

## UPDATE RE: EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

1. Our memories are not video cameras; we are not able to record an event in our memory, to be retrieved later when we summon it.
2. It is more accurate to say that our memory is an imperfect mechanism that can easily be distorted by external influences.
3. Remembering something is actually a 3-step process. First, we have to store something in our memory. This is done selectively: no one is able to remember every detail of his life. For example, can you recall what is printed on the back of a \$1 bill? We remember things *selectively*.
4. After we store something in our memory, we then have to keep it there. Our ability to do this is affected by how recent the memory is, how long we paid attention to it while we were having the experience, and how much new information we've since processed.
5. Memory for faces is greatly influenced by how many times we've seen that face. This explains why you may easily recognize an old school chum after 20 years, but fail to recognize your new neighbor. The school friend was seen daily for a long period of time, whereas the new neighbor has been seen only a few times. Brief exposure to an event or person greatly reduces the probability of accurate recall.
6. All of the above helps to explain why eyewitness testimony is not as reliable as it would appear to be. Simultaneous line-ups are particularly troublesome, because witnesses are likely to make a "relative identification": which of the people in the line-up looks most like the person the witness "remembers" seeing, *relative to each other*.
7. Far more preferable are *sequential line-ups*, in which the witness looks at each person individually and asks himself "does this person look like the one that I saw?" Sequential line-

ups thereby result in fewer misidentifications, as opposed to the simultaneous line-up procedure.

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