

O.J. Simpson: "The Juice Is Loose"

On a sultry June night in the eastern states and late afternoon in California, once again, American eyes were held, fascinated, by their TV screens. The media event of 1994 was beginning to unfold. Seven news helicopters swarmed around those of the LAPD and transmitted live the police chase and eventual arrest of O.J. (the Juice) Simpson, a football hero, sportscaster, and media celebrity, who was accused of the murder of his ex-wife, Nicole Simpson, and her male friend, Ron Goldman. O.J. Simpson is Black, the dead bodies were white. At least twelve police cruisers followed the white Ford Bronco at a safe distance, making no attempt to intercept, as O.J.'s friend Al Cowlings drove the vehicle carefully along the Los Angeles freeways while O.J., in the back seat, used his cellular phone to talk to his mother and the police used it to talk to him. Other motorists, listening to the event on their radios, pulled over to allow the cavalcade to pass, and, as it did, many waved encouragement and support to O.J. Still others who had been watching at home on television drove to the freeway with hastily lettered banners proclaiming their support for their hero. They packed the freeway overpasses, shouting "We love you, O.J." and, recalling an ironically appropriate chant from his days as a record-setting running back, "The Juice is loose." The procession eventually came to a halt in O.J.'s driveway, where the star sat for an hour longer in the Bronco, apparently threatening suicide, while the TV cameras hovered overhead and the commentators worried that the fading light would rob them of the climactic pictures. As it turned out, there was no dramatic climax. Dimly seen by the cameras and viewers, O.J. finally left the white Bronco, and police escorted him up the path and into his house.

I joined nearly 100 million other Americans in watching these events, and together we formed what was at the time the second-largest TV audience ever (the first day of the Gulf War had won the largest). Some sixteen months later, the delivery of the not-guilty verdicts at O.J. Simpson's trial was the most watched event in the history of television. As I watched the slow-speed chase, I began to get the eerie feeling that what I was watching was a rerun, or at least a new episode in a familiar series. There were uncanny echoes of Anita Hill's sexual ha-

the same articulation of O.J. with pornography.³ The power of this stereotype of bad Black sexuality was evident in the lengths to which the Republican senators had to go in order to deny Clarence Thomas's alleged taste for pornography.⁴

In the culture and politics of contemporary America, the Black male is figured not only through criminality and bad sexuality, but also through narcotics. "The drug problem" has become a code for "the Black problem," and the war on drugs of the Reagan-Bush administrations has been widely and justifiably de-coded by African Americans at least as a war on Blacks. Narcotizing the Black body serves to magnify the threat of its uncontrollability. The media were awash with stories of the amount of cocaine taken by O.J. and Nicole during their marriage. Other stories linked O.J. with the drug trade, and suggested that the murders resulted from disputes among drug dealers. O.J. Simpson was media saturated with drugs. Rodney King, too, was filled with drugs: Sergeant Stacey Koon "knew" he was high on PCP, a drug that produces a superhuman (read "animal") strength; similarly, the media attributed the brutality (read "animality") of these murders to the effects of drugs. White America magnifies the threat that terrifies it by simultaneously sexualizing and narcotizing racial difference.

This figure of the Black male out of control is a cultural nightmare for whites that has played a central role in all the racial media events of the nineties. Its resonance and its terror are so deep because of the symbolic and social connections between the individual body of the Black male and the social body of Black America. If the individual body of Rodney King escaped the control of the LAPD officers, there was the danger, realized twelve months later, of the body of Black L.A. escaping the same white control. In their coverage of the first two days of the L.A. uprisings, the media constantly voiced the white fear that the disorder would spread from Black L.A. to white L.A. and from L.A. to the nation at large. The few instances of looting in Beverly Hills occasioned as much media coverage as and more media panic than the widespread destruction in South-Central, and almost every broadcast of the events in Los Angeles linked them to lesser, but still whitey terrifying, uprisings in Atlanta, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, and even to the absence of an uprising in New York. When O.J. failed to keep his promise to turn himself in, Gil Garcetti, the district attorney for Los Angeles County, issued a public statement in which he warned: "I want to say to the entire community—Mr. Simpson is a fugitive from justice. If you assist him in any way, you will be committing a felony." Behind the warning, according to journalist John Dunne, was the fear that O.J. might disappear into the communal Black body of South-Central, and that a police search for him there might produce a "riotous conflagration."⁵ The D.A.'s adjective "entire" strained to bring the residents of South-Central temporarily and strategically into the U.S. community from which they are more normally excluded (for example, by the media coverage of the uprisings [see p. 164], by Dan Quayle's description of the "underclass" being "disconnected" from normal society, and by Judge Joyce Karlin's exclusion of Latasha Harlins from the "society" that needs protection). Dis-

missment in Nicole Simpson's battering, and O.J.'s drama seemed the final scene in a story line in which Bill Cosby turned into a Hortonized Rodney King. It seemed that all the cultural currents in the media events analyzed earlier in this book were boiling to the surface once again.

Figuring O.J.

O.J. Simpson, Rodney King, Clarence Thomas, Willie Horton, Mike Tyson, and Marion Barry are all different people, but they are all resonant media figures of the 1990s because they are all Black men whose mediated racial identity was sexualized, whose masculinity was racialized, and who were all, whether found guilty or not, criminalized: race, sex, and (white) law and order were mixed differently in the figuring of each. Their criminalization allowed the white social order to figure itself as the "defender-victim." As I have argued, whiteness is normally an unmarked space from which to view its racial others, but it does allow itself strategically chosen presences, of which the defender-victim is one of the most useful. The firefighters and paramedics who were allegedly shot at during the L.A. uprisings were one form of this visible whiteness; Nicole Simpson was another.

