

Campus pauses as trial of century ends

Defense team racial strategy aided doubt

By Chad Lorenz
Senior Editor

Racial issues were apparent throughout the O.J. Simpson trial, but race might have played its biggest part Monday in the jury's acquittal of Simpson, said two local black leaders.

John Harris, special assistant to the vice chancellor for student affairs, said the taped racist comments of Los Angeles police detective Mark Fuhrman proved the possibility of a police conspiracy to frame Simpson.

"That may have been one of the most impacting factors in their decision," Harris said.

The jury was given the job of finding any reasonable doubt that Simpson murdered his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, he said. The racial strategy applied by the defense may have provided that doubt, he said.

But the defense team didn't have to paint a racist picture of Fuhrman, Harris said.

"Fuhrman painted his own picture," he said.

The "race card" played by the defense was effective because American people are sensitive to bigotry, Harris said.

If lawyers can use race strategy the right way, he said, they can generate the desired response to win a case.

Nebraska senator Ernie Chambers of Omaha said race was an issue in the trial, but the jury's decision was simple. They weren't convinced by the evidence presented to them that Simpson was guilty, he said.

Fuhrman's racist attitude destroyed the credibility of the evidence obtained by the Los Angeles Police Department, Chambers said.

It also destroyed the prosecution's credibility.

"They knew they had a racist and a liar," Chambers said. "I think they were their own worst enemy."

The jurors, however, had solid evidence that spoke for itself: a glove that didn't fit, socks that had been tampered with and an impossible time bracket to commit the crime, he said.

Harris said some people would be upset regardless of the verdict.

Harris said he saw students crowding around televisions in the Nebraska Union waiting only for the verdict they wanted to hear.

"Many white people — not all — wanted a guilty verdict," he said. "Many minorities — not all, but many — wanted him acquitted. That's tension right there."

And the verdict doesn't resolve the central issue of the case, he said — two people are dead and police have no other suspects.



A large crowd focuses its attention on a Nebraska Union television Tuesday, moments before the announcement of the not guilty verdicts in the O.J. Simpson trial.

Jeff Haller/DN

Civil suit next for Simpson

By Erin Schulte
Staff Reporter

It's finally over ... maybe.

Although jurors handed down a not guilty verdict Tuesday morning, more O.J. Simpson news may be to come. There are still legal options the prosecution and the victims' families can pursue, Nebraska legal experts said.

Collin Mangrum, a professor of law at Creighton University in Omaha, predicted the families of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman would bring civil charges of wrongful death against Simpson. The families would sue for damages, Mangrum said.

Goldman's family announced Monday a civil lawsuit would be filed. In a civil trial, Simpson would have to testify.

It's easier to find someone guilty in a civil suit, said Jo Potuto, professor of constitutional law at the UNL College of Law. The jury only has to decide if it was more likely than not that the person committed the crime, Potuto said; in

a criminal court the jury must be sure beyond a reasonable doubt.

Therefore, even if Simpson is found not guilty in criminal court, he could be found guilty in civil court, Potuto said.

No more criminal court action will be taken because of the double jeopardy law, Potuto said. Mangrum agreed there would be no further action in the criminal court because of jury nullification (the jury's ability to convict or acquit not withstanding the evidence).

Alan Loya, a second-year UNL law student from Los Angeles, said the prosecution may try to find out if jurors did anything inappropriate, such as view outside news media about the case. The prosecution could then call for a mistrial and issue an appeal.

"No judge would want to get his hands dirty with this case, though. They'd find a way to overturn the appeal," Loya said.

Mangrum said it would be hard for the prosecution to call a mistrial because the jury cannot testify why they decided one way or the other.



Travis Heying/DN

Jennifer Bevins, a senior psychology major, reacts to Tuesday's verdict.

Verdict may hurt victims

By John Fulwider
Senior Reporter

It was a case deemed by some to be a fight for all victims of domestic assault. And it was lost.

After the jury in the O.J. Simpson case returned not guilty verdicts Tuesday, women's rights advocates reacted with disappointment and concern.

The heavily publicized case sends women a difficult message that people are not held accountable for domestic violence, said Madeline Popa, coordinator of the Nebraska chapter of the National Organization for Women.

