinical Laboratory Improvement Act provided accountability for laboratories that perform medical tests. A mistake in health tests can have dire results—not only for the patient, but also for the lab, which risks losing accreditation.”).
\item \textsuperscript{347} Established in 1981, ASCLD/LAB accredits labs for a five-year period. See AM. SOC’Y OF CRIME LAB. DIRS., LAB. ACCREDITATION BD., PROFICIENCY REVIEW PROGRAM 2 (2006), http://www.ascld-lab.org/legacy/pdf/alpd1002.pdf. ASCLAD/LAB has been criticized for being too close to the labs it accredits. See Arvizu, supra note 32, at 20–21 (“The ASCLD/LAB is essentially a trade organization of crime laboratory directors. The membership of the ASCLD/LAB delegate assembly consists solely of the laboratory directors of ASCLD accredited laboratories.”); Possley et al., supra note 2 (quoting former Cook County prosecutor and Republican state representative James Durkin) (“ ‘I believe they are more of a fraternal organization than an authoritative scientific body.’ ”). This criticism is overblown. ASCLD/LAB has been one of the most effective reform mechanisms in forensic science over the last decade by operating a voluntary accreditation program, by investigating the Zain fiasco in West Virginia, and by issuing a critical report in the Earl Washington case in Virginia. See supra notes 54 (Zain inquiry) and 217 (Washington case).
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assurance programs—i.e., proficiency testing, technical reviews, audits, and corrective action procedures. Over 240 laboratories have been accredited, and judicial opinions are approvingly citing these accreditation standards in their admissibility decisions. Only ten percent of the laboratories that apply satisfy these standards on the first inspection. In addition, Forensic Quality Services accredits laboratories, including those conducting DNA profiling, according to standards defined by the International Organization for Standardization (“ISO”). The National Association of Medical Examiners (“NAME”) runs an accreditation program for Coroners and Medical Examiner Offices, and the American Board of Forensic Toxicology accredits toxicology laboratories.

These programs are all voluntary, however, and many laboratories remain unaccredited. Currently, only New York, Oklahoma, and Texas require all their crime labs to be accredited; the California statute covers only DNA labs. In 2002, the President of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences observed:

Unfortunately, while the ASCLD/LAB program has been successful in accrediting over 200 laboratories, a large number

349. See, e.g., Smith v. State, 702 N.E.2d 668, 673 (Ind. 1998) (“[T]he [DNA] lab was accredited by the American Society of Crime Lab Directors in 1990. Furthermore, the lab runs its tests under controlled conditions, follows specific protocols, and conducts quality testing on the kits and the analysts.”).
354. OKLA. STAT. ANN. tit. 74, § 150.37 (West Supp. 2007) (generally requiring accreditation by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board or the American Board of Forensic Toxicology).
355. TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN. art. 38.35 (Vernon Supp. 2006–2007) (requiring accreditation by the Department of Public Safety).
356. CAL. PENAL CODE § 297 (West Supp. 2007) (requiring accreditation by ASCLD/LAB or any certifying body approved by ASCLD/LAB).
of forensic laboratories in the U.S. remain unaccredited by any agency. . . . The same dichotomy exists in certification programs for the practicing forensic scientist, even though forensic certification boards for all the major disciplines have been in existence for over a decade. Why have forensic laboratories and individuals been so reluctant to become accredited or certified?357

As the National Academies 1992 DNA Report commented, “[v]oluntary accreditation programs are not enough. Because professional organizations, such as ASCLD-LAB, lack regulatory authority, forensic laboratories could avoid accreditation and still offer DNA typing evidence in criminal proceedings.”358 As noted above, the Justice for All Act of 2004 now mandates accreditation for DNA labs participating in the national database.359 An accreditation requirement should apply to the entire crime laboratory, not only to DNA units.

C. Quality Assurance

The key to laboratory performance is quality assurance. Yet, “[s]omewhat surprisingly, crime labs are not generally subject to mandatory quality-assurance standards imposed by federal or state law.”360 Quality assurance consists of several activities: proficiency testing, laboratory audits, technical reviews, and corrective action procedures.

1. Proficiency Testing

Proficiency testing in the forensic sciences dates back thirty years. In 1978, the Laboratory Proficiency Testing Program, sponsored by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (“LEAA”), reported the results of the first proficiency tests.361 Over 200 crime laboratories participated in this program, which involved such common forensic examinations as firearms, blood, drug, and trace evidence analyses.362 Seventy-one percent of the crime laboratories

358. NRC I REPORT, supra note 330, at 106.
359. See supra note 339.
360. Bales, supra note 236, at 54; see also Joseph L. Peterson, The Crime Lab, in THINKING ABOUT POLICE 184, 196 (Carl B. Klockars ed., 1983) (“Crime laboratories are unique among publicly supported scientific operations in that few participate in external quality assurance programs.”).
362. Id. at 251.
laboratories tested provided unacceptable results in a blood test, 51.4% made errors in matching paint samples, 35.5% erred in a soil examination, and 28.2% made mistakes in firearms identifications.\textsuperscript{363} The report concluded: “A wide range of proficiency levels among the nation’s laboratories exists, with several evidence types posing serious difficulties for the laboratories . . . .”\textsuperscript{364} Thus, although some laboratories performed exceptionally well, the performances of others were disturbing: “65 percent of the laboratories had 80 percent or more of their results fall into the acceptable category. At the other end of the spectrum, 3 percent of laboratories had less than 50 percent of their responses considered acceptable.”\textsuperscript{365} Similarly, certain types of examinations caused few problems, whereas others produced very high rates of “unacceptable proficiency.”\textsuperscript{366} Unacceptable proficiency was most often attributed to (1) misinterpretation of test results due to carelessness or inexperience, (2) failure to employ adequate or appropriate methodology, (3) mislabeling or contamination of primary standards, and (4) inadequate databases or standard spectra.\textsuperscript{367}