The white imagination already held four ready-made image clusters by which to refigure O.J. The first was that of the *lone Black man*, such as Bill Cosby and the old O.J., a figure who proved not only that Blacks could make it in a white society, but that whites could love them and welcome them into their homes, electronically at least, as family friends.

But in the racial climate of contemporary America, the figure of the tame Black male can never shake itself free of its sinister obverse, the *Black male out of control*. One form of this figure is the image of the Black male criminal, and photographs of O.J. in handcuffs slid easily into this figuring. So, too, did the police mug shot of O.J. It was used for the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek*; it led the *New York Times* front-page story, and it reappeared time and again in the tabloids. In all these images, the familiar O.J. was hardly recognizable, but that was not their point: what was perfectly recognizable was the even more familiar image of the Black male criminal. Not content with the ability of the mug shot to tap into the criminalized meanings of Blackness on its own, *Time* "blackened" him even more; the picture used on the cover darkened O.J.'s skin by several shades, a move that provoked angry discussion on at least one African American electronic bulletin board.⁶ Contributors accused *Time* of "niggerizing" O.J., of "tapping into deep-seated racism and capitalizing on it" and of taking America through the Willie Horton incident once again.

Hortonizing O.J. involved linking him not only with racialized criminality, but also with "bad" sexuality. "Days before murder, O.J. rents sleazy porno flick showing a blonde attacked at knife point," screamed an *Enquirer* headline. "O.J. made date with nude beauty he saw in Playboy" was the way the *Globe* made

course is not a representation of a reality that precedes it, it helps constitute the reality that it describes and knows. The discursive figure of the Black man out of control is actively constitutive of social realities, such as those of the legal system, of policing, of employment preferences, of welfare policies, of gun rights—and of white fear.

The third cluster of images in the mediation of O.J. consisted of those portraying *family values*. These showed a happy, conventional family of Mom, Dad, and two beautiful children that even the religious right would be proud to endorse. The only unconventional note was sounded by the racial identities of the parents. When originally published, the photos may well have been articulated with those of O.J. as the tamed Black man, to signify that "family values" can overcome racial difference. But the divorce, the stories of wife beating, and the murders allowed the racial meanings of the photos to surface. Now they could perform the same job as Dan Quayle when he blamed the L.A. "riots" on the lack of family values in Black America. In this imagination of the white right, the traditional family upon which the stability of U.S. society depends is implicitly white, and the threat to it, therefore, colored. As the murderous Black husband, O.J. could now be as culpable as all those Black fathers whose absence Dan Quayle latched onto in order to make the single, Black, immature mother on welfare figure everything that the real American family is not.

White America could use simple but powerful stereotypes to make its sense of the interracial marriage, but in Black America the issue was fraught with many more contradictions. Some African Americans used the racial difference between O.J.'s wives (his first marriage was to an African American) to point to the danger of "sleeping with the enemy" and to argue that, in the light of the shortage of "good" Black men, those who marry white women deprive their race of a much-needed resource and contribute to the intraracial negation of Black women. Others made the more moderate point that successful Black men were always cut down by whites, whether justifiably or not, and that this case must be understood as typical, not of the threat of the Black male to the white social order, but of the white threat to the successful Black male.

These images of the violently destroyed biracial family led inexorably into those of the fourth cluster. These were the most horrific, exploitable, and exploited of all. What they showed was *the blood of the white woman*. The murders were excessively bloody, and images of the huge red stains on the paving of the sidewalk were widely reproduced in the media. As I have already noted, America has a long tradition of using the beauty and vulnerability of the white woman as a metaphor for its social order and of making the sexualized figure of the male stand for the threat of the other race. But the sexualizations of racial fear in the American Indian and the Japanese soldier were comparatively short-lived; the sexual threat of the Black male, however, has a far longer and more active history.

Statistically, Black-on-white violence is comparatively rare, and white women are in far greater danger from white men than from Black, yet in the white imagination the threat spreads wide and deep. We should not be surprised, then, to find that media events that add a real-world dimension to this imaginary one are disproportionately fascinating. The O.J. affair, the beating of Reginald Denny, and, before the events of this book, the "Central Park jogger case" all became the intensely powerful media events they did in part because they provided very rare instances that could ground imagination in social reality. Reginald Denny's beating was quite untypical of the events that took place during the Los Angeles uprisings, for whites were rarely involved in the violence. It was, however, typical of white fear. Reginald Denny was the perfect figure of the white victim.

The white imagination was a storehouse of ready-made images upon which all four image clusters could draw for their resonance and to which they contributed. But there was one new image whose resonance may have been the same, but whose iconography was unique to this case: *the white Bronco*. The white Bronco became synonymous with O.J. Simpson. He and Al Cowlings each owned one, and O.J. gave at least one to a woman friend; the TV commentators during the chase used the phrase almost ad nauseam and, according to anecdotal evidence, white Broncos sold out of car dealerships across the nation. There were elements in the image that resonated powerfully with elements in the national imagination.

Part of the image's power lies in its obviousness—like O.J. himself, the white Bronco was excessively photogenic. Semioticians, however, would look for meanings underlying that obviousness. They would point to the politics of articulating a bronco with a Black man (even through the association of the unspoken word *back* with both) and would show how white meanings of the untamed, of the masculine, of sexuality, and, of course, of Blackness are activated in that linkage. Throwing the color white into the mix produces an almost uncontrollable semiotic excess. The white Bronco became a signifier of white society; technological, advanced, powerful, expensive, but available to all—the features proliferate almost endlessly—and inside it were two Black men, previously tamed but now reverted to their "wild nature," armed, one accused of killing a white woman, chased by the police, watched by the millions. There were actually two white Broncos (Al Cowlings's, used in the chase, and O.J.'s, allegedly used in the murders), but they merged into a composite that, in literally bearing both "The Black Male" and the stains of the white woman's blood, supplied white America with a materiality on which to ground its imagination. The hypervisibility of the white Bronco secured the imaginary to the "truth."

