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Book Reviews: Popular Books Section

Editor's recommendation. This book is recommended by the editor.

EXCELLENT READING

Mortal Evidence: The Forensics behind Nine Shocking Cases *by* Cyril Wecht, M.D., J.D., and Greg Saitz, with Mark Curriden (Foreword by Dr. Henry C. Lee). Hard Cover, 6" x 9". Illustrations, Notes, Index.
Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197, USA. or . Publication Date 2003. 315 pages, ISBN 1-59102-134-0. Price $26.00

Official site of this book: http://www.prometheusbooks.com/catalog/book_1353.html

An exclusive interview with Dr. Cyril Wecht.

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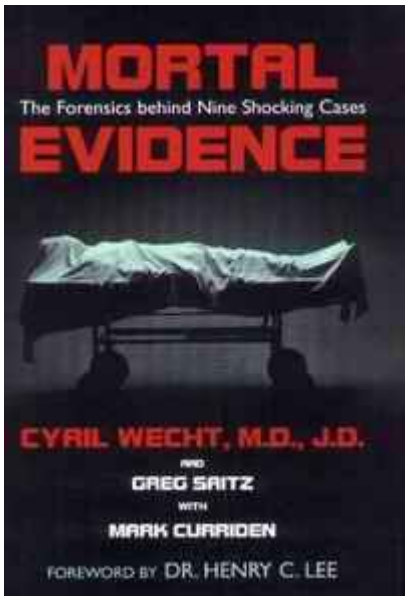


Cyril Wecht



Cyril H. Wecht, M.D., J.D. (Pittsburgh, PA), one of the world's leading pathologists, is the author of *Who Killed JonBenet Ramsey?, Grave Secrets, Cause of Death*, and hundreds of professional publications. He has served as president of both the American College of Legal Medicine and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and has appeared on numerous nationally syndicated television programs including NBC's *Dateline, Larry King Live, 20/20, Burden of Proof*, and many others. Readers wishing to contact Dr. Wecht may want to the linked page (mailto:cwecht@county.allegheny.pa.us?subject=Read about your book (Mortal Evidence: The Forensics behind Nine Shocking Cases) in Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology&cc=KMcCabe@county.allegheny.pa.us&cc=eyoung@county.allegheny.pa.us&bcc=dranil@hotmail.com). His extremely impressive CV can be downloaded by clicking here.

Most people would remember how the **O.J.Simpson** case unfolded. It began with a bizarre, surreal low-speed police chase and ended with two trials one of which found Simpson "Not guilty" and the other found him "Guilty". Simpson's wealth bought him a formidable legal team, dubbed the "Dream Team" which included F. Lee Bailey. The ensuing trial seemed more like show business than legal proceedings and one cannot help thinking of Perry Mason when looking back at the Simpson trial. The Los Angeles Police force came out in a very bad light with one of their detectives, Mark Furhmann, exposed as a racist and with convincing evidence that the Police had fabricated bloodstain evidence.

View this book on Amazon

The other case most readers would remember is the case of **JonBennet Ramsey**. The first images of JonBenet Ramsey that were broadcast to the world showed a pretty little girl in heavy make-up and flamboyant costumes parading across a stage. At the time, the media described her as "a painted baby, a sexualised toddler beauty queen." A rather disturbing image!

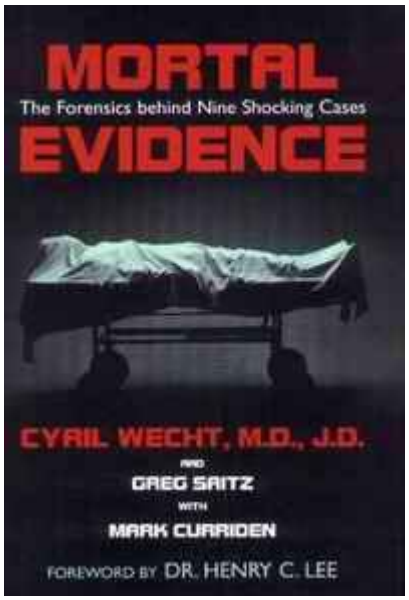
Heavy Metal Poisoning

Click here to read an exclusive interview with Dr. Cyril Wecht.

