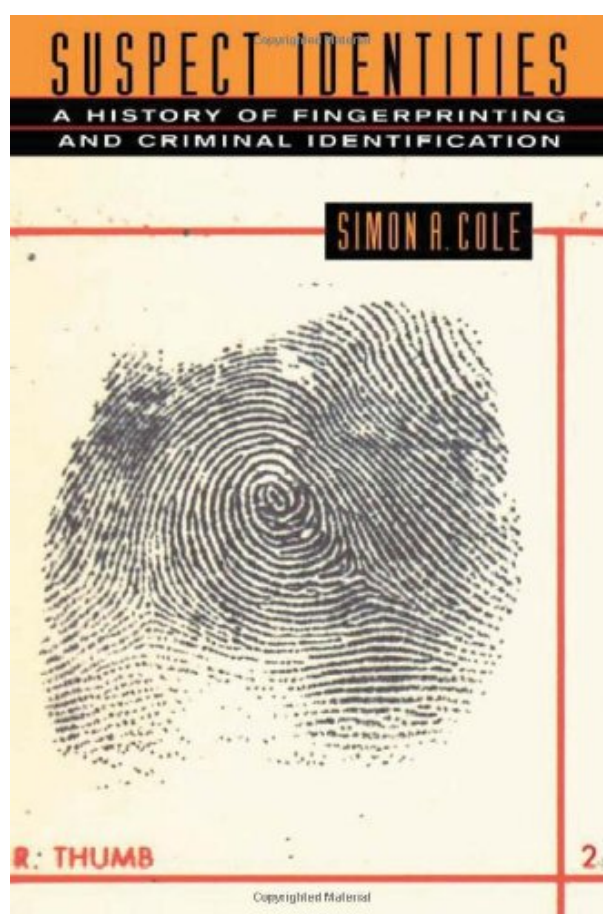
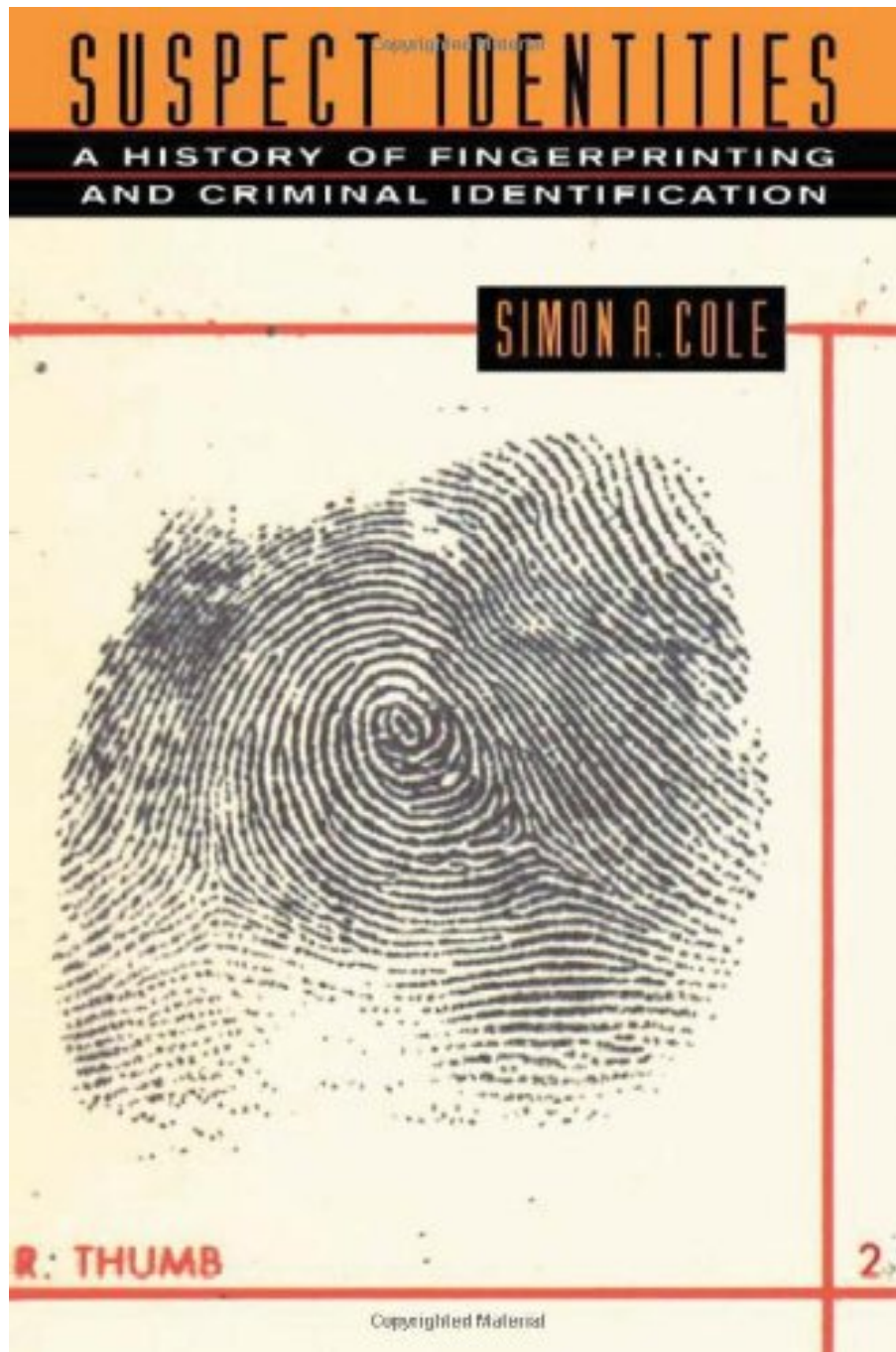