The fascination of the chase depended not only on semiotics, but also on surveillance. It invited the TV viewer to sit in the panoptic seat and experience the pleasure of the power to see. For those whose lives are lived comfortably within the boundaries of the normal, this pleasure may have been relatively unalloyed, for they are less aware of the surveilling eye bearing down upon them. For those

whom the dominant society has abnormlized, however, the pleasure appears to have been more conflicted. Asadullah Samad, for instance, saw the chase as a high-tech replay of the old nigger hunts in the South and the media images of the handcuffed O.J. as "nothing but the kind of pre-lynching parading that has always taken place, whether they had the right man or not." Samad heard clear echoes of the lynch mob in D.A. Garcetti's public proclamation that "O.J. Simpson will be brought to justice." He commented:

No scarier words have ever been issued when it comes to Blacks and justice. Black men's hearts skipped nationwide. We knew what their justice for us means. Code words for "Look out for this runaway Nigger, and when we find your Black ass . . ." The media caught the cue. Once they put that call out on you, you're fair game. We all knew what it meant. . . . Nobody expected to see O.J. alive again.⁵

A Black man whom I interviewed used a telling metaphor to describe how he watched the chase on TV: "My eye was in the helicopter with the police," he said, "but my heart was in the Bronco with O.J." Another felt similarly conflicted; he told me how watching the chase reminded him of how, at some level, he was always aware of "the eye in the sky" that was watching him, and that having this eye made visible and being able to look through its lens both reassured him that his feeling of being constantly surveilled was justified and disturbed him by giving him a taste of the pleasure generated by the power of panopticism. Watching the white Bronco from above, he said, "made me see what I feel I look like."

Neither Orwell nor Foucault, the founding theorists of panopticism, envisaged the possibility that the media might make panoptic power public and thus both share its pleasures and expose its operation. Nor did they foresee that the panoptic would be racialized so that the seeing eye would be white and its object colored. Surveillance has become a technology of whiteness, and thus, although it is penetrating deeply into our society, its penetration is differential. The lives of the white mainstream are still comparatively untouched by it, but in Black America, its penetration is deep. Technology does not, of itself, determine even that it will be used, let alone how. But when it technologizes a social power that is already, if less efficiently, in operation, then its deployment is both widespread and rapid. The extension of video surveillance can be explained, in large measure, by the perfect fit between the technology's ability to see racial difference and the need of whiteness to know it. The Black male, on the streets or in the Korean grocery store, is the paradigmatic object of surveillance, for it is his body that makes the whitely threatening other both visible and knowable. In his hyper-visible presence and otherness whiteness inscribes its own absence, invisibility, and normality. The Black man is, indeed, he who must be seen.

Wife Battering and the Media

As in the case of Anita Hill, the women's movement was singular and certain in its stance in the case of O.J. Simpson: its representatives were as successful in using Nicole Simpson's murder to focus the nation's attention upon wife battering as they had been in using Anita Hill's testimony to turn it toward sexual harassment. This use of Nicole Simpson's murder echoed that of Anita Hill's harassment in one unfortunate aspect, for the singular focus on the gender politics of the affair ignored, or even erased, those of race. The attempts to raise the nation's consciousness regarding wife battering met remarkably little opposition: it was as though the media and the nation experienced a form of confessional relief at being able to bring the "hidden crime" into the light of public inspection. So newspaper after newspaper and show after show on TV linked Nicole Simpson's death with those of the fourteen hundred women murdered annually by their male partners, and the media took pains not only to link her history of marital abuse to the half million cases brought before the authorities each year, but also, in an unusually confessional mode, to cast their own role in covering up O.J.'s abusive relationship as symptomatic of the more general cover-up by which America refuses to recognize one of its most common crimes. Their failure to report widely on the previous occasions that police had been called to save Nicole from his assaults, one of which had resulted in an arrest, was seen, with uncommon insight, as part of the problem. Later, during the trial itself, the women's movement grasped another opportunity: the lead prosecutor, Marcia Clark, was faced with losing custody of her children because her ex-husband claimed that she was devoting too much time to the trial to give them proper maternal care. Spokeswomen were quick to cast this as a typical example of male backlash that sought to punish women for escaping the kitchen.

The serious media discussed the statistics of spouse abuse and the failure of courts and police to respond adequately, and they interviewed representatives of women's organizations and women's shelters. The tabloids took a different tack, and surrounded their O.J. coverage with other stories of wife beating. They made no explicit connections among the stories, but allowed their readers to turn the pages and learn of spouse abuse involving celebrities such as Queen Elizabeth, Mike Tyson, Elizabeth Taylor, Dolly Parton's sister, Whitney Houston, and Halle Berry. These revelations of the hidden lives of celebs were interspersed with those of ordinary people, of truck drivers who admitted to wife beating, and of women who had suffered it. It is hard to know which of the different ways of establishing that spouse abuse is both widespread and widely repressed is the more effective.

