HUMAN IDENTIFICATION

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Case Studies in — Forensic Anthropology ———

Edited by

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About the Authors

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HUMAN IDENTIFICATION

Section I THE ROLE OF THE FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGIST The Case for Cooperative Research

Forensic Physical Anthropology? Probably very few people have heard of this scientific specialty. Its major focus is upon the identification of human remains in a legal context. Other specialists in the medical and legal fields are also concerned with identification, but physical anthropologists who specialize in skeletal analysis bring a particular perspective to those instances when identification cannot be made with traditional medical and legal means: fingerprints, dental and medical records, or personal recognition. We have developed special methods, skills, a documented data base, and theoretical orientations for the analysis of human remains.

Once a forensic anthropologist has become involved in the collaborative activities dealing with human remains in a legal setting, our purposes and potential contributions need to be made clear to the cooperating participants. Essentially, the forensic anthropologist provides direct physical or circumstantial information from the human remains to allow the designated authority to determine identity of the deceased and the circumstances of death. Since the anthropologist is a consultant, cooperation with law enforcement personnel—forensic pathologists, coroners or medical examiners, forensic odontologists, attorneys, and judicial officials—is essential. Communication and the establishment of responsibility are important aspects of any given case.

As the case studies in this volume illustrate, forensic physical anthropologists can provide service at the discovery site of human remains, determine if the bones are indeed human or not, provide organizational and analytical expertise at mass disasters involving multiple deaths, help to unravel the intricacies when commingling of multiple remains has occurred, and suggest possible time intervals since death. Burned remains can be especially challenging—even so, the incinerated skeleton may frequently provide clues to identity. Cause of death, although ultimately determined by a physician or the courts, may be suggested by the anthropologist from skeletal analysis. Individual identification of a decedant from the probable match with skeletal attributes such as sex, age at death, ancestry or social attribution of race, probable living height, and unique features of the skeletal structure may be made by the legal authorities. Presentation of findings and opinions as an expert witness in court may also be necessary if litigation is involved.