Given these results, one would have expected the implementation of fairly extensive reforms. However, “[t]he startling conclusions from that research led to some efforts to improve conditions in the laboratories, but these encountered institutional inertia against reform.”\textsuperscript{368} In sum, widespread reform failed to materialize.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[363] Id. at 251 tbl.89. One blood test had only 3.8% unacceptable results. \textit{Id.}
\item[364] Id. at 3.
\item[365] Peterson, \textit{supra} note 360, at 195.
\item[366] \textit{See id.} at 188–91. The number of laboratories responding ranged from a low of 65 to a high of 205. \textit{Id.} at 194. An unacceptable response did not necessarily mean an incorrect one. \textit{Id.} at 191. Other reasons for an unacceptable designation included a correct response for the wrong reason, an unsupported, inclusive response, multiple responses, and incomplete responses. \textit{Id.}
\item[367] \textit{Peterson ET AL., supra} note 361, at 258. Professor Peterson, one of the report’s authors, later commented: “In spite of being a firm advocate of forensic science, I must acknowledge that a disturbingly high percentage of laboratories are not performing routine tests competently, as shown by our proficiency testing.” \textit{Symposium on Science and the Rules of Legal Procedure}, 101 F.R.D. 599, 645 (1983).
\item[368] \textit{Symposium, supra} note 367, at 645 (remarks of Professor Joseph L. Peterson). For a more detailed discussion of proficiency testing, see Michael J. Saks, \textit{Prevalence and Impact of Ethical Problems in Forensic Science}, 34 J. FORENSIC SCI. 772, 775–78 (1989) (reviewing proficiency testing results and stating, “[p]erhaps the major lessons to be drawn from this are that errors are indeed made and that there is a wide range of interlaboratory variation”).
\end{footnotes}
The Forensic Science Foundation was the next organization to conduct proficiency testing—from 1978 to 1991.\(^\text{369}\) The results of these tests confirmed the findings of the LEAA study—that forensic labs show unacceptably high error rates in certain fields. Several types of examinations caused concern: fiber, paint, glass, and body fluid comparisons resulted in incorrect results in more than ten percent of the cases.\(^\text{370}\) A review of five handwriting comparison proficiency tests in 1987 showed that, at best, “[d]ocument examiners were correct 57% of the time and incorrect 43% of the time.”\(^\text{371}\) This program has continued: “By 2000, more than 400 laboratories worldwide were participating in the program. Although the majority of laboratories have been found to produce correct results, the program has revealed errors stemming from inadequate standard reference materials, inexperienced examiners, inappropriate tests, or misinterpretation of otherwise good data.”\(^\text{372}\)

The DNA Identification Act of 1994 required proficiency testing for DNA examiners in the FBI Laboratory and for those in laboratories participating in the national DNA database or receiving federal funding.\(^\text{373}\) In addition, a laboratory voluntarily accredited by ASCLD/LAB must engage in a documented program of proficiency testing that measures the capability of its examiners and the reliability


370. Peterson & Markham, Crime Labs II, supra note 369, at 1028.


373. 42 U.S.C.A § 14132(b)(2) (West 2005) (mandating external proficiency testing for CODIS participation); id. § 14133(a)(1)(A) (mandating the same for FBI DNA analysts) (2004). As noted earlier, DAB Standard 13 implements this requirement. See supra note 335 and accompanying text. The 1996 National Academies DNA report also recommended proficiency testing. NRC II REPORT, supra note 330, at 88 (“Recommendation 3.2: Laboratories should participate regularly in proficiency tests, and the results should be available for court proceedings.”).
of its analytical results. All forensic disciplines should be legislatively obliged to participate in meaningful proficiency testing.

There are several types of proficiency testing: internal or external, and blind or non-blind. External blind testing is by far the best. The DNA Act authorized a study of the feasibility of blind proficiency testing; that study raised questions about the cost and practicability of this type of examination, as well as its effectiveness when compared to other methods of quality assurance, such as accreditation and more stringent external case audits.

In addition, the rigor of some voluntary proficiency tests is suspect. For example, a fingerprint examiner from New Scotland Yard testified in one case that the FBI proficiency tests were deficient: “It’s not testing their ability. It doesn’t test their expertise. I mean I’ve set these tests to trainees and advanced technicians. And

374. Melson, supra note 350, at 8–9. The proficiency tests must be conducted by external providers, where available. Id. at 9. Laboratories are also encouraged to conduct proficiency testing using blind tests prepared internally or externally and submitted as normal casework evidence or by re-examination by another examiner on completed casework. Id. at 9–10.

375. See Bashinski & Peterson, supra note 340, at 579 (“Laboratory proficiency cannot be assumed. It must be positively demonstrated.”); see also THIRD HOUSTON REPORT, supra note 166, at 37–38 (reporting that the examiner “failed her competency test after, among other things, she indicated the presence of PCP in both blood samples where it was not present, did not detect the morphine presence in the first blood sample, and did not detect either substances in the second blood sample”).


1. The accreditation system and associated quality assurance guidelines of the DNA Advisory Board need to be given the opportunity to take hold.
2. It is recommended that the DNA Advisory Board generate guidelines for more stringent external case audits for use by ASCLD-LAB, or another relevant accrediting body, as part of the accreditation process. The external case audits should be conducted regularly and serve as a measure of how well accreditation and its associated requirements are working in a quality assurance context.
3. In the extreme, blind proficiency testing is possible, but fraught with problems (including costs), and it is recommended that a blind proficiency testing program be deferred for now until it is more clear how well implementation of the first two recommendations are serving the same purposes as blind proficiency testing.

Id. at 30.

377. See, e.g., United States v. Yee, 134 F.R.D. 161, 208 (N.D. Ohio 1991) (“[T]he F.B.I. program of [DNA] proficiency testing has serious deficiencies, even without consideration of the troubling hint in the record of an impulse at one point to destroy some of the small amount of test data that had been accumulated earlier.”), aff’d sub nom. United States v. Bonds, 12 F.3d 540 (6th Cir. 1993).
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If I gave my experts these tests, they’d fall about laughing.”378 The district court agreed, noting that “the FBI examiners got very high proficiency grades, but the tests they took did not. . . . [O]n the present record I conclude that the proficiency tests are less demanding than they should be.”379 The FBI’s own report acknowledged this shortcoming.380 Similarly, in a trial involving handwriting comparisons, the court wrote:

There were aspects of Mr. Cawley’s testimony that undermined his credibility. Mr. Cawley testified that he achieved a 100% passage rate on the proficiency tests that he took and that all of his peers always passed their proficiency tests. Mr. Cawley said that his peers always agreed with each others’ results and always got it right. Peer review in such a “Lake Woebegone” environment is not meaningful.381

If proficiency programs are not rigorous, they provide only an illusion of reliability. Indeed, by bestowing an undeserved imprimatur, they are affirmatively misleading.

