

# Simpson verdict anything but a feeling of closure

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I'm supposed to believe the O.J. Simpson guilty verdict is a purging. It supposedly represents America collectively issuing a makeup call for 1995 by rendering a judgment that could send the 61-year-old Simpson to prison for much of the rest of his life.

But I don't believe any of that was accomplished last week in Las Vegas. All this verdict does is prove that race, wealth and celebrity are just as relevant in 2008 as they were in 1995, when Simpson was acquitted of murdering his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, Ronald Goldman.

In response to the guilty verdict, David Cook, the attorney who represents Goldman's father Fred, said: "Is this closure for Fred Goldman? No. Is this closure for America? Yes."



*AP Photo/Daniel Gluskoter/Pool*

The verdict means O.J. likely will be sentenced to between 10 and 15 years.

With all due respect to Cook, it's not closure for me, because I accepted O.J.'s acquittal 13 years ago. I never treated the 1995 verdict like it was the greatest injustice in American history. I didn't care if O.J. played golf, learned the mambo or ate a bologna sandwich.

Aren't those all things that a "free man" is supposed to do?

"I think it's closure for traditional white America," said Dr. Carl Taylor, a sociologist at Michigan State. "[For African-Americans], this won't be a closure. It will be an opening. It will be ripping the wound open."

It's hard to feel closure when you don't believe O.J.'s guilty verdict was about real justice. Given the reaction to the verdict, the case is clouded by a strong odor of payback and revenge.

Maybe you're fine with that, but I'm not.

O.J.'s imprisonment wasn't Al Capone being nabbed for tax evasion, because that took thought, planning, precision and the FBI collecting a litany of evidence. The caper that undid O.J. was engineered by a bunch of buffoons and amateur criminals, who were given a high degree of credibility in a court of law. Thomas Riccio, the principal figure in the case, admitted he set up O.J. for cheap fame and cash. Riccio, who has done a total of eight years in prison, sold the infamous audiotapes of O.J. demanding his belongings for \$210,000. Of course, Riccio, who received immunity, never explained how he got O.J.'s collectibles. And lucky for him, the prosecution didn't bother to ask.

There are also serious questions about whether the jury was unbiased. According to an Associated Press report, five of the 12 jurors -- all of whom were white -- wrote in their questionnaires they disagreed with the 1995 verdict, and several others didn't even answer the question.

So much for an unbiased jury of one's peers.

The "experts" now predict O.J. will spend the rest of his life in jail, which is an interesting leap when you consider that Simpson will come to his December sentencing with a clean criminal record. What millions of Americans "thought" he did 13 years ago doesn't constitute an actual conviction.

But life in prison for sports memorabilia? Life, when many witnesses who testified in the trial had rap sheets that could carpet a 2,000-square-foot home? Bobby Brown has been arrested eight times -- including once for sexual battery and another time for getting into a violent altercation with ex-wife Whitney Houston -- and he has never even done more than a month in jail.

Understand this: I don't feel sorry for O.J. because his poor judgment ultimately led to his undoing. No matter how much he didn't trust the police -- and with his previous experiences, can you blame him? -- going to a hotel room to retrieve his possessions by force was incredibly stupid. Maybe O.J. wouldn't be in this mess if, instead of stealing cable and having bouts of road rage, he had moved to Paraguay and become a soybean exporter.

Still, the reaction to Simpson's guilty verdict is just more of the same irrational, often racist, hatred that has dogged him for years. You wouldn't know it now, but O.J. was

once considered one of the greatest running backs to ever play. Some think O.J., who won the Heisman Trophy at USC and later became the first NFL player to rush for more than 2,000 yards with the Buffalo Bills, was better than Jim Brown.

No doubt, O.J. has done some despicable things -- the "If I Did It" book was a new low -- but his greatest crime still seems to be betraying mainstream America, which came to love him not only as an outstanding athlete but an actor, pitchman and broadcaster.

The guilty verdict is merely an extension of how O.J. has been treated the last 13 years. It always was considered appropriate to refer to O.J. as a murderer, even though the law says otherwise. Yet no one would dare still call William Kennedy Smith a rapist. And Smith also settled a civil suit after being accused by another woman of sexual assault.

Last year, O.J. was asked to leave a restaurant in Louisville, Ky., the night before the Kentucky Derby because his presence was supposedly unnerving the customers. Meanwhile, Phil Spector and Robert Blake apparently dine unbothered.

"The public reacted more angrily to the acquittal in this case than the public would ever react to the execution of an innocent person," Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz told PBS' "Frontline" during a special retrospective on O.J.'s murder case a couple years ago. Dershowitz was a member of Simpson's defense team in 1995. "This was taken personally by whites in America in a way that no other case ever affected them. This was somehow a legitimization of the pent-up racism that I think Americans have had to hold back since the 1950s."

This conviction seems to have stirred up plenty of feelings. None of which is closure.

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