

# Case Study: O.J Simpson

(from *Bodies of Evidence* by Dr. Scott Christianson)

**The O.J Simpson case assembled a “dream team” of top lawyers and forensic experts who put the LAPD’s shoddy crime scene investigation under the microscope to show that much of the crucial scientific evidence had been contaminated or didn’t add up.**

Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend, Ronald Goldman, were found slashed to death in the courtyard entrance to Nicole’s home in Los Angeles on the night of June 12, 1994. Suspicion quickly fell on her estranged husband, O.J Simpson, the famous actor and former football star. He had previously been involved in domestic violence incidents with her and some of his ex-wife’s relatives immediately told the police that he had “finally killed her.” Crime scene investigators started swarming over the site and LAPD detectives also began looking for O.J. Simpson at his mansion which was 5 minutes away from the crime scene.



From left to right: Robert Shapiro (lead defense attorney), Johnny Cochran (defense attorney), and OJ Simpson.

By the time an LAPD detective contacted O.J. Simpson by telephone to inform him that his wife had been “killed,” he was in Chicago on a business engagement (he had taken a red eye flight the night of the murder) and he rushed home. Police already had found several incriminating clues, including blood on the door of his parked Ford Bronco as well as blood drops leading into his mansion. Detective Mark Fuhrman reported finding a bloody glove at the crime scene as well as a matching glove outside O.J.’s home. Testing would later show blood that was consistent with O.J., Nicole and Goldman. The glove also contained African-American limb hairs and hairs consistent with Goldman and Nicole.

Shortly after O.J.’s return from Chicago the day after the murders, the police noticed his bandaged hand and began questioning him, photographing the wound, taking samples of his blood and hair, and finally they arrested him for the murder.

But Simpson was unlike other defendants. He was rich. And he began using some of his resources to hire the best legal defense team ever assembled in the United States---a group with so many legal stars that the news media dubbed in the “Dream Team.” It included not only some of the best lawyers in the country, but also several of the nation’s premier forensic experts to assist in the defense. They included: Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld, two New York-based lawyers specializing in DNA; Dr. Michael Baden of New York, regarded as the top pathologist and medical examiner; renowned criminalist Dr. Henry C. Lee of Connecticut; Herb McDonald, the world’s leading blood pattern experts; Chuck Morton, a famous trace evidence expert; crime scene expert Larry Ragle, and several others. Most of the experts retained by the defense were among the best-known authorities in their fields, and were usually employed by the prosecution; their integrity and credibility was well established.

As it would turn out, unlike virtually any other high-profile case tried in Los Angeles, this high-powered defense team would have at its disposal almost as many resources as the prosecution, amounting to enough talent to make the Simpson case one of the greatest American courtroom battles. Ultimately the trial would involve 126 witnesses and 857 piece of evidence. It would receive the most intensive coverage

of any criminal trial in history, with live televised broadcasts of the proceedings and endless commentary by scores of talking heads. Networks and supermarket tabloids paid huge fee in exchange for eyewitness “scoops.” Simpson’s “not guilty” verdict is still considered one of the biggest, most talked about cases in history.

Before the Simpson case, crime scene investigators for the LAPD (and many other major police departments) were accustomed to handling much of their blood and other biological evidence much more casually, even sloppily. Cops had not been sufficiently trained to deal with DNA.

The Simpson trial would make that clear mistakes by investigators can destroy even an open-and-shut case, as this one seemed to be at the start. If nothing else, the jury’s “not-guilty” verdict shook big-city police departments, especially LA’s, out of their small-time forensics complacency.

One of the trials most dramatic moments in the case involved the bloody gloves that detective Fuhrman said he had found. The prosecution claimed the gloves had belonged to O.J. and that he had worn them to commit the murders. The prosecutor allowed Simpson to demonstrate whether the gloves actually fit. But when Simpson attempted to try them on in full view of the jury, they appeared to be too small for his large hands. And as defense lawyer Johnnie Cochran later concluded in his summation: “If the gloves don’t fit, you must acquit.” One more seed of doubt was planted in the minds of the jury. All the forensic evidence was steadily undermined.



OJ Simpson shows that the Aris gloves apparently do not fit.

In theory, the prosecution should have been able to show that comparisons of DNA from blood found at the crime scene, Simpson’s car, his house gate, and a sock found in his home, all proved that he had committed the murders. But in light of questions raised about the police department’s sloppy handling of the evidence, and the racial attitudes of some of the officers, jurors were left questioning how the DNA might have ended up there- was it planted? In the end, such questions created doubts that resulted in Simpson’s acquittal.

Looking back on what transpired in the O.J. Simpson case, experts identified some of the LAPD’s most glaring forensics mistakes as follows: ... **(you’ll read more on this later ☺)**