2. Laboratory Audits

Inspections or audits are another significant quality assurance mechanism. They “may range from internal peer review (review of one laboratory section by another or review of the laboratory unit by the audit unit of the department) to a full-scale inspection by a team of external scientists such as the ASCLD/LAB accreditation inspectors.”382

379. Id. at 565; see also United States v. Crisp, 324 F.3d 261, 274 (4th Cir. 2003) (Michael, J., dissenting) (“Proficiency testing is typically based on a study of prints that are far superior to those usually retrieved from a crime scene.”); Mnookin, supra note 313 (“There are no systematic proficiency tests to evaluate examiners’ skill. Those tests that exist are not routinely used and are substandard.”).
380. See supra note 301 and accompanying text.
381. United States v. Lewis, 220 F. Supp. 2d 548, 554 (S.D.W. Va. 2002); see also Crisp, 324 F.3d at 279 (Michael, J., dissenting) (“[A]lthough the government’s expert here testified to his success on proficiency tests, the government provides no reason for us to believe that these tests are realistic assessments of an examiner’s ability . . . . See J.A. 342 (testimony of the government’s handwriting expert that he has always achieved a perfect score on proficiency tests) . . . .”).
382. Bashinski & Peterson, supra note 340, at 587; see also Arvizu, supra note 32, at 25 (“O]nly an on-site laboratory audit can provide a complete picture of a laboratory. It is one thing to have acceptable written procedures for a laboratory’s activities. It is quite another to comply with the procedures on a daily basis.”).
DAB standards mandate annual internal audits and biannual external audits for DNA labs. 383 Yet, a 2001 I.G. Report found that the audit procedures for CODIS were defective. A review of eight state and local laboratories “disclosed that four laboratories did not fully comply with the FBI’s quality assurance standards and national index requirements.” 384 In addition, labs had entered unallowable or incomplete profiles into CODIS. The problem stemmed from the fact that the audit did not review the actual DNA profiles, and labs could certify their own compliance instead of reporting audit results directly to the FBI. Here, again, the experience with regulating DNA analysis provides a template. The new federal legislation dictates that “external audits, not less than once every 2 years . . . [must] demonstrate compliance with standards established by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.” 385

As the Houston fiasco demonstrated, internal audits are often not rigorous. That lab passed its internal audits with flying colors, only to be shut down following an external audit. 386

3. Corrective Action Procedures

DAB standards also require corrective action procedures “whenever proficiency-testing discrepancies and/or casework errors are detected.” 387 The value of such a program is illustrated by a series of news articles on the Washington state DNA program. Over a four-year period, the lab documented “contamination or errors in twenty-three of more than 5,000 DNA cases.” 388 Because PCR-DNA is extremely sensitive, cross-contamination is always a concern. 389 The

383. DNA Advisory Board, supra note 335, Standard 15.1 ("The laboratory shall conduct audits annually in accordance with the standards outlined herein."); id. Standard 15.2 ("Once every two years, a second agency shall participate in the annual audit.").
384. 2001 I.G. REPORT, supra note 332, at iii.
386. See supra notes 199–200 and accompanying text.
387. DNA Advisory Board, supra note 335, Standard 14.1.
388. See Barry K. Logan, Crime Lab Committed to Improvements, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER, July 30, 2004, at B7. Logan was the lab director.
389. See John E. Smialek et al., The Microscopic Slide: A Potential DNA Reservoir, FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULL., Nov. 2000, at 18, 19. Smialek notes:

Contamination occurs when the evidence comes in contact with another individual's body fluids through actions, such as sneezing, coughing, or touching... But, the PCR process cannot distinguish between DNA from a suspect and another source. Therefore, any substantial contamination to the DNA material will result in a confusing result.

Id.
reported deficiencies are troublesome, but the lack of any corrective action file would be far more worrisome. In other words, this information may show that the system is working—mistakes are being reported, the first step toward remediation.

D. Standardization of Technical Procedures

Valid procedures, of course, are critical to ensure the accuracy of test results. The 1997 I.G. Report recommended the development of written protocols for scientific procedures. According to the first National Academies Report, “[e]ach DNA typing procedure must be completely described in a detailed, written laboratory protocol.” Current DAB standards require DNA analytical protocols, equipment calibration and maintenance procedures, and administrative and technical reviews of test results. They also prescribe developmental and internal validation. Further, all ASCLD/LAB-accredited laboratories must maintain written copies of appropriate technical procedures. These protocols include descriptions of sample preparation methods, controls, standards, and calibration procedures, as well as a discussion of precautions, sources of possible error, and literature references.

390. See Teichroeb, Rare Look, supra note 23 (reporting that examiners “tainted tests with their own DNA in eight of the 23 cases” and that cross-contamination between cases occurred in three incidents and other mistakes included “throwing out evidence swabs to misreading results, fingering the wrong rape suspect”; the source of contamination in five other tests was unknown).

391. See 1997 I.G. REPORT, supra note 27, Executive Summary, at pt. VII; see also supra note 242 and accompanying text.

392. NRC I REPORT, supra note 330, at 8. The second report stated that “[l]aboratories should adhere to high quality standards . . . .” NRC II REPORT, supra note 330, at 88 (citing TWGDAM and DAB standards as examples in Recommendation 3.1).

393. DNA Advisory Board, supra note 335, Standards 9, 10 & 12.

394. Id. Standard 2(ff): (“Validation is a process by which a procedure is evaluated to determine its efficacy and reliability . . . . Developmental validation is the acquisition of test data and the determination of conditions and limitations of a new or novel DNA methodology . . . ; (2) Internal validation is the accumulation of test data within the laboratory to demonstrate that established methods and procedures perform as expected in the laboratory.”). SWGDAM promulgated revised validation guidelines in 2003. See Revised Validation Guidelines, FORENSIC SCI. COMM., July 2004, http://www.fbi.gov/hq/lab/fsc/back issu/july2004/standards/2004_03_standards02.htm.

395. Melson, supra note 350, at 8. During accreditation audits, a representative number of laboratory reports are subjected to review to ensure that the conclusions of examiners are reasonable and within the constraints of scientific knowledge. Id. at 9. This technical review assures that laboratory protocols are being utilized. Id. at 8. All new technical procedures must be scientifically validated before being used in casework. Id. See generally AM. SOC’Y OF CRIME LAB. DIRS., supra note 347 (explaining accreditation program).
Based on the DNA experience with TWGDAM, established by the FBI in 1988, comparable groups were set up in fingerprints, controlled substances, trace evidence or materials analysis, questioned documents, fire and explosives, imaging technology, digital evidence, and firearms examination.\textsuperscript{396} Moreover, the American Society for Testing and Materials (“ASTM”) has promulgated standards in some forensic areas.\textsuperscript{397}

In \textit{Daubert}, the Supreme Court cited the “existence and maintenance of standards controlling the technique’s operation” as a relevant factor in assessing the reliability of expert testimony.\textsuperscript{398} The adoption and public promulgation of written laboratory protocols would seem to be required by this factor. In fact, any laboratory without such protocols cannot be called a “scientific” laboratory.

\section*{E. Problem Issues}

Several vexing issues concerning lab procedures surface on a recurring basis. This section addresses four of those issues.