"It's sending the message that no matter what, you are not going to be able to have people look at your story," she said.

Although the verdict was discouraging, Popa said, it was only one case. The struggle against domestic violence must continue, she said. "There are so many more cases where women need to fight for their life, for their rights," she said.

In Lancaster County, domestic assault cases total more than 2,000 a year, said Deputy County Attorney Nancy Wynner.

Though the Simpson case didn't result in a conviction, she said, that is not reflective of the norm.

"We've got a pretty good conviction

rate in Lincoln," she said. Sometimes those convictions come on a lesser charge, such as disturbing the peace, but Wynner said that was not extremely common. "The key is getting cooperation from the victim," she said.

The not guilty verdicts may clear Simpson of murder, but Popa said he was guilty of another crime. "He is guilty of the domestic violence he imposed on her throughout their marriage," she said. "That also will stay with him."

Lisa Cauble, UNL Victim's Services coordinator, said she was not sure if the verdict itself would make a difference.

But the coverage of the trial, she said, has brought domestic violence into the national spotlight. And that's good, she said. "People have been made aware of it," she said, "and know that something needs to be done about it."

Wynner agreed, but said that attention was lost as the trial dragged on. "The focus switched from domestic violence to race," Wynner said.

"The justice system will not always fail women," she said. "We're concerned that women in the community know that we are still here for them."

Senior editor Brian Sharp contributed to this report.

Reaction

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more accounting major. "It didn't add up. He was railroaded."

McElligott shrieked and jumped from her seat on the union floor after the first verdict was read. Her celebration had started even before Simpson mouthed "Thank you" to an international television audience.

The crowd at Lazzari's sat silent while the verdicts were revealed.

Expressions of shock and disbelief engulfed most of the patrons. At one table, someone clapped. At another, a woman lifted her hand to her mouth.

One customer, Miriam Davis of Lincoln, said the verdict sent society back to an era when violence against women was tolerated.

"We've gone back in time," Davis said. "If you're the right person with the right attorney, you can get off. Women — look out."

A similar silence swallowed the lounge at the Rec Center. An interpreter for a deaf student stood on a chair at the front of the room and signed the reporters' commentaries and the comments being made in the courtroom. There was nothing to interpret from the room around her — it was quiet.

"This is bigger than the Super Bowl," one man said. His comment

"My opinion doesn't matter. The jury has spoken."

BUDDY KUALAPAI

UNL student

was answered by nervous laughter.

Noise filled the room as soon as the verdicts were announced. Some students shook their heads. Others laughed.

Senior Alicia Haugen said she was relieved the trial was over.

"If he were found guilty, there would probably be a lot of appeals," Haugen said. "People want this thing to be over."

Buddy Kualapai, who came upstairs just to hear the verdicts, said he wasn't sure if the decision was fair.

"My opinion doesn't matter," Kualapai said. "The jury has spoken."

Moments after the verdicts were announced, all of the crowds began to clear.

Reggie Barnes, a freshman psychology major, stayed in the union to watch the decisions be replayed.

"Say it again," Barnes said, bowing his hands to the big screen television with a frozen picture of Simpson. Barnes and a group of friends

agreed that race played a major factor in the Simpson case. If the victims were not white, they said, the case would have received less publicity.

Mark Byars, a senior accounting major, stood about 10 feet from the big-screen television as the court clerk read the verdicts.

Byars, who wore a blue suit with an American flag necktie, said that race was not a major factor in the trial. However, he said, two cases have been ongoing: one in the courtroom and one in the public.

"I thought he was guilty. And I did think he would be convicted," Byars said. "Obviously the jury didn't think so."

After the verdict was read at Lazzari's, conversation and the clatter of plates and silverware filled the restaurant once again.

As slowly as the crowd grew, it began to thin out, leaving just a few people in the pizzeria by 12:30 p.m.

From the Avery Hall Lounge, Mike Stricklin shook his head. The journalism professor said he was never sure whether Simpson was guilty or innocent.

"I'm glad I didn't have to face the question," Stricklin said. "It's a lot easier to let someone else decide it."

Reported by Daily Nebraskan staffers Jeff Zeleny, Doug Peters, Melanie Brandert, Thor Schrock and Beth Narans.