



## Case Study: The OJ Simpson Murders

The former professional football star and actor O. J. Simpson was tried on two counts of murder after the deaths of his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and waiter Ronald Lyle Goldman, in June 1994. The case has been described as the most publicized criminal trial in American history. Simpson was acquitted after a trial that lasted more than eight months.

### Brown-Simpson Marriage

Brown and Simpson were married on February 2, 1985, five years after his retirement from professional football. The couple had two children, Sydney and Justin. The marriage lasted seven years, during which Simpson pleaded no contest to spousal abuse in 1989. Brown filed for divorce on February 25, 1992 citing "irreconcilable differences".

### Murders

At 12:10 a.m. on June 13, 1994, Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman were found murdered outside Brown's Bundy Drive condo in the Brentwood area of Los Angeles. Evidence found and collected at the scene led police to suspect that O. J. Simpson was the murderer. Brown had been stabbed multiple times in the head and neck and had defensive wounds on her hands. The wound through her neck was gaping, through which the larynx could be seen, and the vertebra in her neck was also cut.

### Arrest of Simpson

Lawyers convinced the LAPD to allow Simpson to turn himself in at 11 a.m. on June 17, 1994, but he failed to appear. At 2 p.m., the LAPD issued an all-points bulletin (APB), making OJ a fugitive from justice. At 5 p.m., Robert Kardashian, a friend of Simpson and one of his defense lawyers, read a letter by Simpson to the media. To many, the nature of the letter sounded like a suicide note, and the reporters joined the search for Simpson.

At around 6:20 p.m., a motorist saw Simpson riding in his white Ford Bronco, driven by his friend Al Cowlings, and notified police. The police then tracked calls placed from Simpson on his cellular telephone. When officers approached the Bronco with sirens blaring, Cowlings yelled that Simpson was in the back seat of the vehicle and had a gun to his own head. The officer backed off, but followed the vehicle at 35 miles per hour with up to 20 police cars participating in the chase.

Simpson reportedly demanded that he be allowed to speak to his mother before he would surrender. The chase ended at 8:00 p.m. at his Brentwood home, 50 miles later, where his son Jason ran out of the house, "gesturing wildly." After remaining in the Bronco for about 45 minutes, Simpson surrendered to authorities. In the Bronco the police found "\$8,000 in cash, a change of clothing, a loaded .357 Magnum, a passport, family pictures, and a fake goatee and mustache.

### Defense Case

Simpson hired a team of high-profile lawyers, some of which specialized in DNA evidence, to attempt to discredit the prosecution's DNA evidence, and they argued that Simpson was the victim of police fraud and what they termed as sloppy internal procedures that contaminated the DNA evidence. Simpson's defense argued that LAPD detective Mark Fuhrman had planted evidence at the crime scene. LAPD Criminalist Dennis Fung also faced scrutiny in the way in which evidence was collected.

### Prosecution Case

From the physical evidence collected, the prosecution claimed that Simpson drove to Nicole Brown's house on the evening of June 12 with the intention of killing her. They maintained that Nicole, after putting her two children to bed and while getting ready to go to bed herself, opened the front door of her house after either responding to a knock on the front door or after hearing a noise outside, where

Simpson grabbed her before she could scream and attacked her with a knife. Forensic evidence from the Los Angeles County coroner suggested that Ron Goldman arrived at the front gate to the townhouse sometime during the assault where the assailant apparently attacked him and stabbed him repeatedly in the neck and chest with one hand while restraining him with an arm choke-hold. According to the prosecution's account, as Nicole Brown was found lying face down, the assailant, after finishing with Goldman, pulled her head back using her hair, put his foot on her back, and slit her throat with the knife, severing her carotid artery. They then argued that Simpson left a "trail of blood" from the condo to the alley behind it; there was also testimony that three drops of Simpson's blood were found on the driveway near the gate to his house on Rockingham Drive.

The first officer at the crime scene testified that he found no signs of forced entry or any evidence that anyone had entered the premises and nothing inside was out of the ordinary.

Detectives testified that when he called Simpson in Chicago to tell him of his ex-wife's murder that Simpson sounded shocked and upset, but was oddly unconcerned about how she died. Detective Tom Lange testified that Nicole was probably killed first because the bottoms of her bare feet were clean, implying that she was struck down to the ground before any blood flowed. This was a key point that Simpson might have set out to kill Nicole; whereas Goldman inadvertently stumbled upon the scene and prompted Simpson to kill him too. Simpson lawyer Cochran proposed two hypotheses for what happened at the murder scene. First, he suggested that one, or more, drug dealers encountered Nicole Simpson while looking for her friend and house guest, Faye Resnick, an admitted cocaine abuser. In the second hypothesis, Cochran suggested that "an assassin, or assassins", followed Goldman to the South Bundy house to kill him.

#### Circumstantial Evidence Presented at the Trial

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#### The Verdict

At 10 a.m. on October 3, 1995, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. The only testimony reviewed was that of limo driver Alan Park who stated that he did not see Simpson's Bronco outside of the Rockingham estate after the murders occurred. The jury arrived at the verdict by 3 p.m. the previous day, after only four hours of deliberation, but Judge Ito postponed the announcement.

#### The Civil Trial

In 1997, the parents of Ron Goldman, Fred Goldman and Sharon Rufo, brought suit against Simpson for wrongful death, and Brown's estate, represented by her father Lou Brown, brought suit against Simpson in a "survivor suit", in a trial that took place over four months in Santa Monica. The jury in the civil trial awarded Brown and Simpson's children, Sydney and Justin, \$12.6 million from their father as recipients of their mother's estate. The victims' families were awarded \$33.5 million in compensatory and punitive damages.

