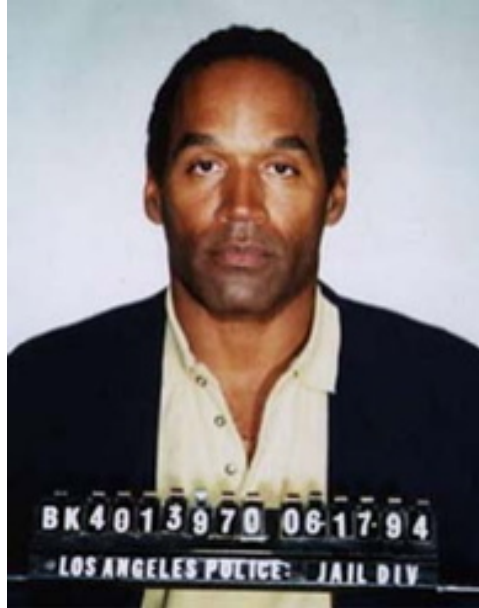


## **Trace Evidence & The O.J. Simpson Double-Murder Trial**



**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, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) charged O.J. Simpson 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.

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*Related Terms:*

**First-degree murder** is committed with premeditation or during the course of a serious crime (e.g. 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 (e.g. domestic dispute, street fight).

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**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 guesthouse.
- 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 was 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.

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

- The pair of socks bearing traces of Nicole Simpson's blood was found in Simpson's bedroom. However, a forensic investigator seized them 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 police had "planted" them.

- A photograph of a 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 that police planted this evidence.
  - Officers moved a bloody glove 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 police had planted it.
  - 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.
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The points raised by O.J. Simpson's lawyers defense 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. Simpson is currently in prison, having been convicted of Robbery charges stemming from a holdup of two sports memorabilia dealers at a Las Vegas hotel room that occurred in 2008.



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

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. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Match each of the following terms with the appropriate definition. (8 marks total)

- A. 68
- B. Trace
- C. Socks
- D. Gloves
- E. Cashmere
- F. O.J. Simpson
- G. Ron Goldman
- H. Nicole Brown Simpson

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Hairs found on Ron Goldman matched this individual.
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Mistakes were made in the collection of this type of evidence.
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ One of these was found at the crime scene, while another was found behind O.J.'s guest house.
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Number of pieces of evidence collected from the crime scene & O.J.'s estate.
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_ Unique type of fibers found inside a knit cap found at the murder scene.
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_ These were seized by police from O.J.'s before a police photo unit had videotaped the area.
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_ Blue/black fibers from this individual's shirt matched fibers found on socks found in O.J.'s bedroom.
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_ Blood matching this individual were found on a pair of socks seized from O.J.'s bedroom.

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*“Wherever he steps, whatever he touches, whatever he leaves, even unconsciously, will serve as silent witness against him. Not only his fingerprints or his footprints, but his hair, the fibers from his clothes, the glass he breaks, the tool he leaves, the paint he scratches, the blood or semen he deposits or collects. All of these and more bear mute witness against him.”*

- Paul L. Kirk, Crime Investigation. Interscience Publishers: New York, 1953.

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

1. *Any 3 of the following would be acceptable:*

- 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 matching O.J. Simpson's hair.
- Hairs on a glove found at O.J. Simpson's estate matching the hair of both the victims.
- Blue/black cotton fibers found on Ron Goldman's shirt matching the fibers on socks found in O.J. Simpson's bedroom.

2. The discovery of cashmere fibers matching the bloody glove from O.J.'s estate inside the knit cap found at the murder scene because cashmere is an expensive and as such a unique and fairly uncommon fiber. To find such an uncommon fiber linked between the two locations is very important piece of evidence.

3. *Any 3 of the following would be acceptable:*

- Example = The pair of socks with traces of Nicole Simpson's blood on them found in O.J.'s bedroom were picked by a forensic investigator before the LAPD photo unit videotaped O.J. Simpson's estate.  
Better method = No evidence should be picked up or handled until after all the videotaping/photographs are completed.
- Example = 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.  
Better method = No evidence should be handled by investigators without protective suit and gloves on.
- Example = A bloody glove was moved by officers before it had been labeled and collected to allow coroner's officers to take the bodies away from the crime scene.  
Better method = Photograph/videotape, collect and label all pieces of evidence before any bodies are moved.
- Example = One of the lead homicide detectives covered Nicole's body with a blanket to prevent photographers from taking photos.  
Better method = Place body in a sterilized body bag and then remove from scene of crime.

4. 1) F 2) B 3) C 4) A 5) E 6) C 7) G 8) H

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