\subsection*{1. Cognitive Bias}

Commentators have identified both motivational and cognitive bias as a concern in the forensic setting.\textsuperscript{399} As one commentator noted: “To the extent that we are aware of our vulnerability to bias, we may be able to control it. In fact, a feature of good scientific practice is the institution of processes—such as blind testing, the use of precise measurements, standardized procedures, statistical analysis—that control for bias.”\textsuperscript{400} Similarly, the 1996 National Academies DNA Report notes, “[l]aboratory procedures should be

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item 396. See Bashinski & Peterson, supra note 340, at 580.
\item 399. See infra notes 449–53 and accompanying text (discussing motivational bias); see also Elizabeth F. Loftus & Simon A. Cole, Letter, \textit{Contaminated Evidence}, 304 SCIENCE 959, 959 (2004) (“[F]orensic scientists remain stubbornly unwilling to confront and control the problem of bias, insisting that it can be overcome through sheer force of will and good intentions.”).
\item 400. MIKE REDMAYNE, EXPERT EVIDENCE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE 16 (2001).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
designed with safeguards to detect bias and to identify cases of true ambiguity. Potential ambiguities should be documented.\footnote{401}

External information provided to lab analysts will often taint their conclusions. For example, “[Professor] Peter DeForest has described investigators who responded to inconclusive results by saying to forensic examiners: ‘Would it help if I told you we know he’s the guy who did it?’\footnote{402} Joyce Gilchrist often received detectives’ views on suspects before she conducted her examinations.\footnote{403} Confirmation bias also arose in the misidentification of fingerprints of Brian Mayfield in the Madrid train bombing investigation\footnote{404} and other FBI investigations.\footnote{405}

As a result of the Mayfield case, several British researchers devised an experiment to test whether external influences can affect the identification process.\footnote{406} In particular, they were concerned with confirmation bias similar to that which occurred in the Mayfield misidentification. Fingerprint examiners who were unfamiliar with the Mayfield prints were asked by colleagues to compare a crime scene and suspect print: “They were told that the pair of prints was the one that was erroneously matched by the FBI as the Madrid bomber, thus creating an extraneous context that the prints were a non-match.”\footnote{407} The participants were then instructed to ignore this information.\footnote{408} The prints, in fact, were from cases that each of the participants had previously matched.\footnote{409} Of the five examiners, only

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\item \textsuperscript{401} NRC II REPORT, supra note 330, at 85. The Report adds: “Bias in forensic science usually leads to sins of omission rather than commission. Possibly exculpating evidence might be ignored or rejected.” Id. at 84–85.
\item \textsuperscript{402} D. Michael Risinger et al., The Daubert/Kumho Implications of Observer Effects in Forensic Science: Hidden Problems of Expectation and Suggestion, 90 CAL. L. REV. 1, 39 (2002) (quoting Peter DeForest, Address at 2d International Conference on Forensic Document Examination (June 14–18, 1999) (notes of Michael Saks, who was present)).
\item \textsuperscript{403} See FUHRMAN, supra note 68, at 91 (“When Cook and other homicide detectives gave Gilchrist hair samples from a suspect, they would often let her know that this was the person they wanted to arrest.”).
\item \textsuperscript{404} See supra notes 297–99 and accompanying text.
\item \textsuperscript{405} See Bales, supra note 236, at 52 (“[The 1997 I.G. Report] concluded that an examiner from the lab’s explosives unit had erred by purporting to identify the particular explosives used in the [1993] World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings. The error stemmed from the examiner’s reliance on information that was tied to suspects but not relevant to his scientific analysis.”).
\item \textsuperscript{406} Itiel E. Dror et el., Contextual Information Renders Experts Vulnerable to Making Erroneous Identifications, 156 FORENSIC SCI. INT’L 74, 75–76 (2006) (explaining the experiment’s methodology).
\item \textsuperscript{407} Id. at 76.
\item \textsuperscript{408} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{409} Id. at 75.
\end{itemize}
one still judged the print to be a match. The other four changed their opinions; three directly contradicted their prior identifications, and the fourth concluded that there was insufficient data to reach a definite conclusion. “This is striking given that all five experts had seen the identical fingerprints previously and all had decided that the prints were a sound and definite match.”

In sum, information from an investigation should not be given to the analyst interpreting the results—i.e., the examiner should generally be “blind” to the case’s circumstances and other evidence.

2. Contemporaneous Recordation

The lack of bench notes is often cited in the lab scandals. The West Virginia, Chicago, Houston, and FBI explosive unit investigations all found inadequate documentation in forensic case files. Moreover, in one Supreme Court case, Delaware v.
Fensterer, an FBI analyst testified that he could not remember which of three methods he had used to determine that hair found at a murder scene had been forcibly removed. He apparently neglected to record this critical information.

DAB Standards require laboratories to adopt and follow written procedures for taking and maintaining case notes to support the conclusions drawn in laboratory reports: in particular, a case record containing all documentation generated by examiners relating to case analysis is standard practice. Unfortunately, the standards do not specify that the notes be recorded contemporaneously with the examination, a deficiency noted in the 2004 I.G. Report.

3. Laboratory Reports

Most pretrial discovery statutes provide for the disclosure of scientific reports. For example, Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 16 makes the “results or reports of any physical or mental examination and of any scientific test or experiment” discoverable. Yet, these rules contain no requirement regarding the content of a laboratory report. The Journal of Forensic Sciences, the official publication of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, published a symposium on the ethical responsibilities of forensic scientists in 1989. One article discussed a number of laboratory

420. Id. at 17. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court declined to find a confrontation violation in this situation. Id. at 20. On remand, however, the Delaware Supreme Court held the opinion inadmissible, but on evidentiary, rather than constitutional, grounds. Fensterer v. State, 509 A.2d 1106, 1109 (Del. 1986). According to the court: “While a witness’s mere lack of memory as to a particular fact may go only to the weight of that evidence, an expert witness’s inability to establish a sufficient basis for his opinion clearly renders the opinion inadmissible under D.R.E. 705.” Id. at 1109–10.
421. DNA Advisory Board, supra note 335, Standard 11.1.
422. 2004 I.G. REPORT, supra note 28, at 107. The report commented: “[C]ontemporaneous documentation is important to ensure that the case file accurately reflects the work performed on each evidence item that is tested. . . . [S]taff members may be unduly influenced by protocol requirements when relying on memory, and document what they know should have occurred when their recollection is vague.” Id.
425. As a result, the reports are often cryptic or confusing. See Bales, supra note 236, at 56 (“Reports of forensic examinations are sometimes terse to the point of being indecipherable.”); FINAL HOUSTON REPORT, supra note 170, at 21 (“The awkwardly-stated conclusions appearing in many of the Crime Lab’s DNA reports are difficult to understand.”).
reporting practices, including (1) “preparation of reports containing minimal information in order not to give the ‘other side’ ammunition for cross-examination,” (2) “reporting of findings without an interpretation on the assumption that if an interpretation is required it can be provided from the witness box,” and (3) “[o]mitting some significant point from a report to trap an unsuspecting cross-examiner.” Fred Zain, Joyce Gilchrist, and Pam Fish, among others, omitted critical information from their reports. These practices could be curbed, if not eliminated, by requiring comprehensive laboratory reports.

