

Running Header: RACE AND ITS EFFECT ON THE O.J. SIMPSON TRIAL

Race and its Effect on the O.J. Simpson Trial

In APA Style

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Abstract

Racism is all around us. It can be found in schools, homes, and politics. Today, in America, we are taught that every man and woman is equal and we all deserve equal rights. In the trial of O.J. Simpson, racism is alive from the jurors to the police officers in the LAPD. This report looks at certain aspects of the trial such as race and how the race card was played by the defense, the racial tendencies of a particular LAPD officer, and the jury. The effects of the verdict are visible by the division of the black and white races in America and the Million Man March.

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RACE AND ITS EFFECT ON THE O.J. SIMPSON TRAIL

Introduction

Background Information

Figure 1



Nicole Brown-Simpson
www.law.umkc.edu

O.J. Simpson is probably the most widely *known* person in American history to be tried for murder (Lamb, 1994). Many Americans tuned into the bronco chase on June 17, 1994 when Simpson was the main suspect for the murder of Nicole Brown-Simpson, O.J.'s ex-wife, and her friend Ronald Goldman, which occurred a few days prior (Lamb, 1994).

O.J. Simpson was the murder suspect for the double homicide of Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman. He was a retired professional football player who resided in California. He was one of the black entertainers of the 1990's along with Oprah, Michael, Wesley, and Spike. Through these entertainers, it was shown that there is opportunity to succeed for black men and woman in society (White, 1995).

The trial was about the double murder of Nicole and Ron. Both of the victims white while the suspect was black. The murders took place at Nicole's home in the suburbs of Los Angeles (Lamb, 1994).

The number one question on everyone's mind was not if O.J. was innocent or guilty, but whether he would be found guilty or just walk away. Other questions on the mind of American's was did he actually commit the crime, did

the crooked cops manipulate the evidence, and did his celebrity status or race affect the verdict?

Many Americans had their minds made up of whether or not Mr. Simpson, a retired professional football player, was guilty or innocent. Whether it had to do with his social status or his race. Most Americans knew, from the moment they saw the Bronco chase, whether they thought O.J. was innocent or guilty. At the end of the trial, public opinion was divided along racial lines: ABC polled that 77% of white Americans believed that Simpson was guilty and that 72% of black believed he was innocent (Chidley, 1995).

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to explain the racial aspects of the trial of O.J. Simpson, including the prosecution, the defense, and the jury. The report will then discuss the effects of the trial after the verdict was given.

Scope

This report will discuss and explain the events before the trial, during the trial, and after the trial. The report will focus on the racism of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and the how the media played a role of dividing the two colors of America.

Findings

Before the Trial

The issue of racism in Los Angeles was clear and well known to the African American citizens as well as the police department even before the murder of Nicole Brown- Simpson and Ron Goldman.

Rodney King

In 1991 the California Highway Patrol (CHP) attempted to pull over Rodney King because he was speeding. Instead of pulling over, Mr. King decided to flee and lead to CHP, as well as the LAPD (Los Angeles Police Department), into a high-speed car chase, a car chase that involved the LAPD because Mr. King was endangering innocent civilians while driving recklessly (Scafidi, 1991). When the police finally caught Mr. King, they brutality beat him “well beyond the point where he was a threat- if he ever was a threat” Scafidi explained. This was clear to many people.

Rodney King later filed police brutality against the LAPD and went to court. The prosecution thought they had a solid case against the police officers, especially with a videotape of the beating from a witness (Chidley, 1995).

In 1992, with a predominantly white jury, the police officers were acquitted of the charges of brutality (Chidley, 1995). This was the opposite situation in the O.J. Simpson trial where there was a predominantly black jury (Chidley, 1995).

LAPD

It was a known truth among the 4 million citizens that reside in Los Angeles that the LAPD was harsh with the African Americans who lived in the streets they patrolled. The beating of Rodney King illustrates the hatred the LAPD had towards blacks (Scafidi, 1991). It was even reported that some police cars had bumper stickers that read: "I'm a member of the KKK" and "Property of the South African Government (before apartheid ended)" (Samad, 1995).

The incidents of the beating of Rodney King and the possibility of manipulated evidence in the O.J. case show the ugly truth about the LAPD and its officers. These incidents proved to the community, and the country, what the blacks have been trying to prove all along: there are lying officers, officers stopping citizens without cause, dropping people in alley ways daring them to run, strangling blacks, excessive threats, and false arrests (Samad, 1995).

There were many cases of police brutality filed against the LAPD. In one year, the police department paid \$8 million in claims of such brutality, which offered proof that the brutality was rampant (Scafidi, 1991). The amount of \$8 million is a large amount, but if looked at closely, most civil cases are awarded a large amount of money in damages. Such a case as police brutality could provide the victim with \$500,000. Therefore, the \$8 million would average out to about 16 cases, in a city of 4 million (Scafidi, 1991). There were also about 350 complaints of police overreaction a week against the LAPD by civilians (Scafidi, 1991).

During the Trail

Race played a major role in the trial of O.J. Simpson. There was a crooked cop, Mark Fuhrman, and a crooked police department in which Fuhrman was employed. Both Fuhrman, and others in the LAPD were racist against African Americans. Mark Fuhrman and his racial opinions are provided in more detail in the following subtopic.