Another difference between the high- and the lowbrow news was that the highbrow was self-critical of its failure to pay adequate attention to earlier reports of O.J.'s wife battering, and saw this as symptomatic of society's more gen-

eral repression of the crime. The tabloids, on the other hand, congratulated themselves in screaming headlines for telling their readers about the abuse that the rest of the media covered up. The *National Enquirer*, for example, reprinted the headlines of its stories of O.J.'s wife battering from 1989, 1991, and 1992, together with the words of "famed psychologist" Dr. Joyce Brothers, "If others in the news business had done what the ENQUIRER did—digging hard five years ago and exposing the awful truth about this football hero—maybe Nicole would be alive today."⁶⁶

The *National Enquirer* can also claim some credit for daring to break the almost total silence on the close connections between sports and domestic violence. In a story headlined "Why O.J. and other sports stars turn violent toward women," it gives its readers top psychologists' accounts of "superjock syndrome" and lists a few of the many sports figures who have been convicted of violence toward women. Dr. Susan Forward, Nicole Simpson's therapist and author of a book titled *Obsessive Love: When It Hurts Too Much to Let Go*, is quoted, "O.J. Simpson and others like him are suffering from Superjock Syndrome—but their wives are the real victims." Dr. Joyce Brothers explains further, "Superjock Syndrome has devastated the careers of scores of top professionals. These athletes, particularly football players, are conditioned to deal with any obstacle by physically overcoming it with aggression. And this training on the field frequently extends into their personal lives. They become prone to violence when frustrated—including violence against women."⁶⁷ Alongside the headline is a small "reminder" picture of O.J. in handcuffs. The NFL appears to have recognized the problem, for in 1994 it sent twenty-eight domestic violence counselors to its teams' training camps.

The *Enquirer* story did not, however, extend its discussion of sports and domestic violence into the homes of fans. It did not remind its readers what women's organizations know all too well—that the busiest day of the year for women's shelters is Super Bowl Sunday, as the male fans of the losing team work out their frustration on their women's bodies. Though the media constantly circulate public anxiety about violence, the violence in question is, implicitly, "street" violence, for this is the violence that those privileged by gender, class, and race believe is most likely to happen to them. It is a violence directed *against* established power relations, and is thus readily seen as a public problem. Domestic violence against women, however, is violence *along* established power relations and is thus typically repressed from public discussions of the "problem of violence." Though wife battering may exceed acceptable norms for exercising gender power (and even this is questioned by some), it does not contradict them.

Women did manage to insert domestic abuse into the national concern with violence. Sports, however, were kept well out of it. America is happy to identify its entertainment system as a primary cause of its violence, for that keeps its social system off the agenda for critical interrogation. But its consistent finger pointing at Hollywood as the culprit diverts attention from sports, and allows it

to ignore the stronger evidence of direct links between sports and violence than between screen fiction and violence. The notion that there is a socially negative dimension to sports appears to be unthinkable in mainstream America, and in all the public and private discussion of the issues in the O.J. affair, it was hardly ever raised.

Media Events

The media obviously play a central role in turning events into media events, for their saturation coverage is necessary. Central though their role is, however, the media are not the sole, or even the main, determinants. The prime determinants of which events become media events must be sought in the social order of which the media are only one component. The more America becomes divided along its multiple axes of social difference, of which race, ethnicity, gender, class, and age are only some of the most salient, the more frequently media events and figures that dramatize these fault lines will occur, the more intensely they will grab the American imagination, and the more bitter will be the struggles to infect them in one direction or another. A media event is significant because of the inevitability of its recurrence and the clarity it gives to murky anxieties and political differences: it is significant because it serves as a public arena wherein the American people engage in urgent political debate and in sometimes effective political action. Media events are the shaping events of a postmodern world.

Of course, the O.J. Simpson affair would not have become the massive media event that it did without decisions made by media executives. Local news executives did decide to send seven news helicopters to cover O.J.'s chase and arrest, and the network executives did decide to interrupt regularly scheduled programming to cover the events live. Similarly, long stretches of the preliminary hearings in the case were given live TV coverage (in some markets as many as forty-two channels carried them). All networks carried key moments of the trial live, CNN and Court TV devoted much, if not all, of their schedules to live coverage, and networks and cable channels had nightly summaries and analyses. The publishing industry was equally quick off the mark: within six months of the arrest, six books on the affair had reached the *New York Times* best-seller list. Media production was instrumental in changing the events into media events, but the origins of media productions lie outside the walls of media headquarters. Indeed, it is possible to argue that the decisions were made not in the executive offices of media corporations, but in the living rooms and bars of America. An event becomes a media event not at the whim of the media alone, but also to the extent that the media give discursive visibility to cultural currents that long precede the event and will long outlast it.

For instance, of the ten occasions before the O.J. chase on which the networks suspended schedules to carry live events, nine were presidential—either addresses by President Clinton or the death and funeral of former President

ways held against whites," she writes, "is 'bad science,' their habit of putting theory and 'scientific investigation' before people, before any obligation to community."⁹

In court, scientific evidence is equally often seen as "white." In many of my interviews with African Americans about the Simpson trial, I heard the belief that scientific evidence always seemed to end up proving the guilt of Black defendants and never their innocence. In this light, the arguments of Simpson's defense team against the DNA evidence were more than just "scientific" arguments about its accuracy; they were also arguments about racially different knowledges. Johnnie Cochran, the Black lawyer who led for the defense, cross-examined police witnesses for days to show how their procedures contaminated evidence, particularly bloodstains, upon which scientific results were based. His constant use of the term "contamination" to describe white handling of blood was clever, for it directly opposed the white supremacist knowledge that contamination is the genetic threat of Black blood to white. His cross-examination of the police was as relentless as the beating of Rodney King, and many of my Black interviewees commented on their pleasure in seeing a Black man beat up on white cops on television, even if only verbally. For them, those days of cross-examination provided a rare, if not unique, reversal of racial power.