Comprehensive lab reports are simply good science. Both DAB and ASCLD/LAB have standards governing laboratory reports. By ensuring that the examiner has followed the prescribed procedure and by permitting external review, lab reports can function as a quality control mechanism. In particular, the report should contain an express statement of the limitations of the technique.


428. See supra note 55 and accompanying text.

429. See supra notes 70–117 and accompanying text.

430. See supra notes 150–59 and accompanying text.

431. One scientist has observed that a crime lab report at a minimum should include:

(a) a description of the analytical techniques used in the test requested by the government or other party, (b) the quantitative or qualitative results with any appropriate qualifications concerning the degree of certainty surrounding them, and (c) an explanation of any necessary presumptions or inferences that were needed to reach the conclusions.

Professor Anna Harrison, Mount Holyoke College, Symposium on Science, supra note 367, at 632.

432. See DNA Advisory Board, supra note 335, Standard 11.1.2 (requiring reports to include (1) a case identifier, (2) a “description of evidence examined,” (3) “[a] description of the methodology,” (4) the locus tested, (5) the “[r]esults and/or conclusions,” (6) “[a]n interpretative statement (either quantitative or qualitative),” (7) the “[d]ate issued,” (8) the “[d]isposition of evidence,” and (9) “[a] signature and title, or equivalent identification, of the person(s) accepting responsibility of the content of the report”).

433. See ASCLD Guidelines for Forensic Laboratory Management Practices, 14 CRIME LABORATORY DIG. 39, 43 (1987) (“The documentation should be such that a knowledgeable analyst or supervisor, in the absence of the primary analyst, would be able to evaluate and interpret the data.” Competitive laboratory reports must include (1) an “accurate summary of significant material contained in the case notes,” (2) “interpretive information as well as examination results wherever possible,” and (3) identification of the analyst(s) and, if appropriate, the testing methodology.”).

434. See NAT'L RESEARCH COUNCIL, supra note 254, at 110 (“The conclusions in laboratory reports should be expanded to include the limitations of compositional analysis of bullet lead evidence. Moreover, a section of the laboratory report translating the technical conclusions into language that a jury could understand would greatly facilitate the proper use of this evidence in the criminal justice system.”).
Comprehensive reports also promote good legal policy.\textsuperscript{435} Because they are discoverable, they assist attorneys in preparing for trial and in rendering effective representation. Further, determining whether defense counsel should seek the appointment of a defense expert often requires a preliminary assessment by an expert. An expert might be willing to review a report but not want to become further involved in a case without compensation. Unless the report is comprehensive, such a review may be worthless.

4. Testifying Beyond the Report

Experts should generally not testify beyond the scope of the report without issuing a supplemental report. \textit{Troedel v. Wainwright},\textsuperscript{436} a capital murder case, illustrates the problem. In that case, a report of a gunshot residue test based on neutron activation analysis concluded that swabs “from the hands of Troedel and Hawkins contained antimony and barium [primer residues] in amounts typically found on the hands of a person who has discharged a firearm or has had his hands in close proximity to a discharging firearm.”\textsuperscript{437} An FBI expert testified in accordance with this report at Hawkins’ trial but enhanced his testimony at Troedel’s trial, when he testified that “Troedel had fired the murder weapon.”\textsuperscript{438} In contrast, during federal habeas proceedings, the same expert testified in a deposition that “he could not, from the results of his tests, determine or say to a scientific certainty who had fired the murder weapon” and that “the differences in the amount of barium and antimony on the hands of Troedel and Hawkins were basically insignificant.”\textsuperscript{439} The district court found the trial testimony, “at the very least,” misleading.\textsuperscript{440} In granting habeas relief, the court wrote:

\begin{quote}
[T]he Court concludes that the opinion Troedel had fired the weapon was known by the prosecution not to be based on the results of the neutron activation analysis tests, or on any scientific certainty or even probability. Thus, the subject
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{435} The Canadian investigation into the wrongful conviction of Guy Paul Morin made the following recommendation: “The Centre of Forensic Science should establish a written policy on the form and content of reports issued by its analysts. . . . In addition to other essential components, these reports must contain the conclusions drawn from the forensic testing and the limitations to be placed upon those conclusions.” 1 KAUFMAN, \textit{supra} note 138, Recommendation 7, at 331.
\textsuperscript{436} 667 F. Supp. 1456 (S.D. Fla. 1986), aff’d, 828 F.2d 670 (11th Cir. 1987).
\textsuperscript{437} \textit{Id.} at 1458.
\textsuperscript{438} \textit{Id.}
\textsuperscript{439} \textit{Id.} at 1459.
\textsuperscript{440} \textit{Id.}
testimony was not only misleading, but also was used by the State knowing it to be misleading.441

In addition to other functions, comprehensive reports afford substantial protection to experts from overreaching by attorneys. In Troedel, the expert claimed that the prosecutor had “pushed” him to enhance his testimony, a claim the prosecutor substantiated.442 The issue also surfaced in Joyce Gilchrist’s cases.443 Experts are often pressured by attorneys to “push the envelope”—not a surprising occurrence in an adversarial system.444 ABA Criminal Justice Standards state that a

prosecutor who engages an expert for an opinion should respect the independence of the expert and should not seek to dictate the formation of the expert’s opinion on the subject. . . . [T]he prosecutor should explain to the expert his or her role in the trial as an impartial expert . . . .445

The commentary to this standard elaborates:

Statements made by physicians, psychiatrists, and other experts about their experiences as witnesses in criminal cases indicate the need for circumspection on the part of prosecutors who engage experts. Nothing should be done by a prosecutor to cast

441. Id. at 1459–60.
442. Id. at 1459 (“[A]s Mr. Riley [the expert] candidly admitted in his deposition, he was ‘pushed’ further in his analysis at Troedel’s trial than at Hawkins’ trial. . . . [At the] evidentiary hearing held before this Court, one of the prosecutors testified that, at Troedel’s trial, after Mr. Riley had rendered his opinion which was contained in his written report, the prosecutor pushed to ‘see if more could have been gotten out of this witness.’ ”).
443. See McCarty v. State, 765 P.2d 1215, 1219 (Okla. Crim. App. 1988) (“[W]e are greatly disturbed by the implications that the Oklahoma County District Attorney’s Office may have placed undue pressure upon Ms. Gilchrist to give a so-called expert opinion, which was beyond scientific capabilities.”); id. at 1219 (quoting a prepared statement from the Board of Directors of the Southwestern Association of Forensic Scientists, Inc., that “in our system of jurisprudence, undue pressure can be placed upon the forensic scientist to offer personal opinions beyond the scope of scientific capabilities’ ”) (citation omitted); see also Bank of Nova Scotia v. United States, 487 U.S. 250, 258 (1988) (“District Court further concluded that one of the prosecutors improperly argued with an expert witness during a recess of the grand jury after the witness gave testimony adverse to the Government.”).
444. See SHECK ET AL., supra note 5, at 31 (quoting Dr. Robert Shaler, former head of N.Y.C. Medical Examiner’s DNA unit) (“Most attorneys like to let you know what their opinions of the facts of the case are—irrespective of the scientific conclusions.”).
F. Certification of Examiners

A number of organizations offer examiner certification programs. Some certifying organizations, however, appear to lack stringent requirements. Instead, they issue what are reported to be “checkbook credentials.” Rigorous certification standards should be instituted for examiners in order to ensure competence. Demanding written examinations, proficiency testing, continuing education, recertification procedures, an ethical code, and effective disciplinary procedures should form the basis of such a program.

