

New FBI Fingerprint Technology Solves Many Cold Cases

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Just after Thanksgiving in 1983, James Downey dropped off his brother, John, at a Houston bus station, then turned away so neither the police nor a motorcycle gang affiliated with his brother could demand details about where the bus was headed. Thirty-four years later, Downey got a call similar to those that more than 200 families across the U.S. gotten in the last few months since the FBI began using new fingerprint technology to resolve identity cases dating back to the 1970s, [the Associated Press reports](#).

<https://lasvegassun.com/news/2017/oct/31/new-fingerprint-algorithm-helps-id-bodies-found-de/> The remains of a man found beaten to death decades ago along a brushy path in Des Moines, 800 miles away, had been identified as his brother.

Since launching the effort in February, the FBI and local medical examiner offices have identified 204 bodies found between 1975 and the late 1990s. The cases stretch across the country, with the largest number in Arizona, California, New York, Florida and Texas. “We didn’t know the actual potential success. We were hoping to identify a few cases, maybe five or 10,” said Bryan Johnson of the FBI’s Latent Fingerprint Support Unit who proposed the effort. “We’re really proud that we found another way of doing this.” Johnson and eight others in the FBI unit ran fingerprints from about 1,500 bodies through a new computer algorithm that could make matches from low-quality prints or even a single finger or thumb. Previously, the standard algorithm typically needed quality prints from all 10 fingers to make a match. The unit is now urging local authorities to search through other old case files and send in smudged or partial prints that couldn’t previously be matched.