Johnnie Cochran also argued strongly to have racist remarks made by Detective Mark Fuhrman admitted as evidence. According to a police witness at administrative board hearings held in 1984 and 1985, Fuhrman had been identified as a leader of groups called Men Against Women and White Anglo Saxon Police-men.¹⁰ The defense claimed to have witnesses who would testify that Fuhrman had boasted of pulling over Black men driving with white women, that he had called interracial marriage "a crime against nature," and that he had expressed the desire to see all "niggers gathered together and burned."¹¹ Toward the end of the trial, the so-called Fuhrman tapes exploded onto the scene. The tapes were recordings of conversations between the detective and Laura Hart McKinny, a screenwriter who had interviewed Fuhrman in hopes that his experiences would help her write a realistic screenplay. On them, Fuhrman uses the word *nigger* forty-one times, and on at least eighteen occasions he boasts about framing Black suspects, planting evidence, conspiring with other cops, lying to his superiors, and torturing, beating, and even killing suspects. The matter-of-factness and at times pride in his tone of voice shocked the nation as the tapes were played and replayed across the airwaves. It seemed that the only people who had not heard the tapes were the sequestered jurors. Eventually, the judge ruled that they could hear one excerpt and read the transcript of one other in which Fuhrman called African Americans niggers. Under cross-examination during the prosecution's case, Fuhrman had sworn that he had never used the word in the past ten years. After the verdicts were rendered, members of the jury said that their limited access to the tapes had made no difference: even before the tapes were brought into evidence, they had identified Fuhrman as a racist and a liar who

264 Nixon—and the tenth was a natural disaster, an earthquake in Los Angeles. None of the presidential events became a media event. It is not the media coverage alone that produces media events, but a coalition between media interests and popular interests. This point is important, because, although we must always maintain a critical eye, sometimes a sharply critical one, upon the media, we must not shut the other one that should be turned upon ourselves.

Although the media may not be solely responsible for turning events into media events, all events that matter in a postmodern society must be multimeditated and the way we know them will always depend upon media technology. As the police cruisers and helicopters "chased" O.J. along the freeways, TV commentators and cameras in helicopters relayed the events over the airwaves and cut to reporters on the ground who were monitoring police radio to learn of what was being said on cellular phones. People phoned friends and family to tell them to watch the events on TV and to discuss what they were watching. Those with access to electronic bulletin boards swung into instant communication; talk radio received and broadcast calls by the thousands. Local people watching the chase on TV went to O.J.'s house to be there at the showdown, but took their portable TVs with them in the knowledge that the live event was not a substitute for the mediated one but a complement to it. On seeing themselves on their own TVs, they waved to themselves, for postmodern people have no problem in being simultaneously and indistinguishably livepeople and mediapeople.

Science, Truth, and Evidence

Throughout the enlightenment project, science's claim to produce "objective truth" has been widely believed in Western societies. It may come as a shock to some, then, to hear to that some African Americans believe that scientific truth is not universal but white, if not in its essence, at least in its uses. They point, with much justification, to their knowledge that the typical "objective truth" discovered by science about racial differences always seems to work against them and in favor of whites. The difference in T-cell counts that was so useful to those who allegedly developed AIDS as an ethnic weapon is only one case in point. Another is provided by the publication of *The Bell Curve* during the period of the Simpson affair.¹² The bitter and widespread controversy that the book provoked centered upon its argument that genetic differences account for African Americans' scoring, on average, lower than European Americans on intelligence tests. Besides renewing the long-held belief characteristic of the essentialist racism of white supremacy that Black people are naturally or genetically inferior to whites, the book also argued that the United States should concentrate its educational efforts upon those with the higher intelligence, and so, presumably, widen the racial gap even further. Shirley Anne Williams, an African American cultural critic, puts the whiteness of science into a broader context: for her, science is evidence of white inhumanity. "One of the things Black people have al-

had the motive, opportunity, and character to plant the bloody glove that was the strongest single piece of circumstantial evidence in the prosecution's case.

In the United States at large, people struggled to cast Fuhrman's undeniable racism as either untypical and unique to him or as utterly typical and institutionalized in the LAPD and deeply sedimented throughout white America. In the trial, the difference between institutionalized and individualized racism became crucially important. The prosecution argued that the amount of planted pieces of evidence alleged by the defense would have required an elaborate conspiracy that was logistically impossible. If, however, such racially motivated behavior is institutionalized, however unofficially, no explicit conspiracy is necessary: the actions of individual officers would be institutionally and not individually determined, and thus could be mutually supportive without the benefit of a conspiracy. On one side of the struggle was the president of the Urban League, who commented, "To actually hear the tapes drives the point home that the legacy of racism and brutality in the LAPD is deeply institutionalized." On the other side, the president of the City Police Protection League said, "It is essential . . . to show the public this is just a lone individual and not an endemic problem."¹²

Police racism is widely known in Black America, but rarely admitted in white courts. Equally widely known and equally rarely admitted is the planting of evidence by police to frame Black defendants. One Black woman told me that she was willing to bet that every African American personally knew someone who had been framed in this way. The media stories of O.J.'s framing must have resonated significantly with this knowledge. In an op-ed piece in *USA Today*, Gerry Spence, a white trial attorney, wrote that he had "yet to encounter a Black person who does not believe that O.J. was set up," and concluded that "in the Black community, the prevailing belief is that the police will do anything to do in a Black man."¹³ He compared the O.J. case to lynching, with which the police were often complicit, as the "appropriate" fate for a Black man who sexually threatened a white woman. Charles Lindman, a former president of the L.A. County Court Bar Association, was also persuaded by the evidence of framing. He considered that the defense had proved that the police not only planted the bloody glove, but also planted O.J. Simpson's blood at the crime scene and Nicole Simpson's in his Bronco and on a pair of socks found in his bedroom.¹⁴

The credibility of "police-truth" differs significantly in Black and white America: a CNN poll taken after the three weeks of intensive cross-examination of police witnesses revealed that 70 percent of whites believed that police tell the truth on the witness stand, whereas only 33 percent of African Americans do. On CNN, a white and a Black lawyer differed sharply in their reactions to the poll.¹⁵ The African American argued that Black people, especially those living in Los Angeles, have very different experiences of the police from those of whites, and that these differences will necessarily inform their evaluation of the credibility of police witnesses (it is therefore relevant that 75 percent of the jurors claimed that

they themselves or family members had had "a negative experience of law enforcement"). The white lawyer argued that jurors could "rise above" their position and evaluate evidence "fairly" (the color connotations of the word are hardly coincidental). CBS's account of race in the Simpson trial (see *Sidhar: Race in the Simpson Case*, pp. 268-269) reaches the same reassuring (for whites) conclusion, and finds the clinching evidence in the words of a Black woman juror on the second Rodney King trial (where, significantly, though not mentioned by CBS, the "fairness" of the jury validated the "Black" truth of the beating).