G. Forensic Science Commissions

Commentators have argued for the establishment of crime laboratories that are independent of the police in order to minimize police pressure that may bias lab results. In 2002, the Illinois

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446. Id. at 59.

447. For example, the American Board of Criminalistics has had such a program since 1993. It is a two-step process. The first tier requires an examination on general knowledge, and the second involves specialty areas, which include molecular biology, drug analysis, fire debris, and trace evidence. Bashinski & Peterson, supra note 340, at 577. To maintain certification, ongoing proficiency testing is required. Id. The International Association of Identification established a program for latent print examiners in 1977. Id. The Association of Firearms and Tool Mark Examiners established one in 2001. Id. The American Academy of Forensic Sciences has set up a number of national boards in the field of pathology, toxicology, anthropology, odontology, and questioned documents. See id.; RUDIN & INMAN, supra note 333, at 175. Of course, these programs are valuable only to the extent they apply exacting standards.


449. See, e.g., Giannelli, supra note 49, at 469–73; Andre A. Moenssens, Novel Scientific Evidence in Criminal Cases: Some Words of Caution, 84 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 1, 5 (1993) (“[C]rime labs may be so imbued with a pro-police bias that they are willing to circumvent true scientific investigation methods for the sake of ‘making their point.’”); Symposium on Science, supra note 367, at 642 (statement of Joseph L. Peterson) (“[T]he police agency controls the formal and informal system of rewards and sanctions for the laboratory examiners. Many of these laboratories make their services available only to law enforcement agencies. All of these factors raise a legitimate issue regarding the objectivity of laboratory personnel.”); James E. Starrs, The Seamy Side of Forensic Science: The Mephitic Stain of Fred Salem Zain, SCI. SLEUTHING REV., Winter 1993, at 1, 8 (“The inbred bias of crime laboratories affiliated with law enforcement agencies must be breached.”); see also Regina v. Ward, 96 Crim. App. 1, 51 (A.C. 1993) (appeal taken from England) (U.K.) (“Forensic scientists may become partisan. The very fact that the police seek their assistance may create a relationship between the police and the forensic scientists. . . . Forensic scientists employed by the government may come to see their function as helping the police. They may lose their objectivity.”); Ellis, supra note 2
Governor’s Commission on Capital Punishment proposed the creation of an independent state laboratory as a way to provide access to forensic services. The problem of improper police and/or prosecutorial influence on lab results weaves throughout the reported scandals. Independent crime labs are a solution, but whether they are politically viable seems doubtful, and they would present some disadvantages. A forensic commission with outside membership, on the other hand, could provide some insulation from impermissible external pressure.

A New York statute established a Commission on Forensic Science, which is authorized to (1) develop minimum standards and a program of accreditation for all state laboratories, (2) establish minimum qualifications for laboratory directors and other personnel, and (3) approve forensic laboratories for the performance of specific

increasing the laboratory’s geographical or organizational remoteness, however, can limit the effectiveness of the laboratory’s participation in the investigative phases of a case, when its scientific input may have the greatest chance of contributing to justice. Remoteness also makes the police department less able to direct the efforts of the laboratory toward the cases that the department considers most important.

Bashinski & Peterson, supra note 340, at 581.
forensic methodologies. This approach has advantages over the Oklahoma approach, which only requires ASCLD/LAB (a nonpublic organization) accreditation. A forensic commission could employ an established accreditation program, such as ASCLD/LAB, but it should do much more than monitor lab procedures. These commissions should also ensure adequate funding, investigate misconduct, and compile a registry of independent experts whom the defense could consult.

Before addressing these issues, however, the commission’s membership should be discussed.

1. Composition of Commission

Representatives from the police, prosecution, judiciary, and forensic sciences are obvious candidates for membership. It is critical, however, that research scientists and the defense bar also be represented, as is the case in New York. The 1992 National Academies report recommended the establishment of a National Committee on Forensic DNA Typing, commenting that accreditation should be a responsibility of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in consultation with the Department of Justice (DOJ). DHHS is the appropriate agency, because it has extensive experience in the regulation of


456. See OKLA. STAT. ANN. tit. 74, § 150.37 (West Supp. 2006–2007) (requiring accreditation by ASCLD/LAB or the American Board of Forensic Toxicology).

457. In the early 1990s, a British Royal Commission recommended the establishment of a Forensic Science Advisory Council that, among other things, review the performance and standards of crime laboratories:

[W]e are . . . concerned at the lack of external oversight . . . . We therefore see great attraction in the proposal put to us by the Royal Society for Chemistry that a Forensic Science Advisory Council should be set up which would report to the Home Secretary on the performance, achievements and efficiency of the forensic science laboratories.

ROYAL COMM’N ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, REPORT, 1993, Cm. 2263, at 150–51. Unfortunately, it was not adopted. REDMAYNE, supra note 400, at 27 (explaining that when the government hesitated in adopting RCCJ’s recommendations, forensic experts made their own, different suggestions); see also David E. Bernstein, Junk Science in the United States and the Commonwealth, 21 YALE J. INT’L L. 123, 170–73 (1996) (discussing this proposal).

458. See N.Y. EXEC. LAW § 995-a (McKinney 1996); see also 1 KAUFMAN, supra note 138, at 363 (noting in Recommendation 19 that “[a]n advisory board to the Centre of Forensic Sciences should be established consisting of Crown and defence counsel, police, judiciary, scientists and laypersons. It should be created by statute.”).
clinical laboratories through programs under the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Act and has extensive expertise in molecular genetics through the National Institutes of Health.\(^{459}\)

The DNA Identification Act of 1994, however, located the authority to appoint DAB members in the FBI, despite the NRC report’s conclusion that a law enforcement agency would be unsuitable for this purpose.\(^{460}\) The Act, at least, did require the Director of the FBI to select members from “among nominations proposed by the head of the National Academy of Sciences and professional societies of crime laboratory officials” and to “include as members scientists from State, local, and private forensic laboratories, molecular geneticists and population geneticists not affiliated with a forensic laboratory, and a representative from the National Institute of Standards and Technology.”\(^{461}\) This requirement expired when the DAB ceased to exist after five years.\(^{462}\)

Congress subsequently established a National Forensic Science Commission to improve forensic science.\(^{463}\) This legislation

459. NRC I REPORT, supra note 330, at 107. The 1996 report mentioned only an “appropriate organization.” NRC II REPORT, supra note 330, at 87 (“We recognize the need for guidelines and standards and for accreditation by appropriate organizations.”).

