Portrait parle

INTRODUCTION

PORTRAIT PARLE:
These two French words mean "**speaking likeness**".

Portrait Parle can be defined as a rigorous system for verbal description of physical characteristics of the subject. It is based on the Bertillon method of criminal identification by measurements of the human body and is still in practice today to some extent.

A distinctive description of every feature of the face and head are especially valuable for investigation, **especially when a set of the suspect's fingerprints is not available in his file.**

HISTORY OF PORTRAIT PARLE

- In 1882, Alphonse Bertillon, also called "Father of Scientific Detection" said that anthropology could be invoked to aid in the sight recognisation and identification of criminals.
- Employing these methods of scientific description, he worked out a system of identification, utilizing 11 skeletal measurements which are practicably unchanged after maturity and are not affected by increase or loss of weight.

Alphonse Bertillon
(1853-1914)

- His classification provided a basis for modern recall system that would aid the artist in producing sketches as well as the development of composite kits, catalogs and computer systems.

- Originally, he meant for the catalogue to be an identification aid for recognition of local prisoners but later it was found to be useful for obtaining description of unknown suspects also.

- Bertillon stated from the observations that human bone structure was more or less absolutely fixed by the age of 20, and that the skeleton varied tremendously in its dimensions between one person and another.
- Before DNA evidences-and before that, the ubiquitous adoption of finger printing- became the dominant mode in which criminals were identified by law enforcements, another form of biometric identification was widespread around the world.
- The portrait parle system also known as Bertillonage, had a major impact on criminology, specially in its native France.

- The **Bertillon card** included spaces for description of the prisoner's
- eyes,
- ears,
- lips,
- beard,
- hair color,
- skin color,
- ethnicity,
- forehead,

- nose
- chin
- general contour of head
- hair growth pattern
- eyebrows
- eyeballs and orbit
- mouth
- neck
- inclination of shoulders
- attitude
- Voice
- language
- habiliments

25 TRAITS DESCRIBED IN BERTILLON CARD:

- Gender
- Face shape
- Chin shape
- Skin color
- Hair type (curly, wavy, straight)
- Widow's peak
- Color of eyebrows
- Eyebrow thickness
- Eyebrow placement
- Eye color
- Eye's distance apart
- Eye size

- Eye shape
- Eyelash length
- Mouth size
- Lip thickness
- Nose size
- Nose shape
- Nostril shape
- Earlobe attachment
- Ear pits
- Hairy ears
- Cheek freckles
- Forehead freckles
- Hair color

DECLINE OF BERTILLONAGE

- The "portrait parle" method remained prestigious for quite a while, as it was believed that experienced police officers were able to draw on it to "identify with certainty a suspect who mingled with the crowd".
- However telegraphic transmission of data was difficult- despite the invention of several dedicated codes- and no agreement was ever reached on the universal terminology, which proved fatal to the portrait parle, whose use gradually declined in the inter war period.