The racial differences in ways of knowing the credibility of police-truth include the process of its production. It is generally to the advantage of the power structure to believe that truth is produced by objective or scientific processes rather than social ones and to "know" that evidentiary procedures and the police-truth they produce are scientific, objective, and thus colorless. In cases where truth can never be absolute, such as the media events recounted in this book, relying on the enlightenment notion of a truth that transcends the conditions of its production and is accessible by means of a universal, a-social rationality is an example of power evasion at work. In our contemporary social conditions, the truths that occupy us most urgently are better understood as the products of decisions about what to treat as true. Truth becomes, in large part at least, the product of credibility, and making credible, for ourselves and for others, is a complex process that involves forming alliances among believers. These alliances are informed, though not exclusively, by the social positions of those who form them, and thus by the commonalities both among their social histories and among their tellingly mundane experiences, of which a history is the aggregate. When Johnnie Cochran showed that, in this case at least, knowledge was always local and that credibility could not be divorced from racial identity, he was accused of "playing the race card." His counter, in the light of this theoretical account, was precise: "We choose," he said, "to call it the credibility card."¹⁶

Learning to live in a world where every knowledge and every history is local and partial requires us to develop ways of critically evaluating partialities and the localities in which they are founded. If science produces a partial knowledge, and police-truth is a partial truth expressed in scientific discourse, then deciding the degree of credibility to grant to scientific procedures, whether at the crime scene or in the laboratory, is a process that cannot be abstracted from the social localities and partialities of those who engage in it. It is hardly surprising, then, that polls taken in the early weeks of the trial consistently showed that between 60 and 70 percent of whites believed O.J. to be guilty, whereas a similar proportion of African Americans believed he had been unjustly accused. After the verdicts, the difference was intensified: a *Newsweek* poll reported that 85 percent of African Americans agreed with the verdict, but that only 32 percent of European Americans did.¹⁷ However much some of us may wish to, we cannot make sense of the difference between these credibilities by returning to an absolutism in

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(Picture of courtroom. Live sound: "Race is not, and will not be, an issue in this case.")

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GALIN (to camera): So much has been made of the fact that eight of the twelve jurors are Black. But will that make a critical difference? We asked someone who has been there.

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GALIN (voice over picture of Thompson still speaking): But the jurors have been carefully screened for any strong bias.

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tion of O.J.'s face. There was no hint that the *Time* cover had been computer manipulated to produce a mediatruth, there was nothing to disturb readers' assumptions that this was a traditional police/news photograph that presented the objective truth. Like *Time's* computer, the computer enhancement of the video of Rodney King's beating (chapter 3 makes this clear) harnessed the impression of objective truth to the interests of white racism. The furor over *Time's* cover was justified, and the magazine's managing editor was less than convincing in his claim that the "photo-illustration" (his term for a "computer conviction") was free of racism and that it "lifted a common police mug shot to the level of art, with no sacrifice to truth."¹⁸ Part of this statement, at least, is accurate, if only unwittingly—truth was not sacrificed, it was produced. The editor's apology is not for racism in the Blackening of O.J., for he has denied that any was involved, but for the process: "If there was anything wrong with the cover, in my view, it was that it was not immediately apparent that it was a photograph rather than an unaltered photograph." To participate fully in a postmodern culture, one has to be savvy to mediatech, and *Time* does not appear to wish to help its readers to become so.

Computer-produced realities are not confined to the tabloids. They are increasingly used to provide evidence in the courtroom. They are both excited and worried about the rapid development of low-cost photorealistic computer animation. Such animation can, according to Kathleen O'Connor, writing in the *Florida Bar Journal*, "place the jury . . . in the position of an eyewitness to a crime. . . . [It] can be used to recreate the movements of an eyewitness and a victim and to trace the path of bullets" (or, we assume, a knife). The computer, as a piece of knowledge technology, not only produces information that seems "real," it also, literally, produces knowledge and truth. A computer simulation, O'Connor explains, "supplies missing data" and thus "is more than just an illustration of testimony, it is not simply demonstrative, but also substantive evidence."¹⁹ A computer, in other words, produces knowledge or "missing data" that can exist in no other form. No computer simulation of the murders of Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman was played in the courtroom. Television, however, was less coy: *Hard Copy* screened a reenactment produced by feeding police evidence into a computer. Though not quite "photorealistic," the animation did show the murderer as a Black man clearly resembling O.J. Simpson, and one of the victims was unmistakably similar to Nicole Simpson. (Ron Goldman's general erasure from the case was reflected in the reduced individuation of the second victim.) Another lawyer, Roy Kreiger, also notes that the realization of such computer knowledge pays off in its truth effects: "The mere fact that one [photorealistic computer] graphic looks more real than another may enhance its credibility. Jurors simply find it easier to believe evidence that closely resembles their own world."²⁰ This convergence of computer reality with juror reality may be read as a nonpostmodernist's account of the hyperreal. But when these jurors are media-savvy tabloid readers and viewers, their skepticism may

equip them with a greater ability to handle simulacra than Kreiger gives them credit for.