460. NRC I REPORT, supra note 330, at 107; see also William C. Thompson, Accepting Lower Standards: The National Research Council’s Second Report on Forensic DNA Evidence, 37 JURIMETRICS J. 405, 409 (1997) (“Due in part to the political clout of the FBI on Capitol Hill, an independent national committee was never created. Instead, we have the DNA Advisory Board, which is appointed by the FBI Director.”).


462. The statutory requirements governing DAB do not apply to SWGDAM, the group that replaced DAB at its expiration.

463. Its responsibilities include:

(1) assess[ing] present and future resource needs of the forensic science community;
(2) mak[ing] recommendations to the Attorney General [“(A.G.”)] for maximizing the use of forensic technologies and techniques to solve crimes and protect the public;
(3) identify[ing] potential scientific advances that may assist law enforcement in using forensic technologies and techniques to protect the public;
(4) mak[ing] recommendations to the [A.G.] for programs that will increase the number of qualified forensic scientists available to work in public crime laboratories;
(5) disseminat[ing], through the National Institute of Justice, best practices concerning the collection and analyses of forensic evidence to help ensure quality and consistency in the use of forensic technologies and techniques to solve crimes and protect the public;
(6) examin[ing] additional issues pertaining to forensic science as requested by the [A.G.];
(7) examin[ing] Federal, State, and local privacy protection statutes, regulations, and practices relating to access to, or use of, stored DNA samples or DNA analyses, to determine whether such protections are sufficient;
constitutes an important step in the right direction, but the statute does not specifically require the membership of outside scientists or members of the defense bar—persons who would bring different perspectives to the commission’s tasks. Instead, the Attorney General appoints members from “persons experienced in criminal justice issues, including persons from the forensic science and criminal justice communities.”

2. Investigations

A Forensic Science Commission should be assigned the task of investigating all cases of alleged misconduct or incompetence. The lack of a government agency specifically designated with investigative responsibility leaves a conspicuous regulatory void. The I.G. satisfies this need on the federal level, but the states are another matter. In West Virginia, the state supreme court, at the behest of a prosecutor, appointed a judge to conduct an inquiry into Fred Zain’s misconduct. That judge, in turn, requested that ASCLD appoint a team to review the allegations. In contrast, the Montana Supreme Court ruled that it lacked authority to make this type of appointment. In Houston, the District Attorney provoked controversy because he refused to recuse himself from a grand jury.

(8) mak[ing] specific recommendations to the [A.G.], as necessary, to enhance the protections described in [point] (7) to ensure—
   (A) the appropriate use and dissemination of DNA information;
   (B) the accuracy, security, and confidentiality of DNA information;
   (C) the timely removal and destruction of obsolete, expunged, or inaccurate DNA information; and
   (D) that any other necessary measures are taken to protect privacy; and

(9) provid[ing] a forum for the exchange and dissemination of ideas and information in furtherance of the objectives described in paragraphs (1) through (8).

42 U.S.C.A § 14136c(b) (West 2005).

464. Some states have adopted a more inclusive approach. See, e.g., MINN. STAT. ANN. § 299C.156(1) (West Supp. 2006–2007) (requiring public defender, defense attorney, and university professor as members of Forensic Science Advisory Board); TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN. art. 38.01 (Vernon Supp. 2006) (requiring defense attorney and university faculty or staff as members of Forensic Science Commission).

465. 42 U.S.C.A § 14136c(a) (West 2005).

466. See 1997 I.G. REPORT, supra note 27, at pt. I (explaining the I.G.’s role in investigating the explosives unit); 2004 I.G. REPORT, supra note 28, at iii (explaining the I.G.’s role in policing the matter of Jacqueline Blake).


468. See id. at 504 (stating that “Judge Holliday notes that there was evidence that Trooper Zain’s supervisors may have ignored or concealed complaints of his misconduct” where such complaints were based on the team’s review of the allegations).

469. See supra note 135 and accompanying text.
investigation when his office’s use of the suspect evidence was one of the issues that needed to be examined.\(^\text{470}\) Internal investigations have repeatedly failed to discover or report the nature and extent of lab failures.\(^\text{471}\)

The primary responsibility for detecting, investigating, and correcting instances of misconduct and gross negligence rests with the laboratory and its personnel.\(^\text{472}\) However, external and independent review is also critical and is now mandated by recent federal legislation.\(^\text{473}\) A forensic science commission would have the expertise to conduct such an investigation or to appoint an independent committee to do so.\(^\text{474}\)

### 3. Adequate Funding

A commission should also ensure that labs are adequately funded. Crime labs have become chronically underfunded in the last half century. In 1967, President Johnson’s crime commission noted that “the great majority of police department laboratories have only

\(^{470}\) See Adam Liptak, *Prosecutions Are a Focus In Houston DNA Inquiry: Grand Juries Seen as Widening Investigation*, N.Y. TIMES, June 9, 2003, at A20 (“In April, the county’s 22 criminal district court judges asked Mr. Rosenthal to recuse himself from the investigation.”); see also Nick Madigan, *Houston’s Troubled DNA Crime Lab Faces Growing Scrutiny*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 9, 2003, at A20 (reporting that operations in the Houston lab were suspended in December after an audit found numerous problems).

\(^{471}\) The investigations concerning the Earl Washington case, the FBI explosive unit, and Fred Zain are all examples.

\(^{472}\) Cf. *NRC I REPORT*, supra note 330, at 148 (“Laboratories and experts have a particular responsibility to ensure that they are open and candid with the courts. Any reservations about inadequacies or errors should be promptly revealed, and failure to do that should be dealt with seriously.”).

\(^{473}\) The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 was amended by requiring a “certification that a government entity exists . . . to conduct independent external investigations into allegations of serious negligence or misconduct substantially affecting the integrity of the forensic results committed by employees or contractors of any forensic laboratory system, medical examiner’s office, coroner’s office, law enforcement storage facility, or medical facility” in any state receiving a grant. Pub. L. No. 90-351, 82 Stat. 197 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C.A. § 3797k(4) (West Supp. 2007)). Unfortunately, this requirement has not been rigorously implemented. See *OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, REVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS’ FORENSIC SCIENCE IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROGRAM i* (2005), available at http://www.usdoj.gov/oig/reports/OJP/e0602/final.pdf (concluding that the National Institute of Justice “did not enforce the external investigation certification requirement imposed by the Justice for All Act of 2004”).

