

Trace Evidence & The O.J. Simpson Double-Murder Trial



Mugshot of O.J. Simpson.

The extreme importance of the need for the accurate collection and analysis of physical trace evidence by police investigators and forensic experts was demonstrated in the O.J. Simpson double-murder trial. Many believe that the mistakes made by the police and forensic experts with regards to the physical trace evidence collected in this case led to the release of a violent murderer.

On the afternoon of June 13, 1994 the bodies of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman were found in the upscale suburb of Brentwood in Los Angeles, California. Both victims were found laying in Ms. Simpson's yard, having died from multiple stab wounds sustained during violent struggle.

Nicole was the ex-wife of famed former NFL superstar/sportscaster/actor, O.J. Simpson. O.J. and Nicole had two young children together - a boy and a girl. Nicole and O.J.'s marriage had been a turbulent one - she had called the police to their home on at least two occasions after O.J. had become violent with her. After they divorced, they had frequent contact as they shared custody of their children.

Ron Goldman was an aspiring actor/model who was working as a waiter at a restaurant in Brentwood. Ron and Nicole were acquaintances and there was some speculation that they were romantically involved, however this has never been confirmed.

One week after the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, O.J. Simpson was charged by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) with two counts of second-degree murder. His double murder trial was one of the longest and most expensive in California history. The vast amount of physical evidence collected by the LAPD against

O.J. Simpson was astounding. Sixty-eight individual pieces of evidence were collected and analyzed from the crime scene, O.J. Simpson's vehicle and estate.

Related Terms:

First-degree murder is committed with premeditation or during the course of a serious crime (eg. arson, sexual assault, kidnapping).

Second-degree murder is a non-premeditated killing resulting from an assault in which death of the victim was a distinct possibility (eg. domestic dispute, street fight).

Examples of physical trace evidence collected and analyzed by the LAPD included:

- A bloody glove found at the crime scene and a matching glove was found behind O.J. Simpson's guest house.
- Cashmere fibers found inside a knit cap found at the murder scene matching fibers from the glove found at O.J. Simpson's estate.
- Fibers from O.J. Simpson's Ford Bronco matched fibers on the glove discovered at O.J. Simpson's house and on the knit cap found at the crime scene.
- Hairs found on Ron Goldman's shirt and inside the knit cap discovered at the crime scene matched O.J. Simpson's hair.
- Hairs on a glove found at O.J. Simpson's estate matched the hair of both the victims.
- A pair of socks contaminated with blood matching Nicole Simpson's blood were found in O.J. Simpson's bedroom.
- Blue/black cotton fibers from Ron Goldman's shirt were found on socks found in O.J. Simpson's bedroom.

One of the tactics that O.J. Simpson's team of defense lawyers used during the trial to prove O.J. Simpson's innocence was to attack the methods used by police investigators and forensic experts to collect, store and analyze all the physical evidence from the case.

Some points raised by O.J. Simpson's defense team about the trace evidence collected in this case:

- The pair of socks with traces of Nicole Simpson's blood on them found in O.J.'s bedroom were seized by a forensic investigator before the LAPD photo unit videotaped O.J. Simpson's estate. The defense team suggested that the socks were not there to begin with and that they had been planted by police.

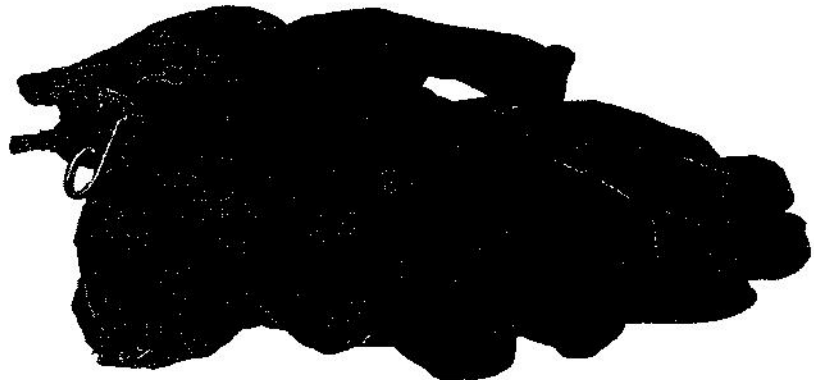
- A photograph of an police investigator, not wearing protective gloves, moving a blood-spattered envelope containing Nicole's mother's glasses from near one of the bodies. Again the defense team claimed this evidence was planted by police

- A bloody glove was moved by officers before it had been labeled and collected in order to allow coroner's officers to take the bodies away from the crime scene. The defense team suggested that the glove was not there to begin with and that it had been planted by police.

- One of the lead homicide detectives covered Nicole's body with a blanket to prevent photographers from taking photos. Defense lawyers pointed out that the blanket should have left microscopic foreign fibers on Nicole's body, but since the LAPD did not find any blanket fibers on her body they suggested that the collection and analysis of trace evidence on the body was done improperly.

The points raised by O.J. Simpson's lawyers defence team about some of the trace evidence collected in this case individually seemed insignificant, but when combined raised doubt in the minds of the jurors about how about the collection of trace evidence was handled by the LAPD. O.J. Simpson's defense team succeeded in convincing the jury that the evidence was mishandled and contaminated by the LAPD, O.J. Simpson was found not guilty of both counts of murder.

Soon after the trial, O.J said that he would hire investigators to find the killers of Nicole and Ron – whether he actually did is unknown. What is known is that ten years has now passed and no other suspects have ever been found, while the LAPD has closed the case. With a large pension from the NFL, O.J. Simpson now lives in Florida with his the two children he had with Nicole.



Trace Evidence & The O.J. Simpson Double-Murder Trial: Related Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. There were numerous types of trace evidence found during the investigation. Outline three specific examples of trace evidence that were found by the LAPD at the crime scene and/or O.J. Simpson's estate. (3 marks)

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

2. Cashmere fibers matching fibers in the bloody glove found at O.J. Simpson's estate were found inside a knit cap, which had been found at the murder scene. Why is the discovery of this type of fiber significant? (2 marks)

3. a) Provide three examples of the mishandling of evidence by the LAPD in the O.J. Simpson case. (3 marks)
- b) After each example, propose how they could have better handled the evidence and/or situation. (3 marks)

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____