The Tabloidization of the Jury

By using compositographs, or computer-manipulated photographs, or by recounting bizarre, uncheckable events, the tabloids encourage their readers to swing at will between skepticism and belief. Compositographs in particular work to show that truth is produced, not revealed. The conventions of mainstream news push in precisely the opposite direction: they work to produce a believing subject who accepts that truth exists outside the conditions of its production, and can thus be known by a process of mere revelation (often called reporting). The different reading relations between the texts and readers of tabloid and mainstream journalism are related to the different social positions of the readers, and thus to their different relations to the mechanisms of knowledge production. Those whose interests are well served by the operations of the existing regime of power have little to gain by questioning the mechanisms by which its official knowledge is produced and distributed. There are others, however, whom we might call the information poor, who feel that official knowledge denies them access to its means of production, represses truths it does not wish them to know, and excludes their truths from its category of the legitimate. For the information poor, the fluid skepticism by which they control their own movement between belief and disbelief is a survival tactic in a society in which the information economy is as unequal in its distribution of resources as the financial economy.

This popular skepticism, however, is not welcome in the jury room. A professional jury consultant warns prosecutors that "talk-show watchers . . . are considered more likely . . . to distrust the official version of truth."²¹ Dan Lundgren, California's attorney general, calls the effect of television talk shows upon jurors "Oprahization" (after Oprah Winfrey, the Black woman talk show emcee), and Gil Garcetti, the Los Angeles County district attorney who prosecuted O.J. Simpson, fears that it has put the criminal justice system "on the verge of a crisis of credibility."²² With eerie foresight, he appears to have been preparing whites with a reason to reject not-guilty verdicts—the ones that a few months later were delivered by a jury that included eight Black women. The class-education-race gap that is implicit in the word *Oprahization* was explicitly active in the jury selection, for Judge Ito automatically rejected anyone who had read a newspaper during the weeks of the selection process. One consequence of this was that there were no regular newspaper readers among the jurors, whereas 67 percent of them were regular tabloid TV watchers. DecisionQuest (a jury consulting firm that advised the prosecution team) found a positive correlation between tabloid TV viewing and the belief that Simpson was not guilty.²³ Other tabloid court shows, such as *Trial by Error*, which reenacts crimes and trials in which people

have been wrongly found guilty, can only serve to reinforce the appropriateness of this popular skepticism for the jury room.

Gil Garcetti's first response to the verdict was, "Apparently the decision was based on emotion that overlapped reason." In the word "emotion" he was Oprahizing the jury, and the word was widely used in white male America to simultaneously Blacken and feminize the verdict. Loaded into Garcetti's discursive opposition between "emotion" and "reason" was the social difference between the white rational educated male (who reads newspapers) and the Black emotional uneducated female (who watches tabloid TV). And there is no doubt whom he considered better able to produce "truth."

Dislocated Racism: The Evacuation of Whiteness

Racial difference was more explicit in the O.J. Simpson trial than in the trials of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King or in Anita Hill's hearings. The arguments between the lead prosecutor and the leading defense lawyer provided an eerie echo of the Simpson marriage, for they were between a white woman and a Black man. Both sides had white and Black lawyers whom they used tactically according to the race and social status of the witness on the stand. The media reports of the composition of the jury and the changes to it as the trial progressed always included the racial component. Racial issues were so obvious that the media could hardly avoid commenting on them. Their coverage, however, was suffused with what we may call "dislocated racism," which is a form of nonracist racism to add to those discussed in chapter 1. Racism is dislocated when it is apparently to be found only in the behaviors of a racial minority and never in those of the white power structure. Dislocating racism thus maintains the racelessness of whiteness.

Dislocated racism informed both the media coverage of the trial and the lawyers' tactics within it. The prosecution attempted to maintain the "race blindness" of justice, and as we have seen, the denial that racial difference makes a difference is a luxury confined to whites. The media were generally complicit with this in the way they consistently constructed the racial question as an exclusively Black one. The defense had to show that race was central to the trial, but in doing so it laid itself open to the (frequently made) accusation of "playing the race card"—a common form of dislocating racism. Actually, the prosecution's concern to "keep race out of it" and thus to continue the invisibility of whiteness was at least as racially motivated a strategy, but it was not explicit. During his aggressive questioning of Tom Lange, the senior detective in charge of the investigation of the murder site, Cochran took numerous opportunities to remind the jury that Lange lived in Simi Valley. He insisted that a pair of shoes taken from the scene were contaminated evidence because Lange had taken them home to Simi Valley overnight before taking them to the forensic Laboratory. The idea that evidence had been racially contaminated by being in Simi Val-

ley must have struck deep chords in the Black jurors, as in Black Americans in general.

The media consistently dislocated racial issues by locating them exclusively on the "Black" side of the case. They thus implied that only African Americans have a racial identity, that racial interests are shared only among African Americans and that the whites involved are "raceless." On March 1, 1995, for instance, the *CBS Evening News* devoted its final segment to "race in the Simpson case" (see *Sidibar* p. 268-269). The story began with an explicit reference to the racial difference between the accused and the victims, but it mentioned racial difference in the justice system only in terms of the Black perception of it, not of the forms that such difference can take, such as in arrest rates and sentence lengths. The story repays analysis: although it did allow African Americans to talk about the way they saw racism operating in the legal system, the singularity of its focus on Black people could all too easily have led white audiences to infer that such racism exists only in the perceptions of Black people, that only Black people have anything to gain by appealing to racial interests, and thus to conclude that the racial component of this case is to be found exclusively in the actions and perceptions of the Black people involved. Whiteness could once again evacuate itself from the racial problem. The whites who did speak on camera spoke only about Black attitudes and behavior, not white. Although the story began by asserting that race was a key element in the trial, it ended by reassuring viewers that the verdicts would be colorless. The actual verdicts proved CBS's conclusion wrong, for they were met with widespread white condemnation of the racism of the Black jurors that apparently produced them: the implication is clear—only guilty (or "white") verdicts could be colorless. The unspoken assumption of guilty verdicts underlies the reassuring conclusion to CBS's story.