# SUSPECT IDENTITIES: A HISTORY OF FINGERPRINTING AND CRIMINAL IDENTIFICATION BY SIMON A. COLE



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From Publishers Weekly

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“No two fingerprints are alike,” or so it goes. For nearly a hundred years fingerprints have represented definitive proof of individual identity in our society. We trust them to tell us who committed a crime, whether a criminal record exists, and how to resolve questions of disputed identity.

But in *Suspect Identities*, Simon Cole reveals that the history of criminal identification is far murkier than we have been led to believe. Cole traces the modern system of fingerprint identification to the nineteenth-century bureaucratic state, and its desire to track and control increasingly mobile, diverse populations whose race or ethnicity made them suspect in the eyes of authorities. In an intriguing history that traverses the globe, taking us to India, Argentina, France, England, and the United States, Cole excavates the forgotten history of criminal identification—from photography to exotic anthropometric systems based on measuring body parts, from fingerprinting to DNA typing. He reveals how fingerprinting ultimately won the trust of the public and the law only after a long battle against rival identification systems.

As we rush headlong into the era of genetic identification, and as fingerprint errors are being exposed, this history uncovers the fascinating interplay of our elusive individuality, police and state power, and the quest for scientific certainty. *Suspect Identities* offers a necessary corrective to blind faith in the infallibility of technology, and a compelling look at its role in defining each of us.

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- Used Book in Good Condition

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Good overview of history of finger mark matching

By Zeno Geradts

The book gives a historical overview of fingerprinting and why anthropometry was more inefficient for the police in the beginning of the 20th century. It furthermore is somewhat critical on the conclusions that are drawn in this field, and the limitations that exist. Also it discusses possibilities that suspects are not found in the database of fingerprints whereas the fingerprints are actually in it.

We see that more discussion on the use of fingerprints as evidence is available on the Internet, in literature and in court. It is always good to remain critical and in this way the book helps in the discussion. In my opinion more scientific research is needed in this field, which can help to have a good overview of limitations and acceptable use. The large finger print databases that exist certainly help to do more research

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Incomplete

By A. Turner

I looked forward to this book with much anticipation...perhaps too much, as I ended up being almost thoroughly disappointed.

First, let me say that Cole's research is by no means on the "cutting edge." Anyone who has done an extensive amount of reading or thinking on the subject of fingerprints should come to the simple conclusion that we do not currently have any way to back up the claim that no two prints are alike. Sure, in the off chance that we find two matching prints one day, the theory will be laid to rest - but without physical proof, theoretical proof cannot be created (in other words, there is no true mathematical or theoretical way to prove or disprove the theory of fingerprints). Some would say that the basis of a scientific theory is that it can be theoretically proven or disproven - hence, fingerprinting is not scientific. All I have to say to that is .... Duh. People have debated that point for dozens of years now.

One could give Cole a little credit for bringing up some lesser known but interesting points - eg, the origin of fingerprinting in Western society as a method to further segregate and identify social undesirables (an offshoot of methods based on race, class, mental health, etc.) But, still, this is not really anything new to those that have read the literature.

Additionally, he tends to make broad claims about what certain evidence means without bothering to back up his statements. More than any other of the techniques employed in the book, I found this the most frustrating of all...especially when he had just made a rather interesting and provocative statement, but which I was then unable to follow up on (either through a reference or a thorough logical argument on his part).

A friend of mine suggested that perhaps my criticism is too harsh, considering that this book is most likely his dissertation and thus not as polished as a 2nd or 3rd book. I don't feel like this is an excuse for lazy or sloppy work, however, and so I can only give this book a mediocre rating at best.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Very timely and interesting

By A Customer

As is not often enough the case with academic writing, Simon Cole's book is at the very cutting edge of his discipline. Not two weeks ago, a court in Pennsylvania, after hearing testimony from Dr. Cole, held that fingerprint examiners would not be allowed to testify that a fingerprint from the crime scene "matches" that of the defendant. Calling fingerprint identification techniques subjective and scientifically unreliable, Judge Pollack raised the bar for fingerprint examiners. Simon Cole's fascinating book begins by discussing the history of criminal identification techniques, exploring both the scientific and sociological mores that influenced the development of these techniques. The book then analyzes, in detail, the science of fingerprint examination and identifies the many flaws and inconsistencies in its current application around the world. Suspect Identities puts the recent developments in our criminal justice system into perspective and provides the only source for this information. No other book on this topic provides such a clear, comprehensive and accurate accounting of both the history and the current state of fingerprint identification techniques.



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