These two cases and seven other cases, including the death of **Tammy Wynette**, the Country and Western singer appear in this book by Cyril Wecht. All the cases make gripping reading!

Small-town America, complete with an eccentric religious sect and a bigoted Sheriff, appear in the case of **"Shoot-out in Miracle Valley"**. This case is based on ballistics and is a good read.

Then there is the case of the Las Vegas casino owner Lonnie Ted Binion, a drug overdose on the face of it, but was it? How do the two well-known villains from old Edinburgh, **Burke and Hare** come into this story?



...The 'stories' read like works of fiction or TV dramas except that they are not! This is the real thing!....

The cases are not all celebrity/high profile type cases. The case of Robert Curly is of considerable forensic significance and even experienced Forensic Pathologists and Clinical Forensic Practitioners would benefit from studying this case.

Robert Curley died from Thallium poisoning which was administered to him by his wife. His illness, typically, was initially mistaken for Guillain Barre Syndrome. This case should serve as an eye-opener and makes one wonder how many cases of heavy metal poisoning are mistakenly labelled as a neuropathy! Thallium poisoning is of course a rarity.

Some related links

Then there is the case of Sam Sheppard. Which dates back to 1954. **Sam Sheppard**, an osteopathic surgeon was convicted of the brutal murder of his wife although he repeatedly pleaded his innocence. The case inspired a 1960's TV series entitled "The Fugitive". Years later a film by the same name and starring Harrison Ford was also produced. The case was reopened in 1995.

The common theme running through this selection of stories is, in Wecht's words, **"What initially may seem to be the obvious solution to a death may in fact be partially or completely wrong"**. The cases are certainly thought provoking.

The 'stories' read like works of fiction or TV dramas except that they are not! This is the real thing! Apart from the fact the cases selected are rather high profile and intriguing, Wecht is a master storyteller and manages to hold his audience. Crime reporter Saitz and legal writer Curriden help him with the writing.

…All the cases make gripping reading!...certainly thought provoking…

Wecht's experience as an expert witness is obvious in the way he reduces complex pathological matters into easily understood lay terminology. That is the hallmark of an experienced expert witness.

Cyril Wecht of course is a well-known figure and a celebrity in the world of Forensic Pathology and the author of popular books as well as technical books. Wecht was the first non-government forensic pathologist permitted to study the autopsy materials of John F. Kennedy. His views on JFK's assassination are controversial and not many readers would agree with his view but this should not detract the readers from enjoying this book.

…Although aimed at a general readership this book should be essential reading for trainee as well as established forensic practitioners. .....For the general reader the message is "Things are not as they seem! Never take anything at face value!"…

Although aimed at a general readership this book should be essential reading for trainee as well as established forensic practitioners. For the general reader the message is "Things are not as they seem! Never take anything at face value!"

Amongst other things this book gives an insight into how the American legal system works or rather, gets bogged down, sometimes rather badly. Forensic Pathologists on this side of the Atlantic might find the media involvement rather worrying. Wecht himself acts as a media commentator and advisor in a number of the cases.

Click here to read an exclusive interview with Dr. Cyril Wecht.

The book is well presented as a hardback and is complete with eight pages of colour plates printed on coated paper.

I would recommend this book to those readers with a fascination for murder mysteries. I would also recommend the book as compulsory reading for trainee and established forensic pathologists as well as law enforcement officers.

-Gyan Fernando

Dr Gyan C. A. Fernando is a Forensic Pathologist in the West Country of Britain. He has solved a number of murder mysteries through his excellent forensic investigations.



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