Whereas most media reports located race squarely within the behavior of the defense, others denied its presence in their coverage at all. In justifying the darkening of O.J.'s mug shot, for instance, *Time's* managing editor both denied and dislocated:

The harshness of the mugshot—the merciless bright light, the stubble on Simpson's face, the cold specificity of the picture—had been subtly smoothed and shaped into an icon of tragedy. The expression on his face was not merely blank now, it was bottomless. This cover, with the simple, non-judgmental headline "An American Tragedy," seemed the obvious, right choice. . . . First, it should be said (I wish it went without saying) that no racial implication was intended, by *TIME* or by the artist. One could say that it is racist to say that Blacker is more sinister, and some African Americans have taken that position in the course of this dispute.²⁴

His belief that the only racism involved lay in the eyes of those who beheld it,

most of whom happened to be Black, is a noteworthy example of how dislocating race contributes to white color blindness.

Race Blindness

This color blindness of the media led to yet more missed opportunities for whites to develop what Ruth Frankenberg calls "race cognizance," by which whites can come to understand the subtle microtechnologies by which racial difference is put into place, and thus equip themselves better to help dismantle them.²⁰

The media coverage of the case was rarely overtly racist, but in a society as deeply and covertly racist as ours, it did not need to be to widen the divide between the races. The details of the case played straight into this divide, and by reporting them without any critical interrogation of the whiteness of the stereotypes they reactivated, the media contributed to racial antagonism. The final pages of O.J.'s story of the American Dream could all too easily be read as an example of a racial reversion to type: they could all too easily be made to "prove" the supremacist epigram (and I riskily use ugly and painful language to spotlight what goes on in this particular white imagination, in the belief that the only way to counter it is to expose it, and that the pain caused to many by expressing it starkly is preferable to allowing it to continue its work unseen; I can do nothing about the fact that my position absolves me from the worst of that pain), "You can take the nigger out of the jungle, but you can never take the nigger out of the nigger."

Such essentialist racism still exists within at least the right wing of the United States, and possibly more widely, and the media did nothing to prevent its activation. They never interrogated the whiteness of the stereotype of the Black male, nor did they attempt to disconnect O.J. Simpson from it. Many Black people were keenly aware of this strategic absence—as one Black woman cried on an electronic bulletin board, "The media has another Black man to show the world as being a REPRESENTATION OF ALL BLACK MEN. I HATE THAT !!!!" One does not have to use a racial stereotype to perpetrate it: in a racist society, ignoring its existence can have the same effect. This may be racism by omission rather than commission, but it is racism nonetheless.

So-called "race-neutral" reporting can in fact operate as race blindness, and, in a racially divided society, such blindness will inevitably contribute to the status quo. Race blindness always advances white interests, but it is not confined to white people. Thus, while he was still the tame Black male, O.J. explained his popularity in race-blind terms: "People identify with me, and I don't think that I'm offensive to anyone. . . . People have told me I'm colorless. Everyone likes me. I stay out of politics, I don't try and save people for the Lord."²⁶ This race blindness cannot make it explicit that the "people" who identify with and like him are white, as is the "anyone" he does not offend. Certainly the "people"

who told him he was colorless were not Black, for to many Black people his whiteness was blindingly apparent. Black leaders from Los Angeles were prepared to go public with the complaint that O.J.'s assiduous—and, we might add, economically successful—pursuit of race neutrality had estranged him from the Black community, and Joseph Lowery, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, thought that, until the case, "most [Black] people called him an Oreo, if not a Tom."²⁷ Sister Souljah, the rap artist, succinctly summed up the contradictions: "They never thought of him as Black before, and when they saw him chased by all those cops, it was the Blackest thing he had ever done."²⁸

The race blindness that helps nonracist racism maintain its mask pervaded the 1994 elections, in which Republicans gained control of the House and Senate for the first time in forty years. Indeed, it is arguable that the political turnaround hinged on race. Exit polls showed that the group whose votes had changed the most since the presidential election two years before was white men. Prelection polls had shown that the electorate wanted politicians, above all else, to get tough on crime and to reform welfare, and candidates from both parties vied to have the hardest nose on each issue. Crime and welfare, of course, are the two prime areas where white America can advance a racist agenda without once mentioning the word *race*. And, consequently, hardly a candidate mentioned it.

The election results were a symptom, frightening in itself, of the white male fear that is a wrongheaded response to the demographic changes (discussed in chapter 1) that will inevitably intensify it over the next decade. Whites do not have many more years in which to enjoy their numerical majority. Attempting to maintain white power and privilege in the face of a steadily decreasing proportion of whites in the population produces racist policies whose racism has to be either covert or effectively recoded. To put it starkly: the call to get tough on crime recoded the desire to put more Black men in prison, the call to reform welfare recoded the desire to reduce the number of Black babies; and the call to maintain the right to own guns, particularly assault weapons, was driven by the fear that neither incarceration nor population control would be enough to maintain white power.

The refusal of much of white America to confront the many forms of its racism has led it to devise policies that are race neutral in their rhetoric, but racially divisive in their effects. Thus, policies on crime, drugs, welfare, and family values can maintain a raceless appearance while they widen the racial gap. It is this same refusal that leads to the intense fascination with media events where racism can be imagined rather than spoken, and thus continued rather than countered. I hope that some of the ideas in this book will help to confront U.S. racism directly and thus to counter it.