\(^{474}\) A few states have set up investigatory agencies. See, e.g., MINN. STAT. ANN. § 299C.156(2) (West Supp. 2006–2007); TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. ANN. art. 38.01(4)(a) (Vernon Supp. 2006). Early results, however, have not been encouraging. See *States’ Efforts to Probe Crime Labs Stall at Start*, AUGUSTA CHRON. (Ga.), Mar. 24, 2007, at A13 (“But not one of the new boards has yet reopened a case—either because they have refused to do so or because they haven’t been funded.”).
minimal equipment and lack highly skilled personnel able to use the modern equipment now being developed." In 1974, President Nixon’s crime commission commented: “Too many police crime laboratories have been set up on budgets that preclude the recruitment of qualified, professional personnel.”

Twenty years later, a report on Washington state crime labs revealed that a “staggering backlog of cases hinders investigations of murder, rape, arson, and other major crimes.” At any time, “thousands of pieces of evidence collected from crime scenes sit unanalyzed and ignored on shelves in laboratories and police stations across the state.” A USA Today survey of 215 laboratories reached the same conclusion: “Evidence that could imprison the guilty or free the innocent is languishing on shelves and piling up in refrigerators of the USA’s overwhelmed and underfunded crime labs.” While budgets increased by ten percent in five years, caseloads increased by almost twenty-five percent. In one case, a suspected serial rapist was released because DNA analysis would have taken months to perform. “Weeks later, [the suspect] raped victim No. 4 as she slept in her home. When the DNA tests finally came back—18 months after samples first went to the lab—a jury convicted [the suspect] of all four rapes.”

Congress recognized the need for federal funding for public crime laboratories and medical examiner offices by enacting the Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Act in 2000. Appropriations, however, have fallen well below authorized limits.

478. Id.
479. Becky Beaupre & Peter Eisler, Crime Lab Crisis, USA TODAY, Aug. 20, 1996, at 1A.
480. Id.
481. Id.
482. Id.
484. See Beth Lavach, Legislative Corner, Acad. News, Sept. 2007, at 3 (“For well over a decade, the Congress has given off-again-on-again support to the forensic sciences.”). In contrast, DNA technology has been funded. On March 11, 2003, the Attorney General of the United States announced the President’s DNA initiative, entitled “Advancing Justice Through DNA Technology.” This initiative proposes over $1 billion in funding for fiscal year 2004 through fiscal year 2008 to reduce casework and database backlogs in DNA laboratories, to improve the DNA analysis capacity of public...
The validity of forensic evidence depends on funding for facilities, equipment, and personnel, as well as for accreditation, certification, and standardization. The Houston experience is not uncommon: “It is clear that, over the 15 years preceding the DNA/Serology Section’s closure in December 2002, HPD and the City failed to provide the Crime Lab with adequate resources to meet growing demands.”

4. Register of Defense Experts

Finding qualified experts to testify for the defense is difficult. The British have had some success in registering experts. A forensic science commission could be tasked with this responsibility. Retired FBI experts have often played a positive role in this context. Moreover, prosecution experts in one jurisdiction should be encouraged to consult with the defense in other jurisdictions. Currently, such contacts are frequently discouraged as John Wilson learned when he testified as a defense expert against Joyce Gilchrist.

CONCLUSION

Scientific proof is often critical in criminal prosecutions. Moreover, it is frequently better than other types of evidence commonly used in criminal trials (i.e., eyewitness identifications, laboratories, to support training, and to assist research and development. U.S. DEP’T OF JUSTICE, ADVANCING JUSTICE THROUGH DNA TECHNOLOGY, Executive Summary (2003), available at http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/dnapolicybook_exsum.htm.

485. THIRD HOUSTON REPORT, supra note 166, at 62.

486. See Weinstein, supra note 346, at 1008 (“Courts, as gatekeepers, must be aware of how difficult it can be for some parties—particularly indigent criminal defendants—to obtain an expert to testify. The fact that one side may lack adequate resources with which to fully develop its case is a constant problem.”). See generally Giannelli, The Right to Expert Assistance, supra note 104 (discussing the right to defense experts).

487. See R. Bramley, Quality in the Laboratory, 43 SCI. & JUST. 104, 106 (2003) (discussing the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners, which requires a “formal assessment by independent peer practitioners of . . . proof of competence”); see also REDMAYNE, supra note 400, at 218 (noting the existence of the British program to register experts).

488. Retired FBI fingerprint examiners testified in the Riky Jackson case. See supra notes 314–20 and accompanying text.

489. See supra notes 84–85 and accompanying text.

490. See Joseph L. Peterson et al., The Uses and Effects of Forensic Science in the Adjudication of Felony Cases, 32 J. FORENSIC SCI. 1730, 1748 (1987) (reporting the results of a survey which revealed that “[a]bout one quarter of the citizens who had served on juries which were presented with scientific evidence believed that had such evidence been absent, they would have changed their verdicts—from guilty to not guilty”); see also Bales, supra note 236, at 51 (commenting that “prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges agree that scientific evidence can powerfully affect—and often determine—the outcome in criminal cases”).
confessions, and informant testimony\textsuperscript{491}, a point that the Supreme Court has made on several occasions.\textsuperscript{492} DNA profiling, for example, has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of scientific evidence in the criminal justice system—both to exonerate the innocent and convict the guilty.

Paradoxically, the most scientifically sound procedure—DNA analysis—is the most extensively regulated, while many forensic techniques with questionable scientific pedigrees go completely unregulated. As the 1992 National Academies report commented: “Because the application of DNA typing in forensic science is to be used in the service of justice, it is especially important for society to establish mechanisms for accountability and to ensure appropriate public scrutiny.”\textsuperscript{493} The same should apply to the entire laboratory. The regulation of DNA profiling, which developed gradually over the last twenty years, can serve as a paradigm for other laboratory units. The accreditation of crime laboratories, the certification of examiners, and the standardization and promulgation of written protocols for each technique would go a long way in professionalizing crime labs. In addition, quality assurance programs, including proficiency testing and external audits, should be mandated. Finally, forensic science commissions should be created in each jurisdiction to implement these reforms.


\textsuperscript{492}For example, in Escobedo v. Illinois, 378 U.S. 478 (1964), the Court observed that history has taught that “a system of criminal law enforcement which comes to depend on the ‘confession’ will, in the long run, be less reliable and more subject to abuses than a system which depends on extrinsic evidence independently secured through skillful investigation.” Id. at 488–89; see also Davis v. Mississippi, 394 U.S. 721, 727 (1969) (noting that “fingerprinting is an inherently more reliable and effective crime-solving tool than eyewitness identifications or confessions and is not subject to such abuses as the improper line-up and the ‘third degree’ ”).

\textsuperscript{493}NRC I REPORT, supra note 330, at 162.