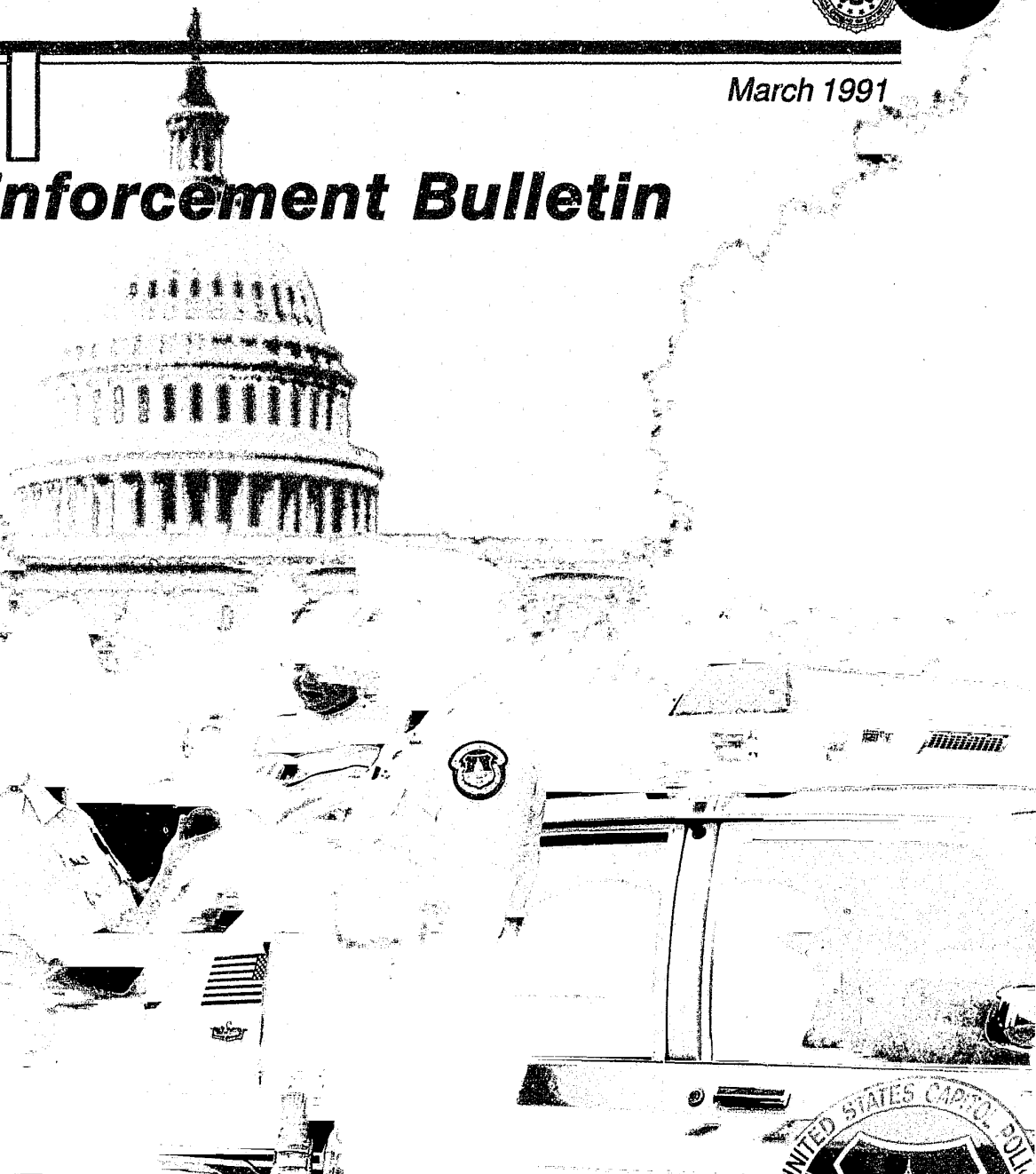




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William S. Sessions, Director

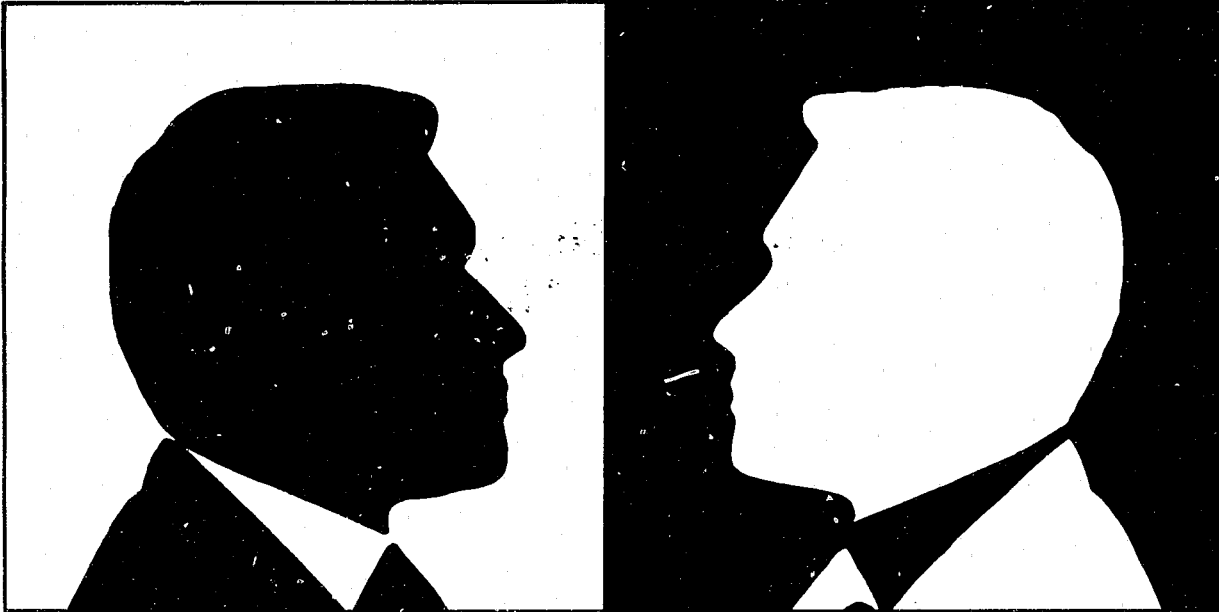
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Cognitive Interviewing



By
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and
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When interviewing crime victims, few investigators begin with questions such as: How tall was the subject? What color was his hair? Did he have any scars? Common sense, experience, and fundamental training lead investigators to the conclusion that such specific questions give witnesses little opportunity to tell what they know. Instead, open-ended questions tend to produce the best results. A question like, "What did he look like?" eliminates the

need for investigators to anticipate every detail of description victims may have noted. Investigators can always follow up the witness' statements with specific, direct questions to fill in gaps. At least, that is what many interview textbooks suggest. But what happens when even these direct questions fail to produce the details needed from witnesses? The cognitive interview method is a proven technique, effective because it provides interviewers with a structured approach

to help retrieve such details from the memories of witnesses.

Consider the following scenario: At a robbery scene, a uniformed officer briefs the investigating detective. Hoping to obtain additional information, the detective approaches the clerk, introduces himself, and sensing her anxiety, takes some time to assure her that she has nothing to worry about. He tells her he understands the trauma she has just undergone, gets her a cup of coffee, and delays