Race also played a major role in the defenses case of O.J. Simpson. The defense used the race card as their strategy as well as Mark Fuhrman's racism against him when he was on the stand.

Mark Fuhrman

Figure 2



Mark Fuhrman
www.johnnyleecary.com
April 2006

Mark Fuhrman was the police officer that found the bloody glove at Simpson's home and was the prosecution's key witness (Chidley, 1995). The first time Officer Fuhrman was on the stand he said, under oath, that he was not racist and never used Then, in August 1994 a videotape arose and showed the officer lying on the stand about his racial bias (Chidley, 1995).

The Defense

O.J. Simpson's defense, or "the dream team", was made up of Johnnie Cochran Jr. and Barry Scheck. The defense exposed Fuhrman's racial tendencies and tried to prove that he manipulated evidence of the case. The evidence included the glove, the crime scene, and Simpson's white Bronco where bloodstains were found. Fuhrman had access to the crime scene and the

evidence and the defense wanted to show the jury that he did tamper with the evidence (Chidley, 1995). The defenses also accused the detectives of tampering with the evidence since they did have access to the evidence and were also part of the racist LAPD (Chidley, 1995).

As Cochran played the race card in the defense's closing statements, Scheck focused on the technical details of the murder such as the DNA found at the crime scene and attempted to expose the police's incompetence in handling the evidence (Chidley, 1995).

Media Coverage

The media coverage for the criminal case against O.J. Simpson was much greater than the coverage of the civil case against Simpson (Fairfield, 1997). The coverage of the criminal trial was highly covered because of the discrepancy between white and black Americans. The coverage brought up dramatic and questionable generalizations about the discrepancy between the races, law enforcement, and the justice system (Fairfield, 1997). The media was quick to pick up on these discrepancies to gain viewers.

O.J. Simpson and Black Americans

O.J. was a famous and great entertainer. "real success lies in

Figure 3



O.J. Simpson
www.mugshots.net
June 1994

providing palatable crossover entertainment" (White 1995), such as athletics, music, film, or television (White 1995). White continues to say, "For a small price, you can be rich and famous. All that is asked

of is that you do not rock the boat” (White 1995). O.J. did this, rock the boat, when he was accused of murdering Nicole and Ron. “O.J. proved very adept at doing this, and for a while things ran smoothly. Ultimately, however, that which is perceived as driving the very spirit and soul of black men emerged. The raging, angry, and sexually violent black man was never tamed” (White, 1995). The murder of Nicole and Ron prove that O.J.’s true nature was never tamed. This proved a point that even the most innocent of black men was essentially dangerous.

The Jury

In the criminal case against O.J. Simpson the jury consisted of nine black Americans, two white American and one Hispanic American (Chidley, 1995). All of the black Americans on the jury were all female. In Renee White’s article *The Economy of Race and Racism*, she states, “The suddenly all-black, all-female jury in the Simpson trial supposedly provides evidence that black cannot ‘do’ science and that black women do not ‘receive’ domestic violence.” White means that the women could not understand the evidence and how it was presented. White goes on to say that “Perhaps blacks just have a different code of violence and aggression than others.” and “This group of women is immediately transformed into a nation of potentially violent, certainly undereducated and uncivilized, blacks” (1995).

After the Trail

The effects of the O.J. trial could have possibly divided Americans that is if they were ever united as one.

“Two Nations”

In Joseph Penial’s article “‘Black’ Reconstructed: White supremacy in post civil rights America,” Penial quoted some black scholars that “America is ‘two nations’ divided by social reality, ideology, and praxis as much as color” (1995). This became apparent in the O.J. Simpson trial when race divided the public opinion of whether Simpson was innocent or guilty.

Million Man March

The Million Man March was held in Washington, D.C. on October 16, 1995. The march involved black men who marched for Black leadership (Holmes, 1995). The event was planned, and led, by Louis Farrakhan who stated that the march will unite men and have them take responsibility for themselves, their families, and their communities (Holmes 1995). Before the walk began the participants were asked to pledge “to improve myself spiritually, morally, socially, politically, and economically for the benefit of myself, my family, and my people” (Holmes, 1995).

The event of the march took place only two weeks after the verdict of O.J.’s innocence was announced (Penial, 1995). Penial continues to say that

some of the media wanted to link O.J.'s innocence to the march, especially since O.J. Simpson and Louis Farrakhan represent two opposing, yet equal, archetypes of black American men (1995). "Orenthal James Simpson: athlete, (supposedly) assimilated, not particularly well-read, part boy, and user-friendly black man. On the other side is Louis Farrakhan: angry, critical, demanding, unrelenting, pro-black, and thus fundamentally separatist and anti-white" (Penial, 1995).

Conclusion

In the trial of O.J. Simpson race was not the only factor that influenced the outcome, but it was one of the major influences. The trial of Simpson is an example how racism continues to grow in America, as well as conservatism. The "Even as racism continues to provide the theoretical underpinnings for conservative and anti-black public policy the state has made blacks the racist and black men have accepted Farrakhan's public articulation of Cornel West's misguided notion of nihilism¹ rather than systems of domination, oppression and racism as the reason behind continued black underdevelopment" (Chidley, 1995).

¹ Belief that all values are baseless and that nothing can be known or communicated (Pratt).

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