

Classic Trials (A)

The People of the State of California vs. Defendant A



Background

Over the years, the defendant has gained fame for a variety of reasons. He played football for the University of Southern California and while playing in the NFL; he won several awards, including the Hall of Fame! In 1994, far away from his sports days, he was back in the news, but not for football. He became the main suspect in the brutal murder of his wife and her friend. He hired the best group of lawyers that money could buy, who became known as “The Dream Team.”

Each day of his trial was televised. In total, it lasted 134 days. His trial became famous for classic quotes such as, “If it doesn’t fit, you must acquit.” Evidence presented by the State included the murder weapon, inconsistencies in the timeline of the murder, and the alibi of the defendant. 911 calls showing he was violent when angry or jealous were enough to prove a motive. The State also had his bloody footprints and the gloves that were worn during the murder. One glove was found at the murder scene and the other at the defendant’s home a few blocks away. Numerous witnesses testified that they saw his car driving erratically and heard his wife’s dog barking at the time of the attack.

His team of defense attorneys was ruthless, however. They set out to prove that there was enough reasonable doubt about who the real murderer was. They demanded that the defendant be set free. The most shocking and damaging evidence presented was that the Los Angeles Police Department (one officer in particular) did not conduct the investigation properly; they planted evidence and were guilty of being racists.

Predict the Verdict:

<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/simpson/simpson.htm>

Classic Trials (B)

Lizzie Borden vs. State of Massachusetts



Background

Most students learn of this case through the rhyme

Lizzie Borden took an axe,
And gave her mother forty whacks,
When she saw what she had done,
She gave her father forty-one.

In actuality, there were only 29 whacks recorded. Two days after the murder, papers began reporting evidence that thirty-three-year-old Lizzie Borden might have had something to do with her parents' murders. A clerk at S. R. Smith's drug store in Fall River told police that Lizzie visited the store the day before the murder and attempted to purchase prussic acid, a deadly poison. Another reported rumors that "Lizzie and her stepmother never got along together peacefully, and that for a considerable time back they have not spoken." *The Boston Herald*, meanwhile, viewed Lizzie as above suspicion: "From the consensus of opinion it can be said: In Lizzie Borden's life there is not one unmaidenly nor a single deliberately unkind act."

Police came to the conclusion that the murders must have been committed by someone within the Borden home, but were puzzled by the lack of blood anywhere except on the bodies of the victims and their inability to uncover any obvious murder weapon. Theories about a tall male intruder were reconsidered, and one "leading physician" explained, "hacking is almost a positive sign of a deed by a woman who is unconscious of what she is doing."

Throughout her trial, Lizzie gave confusing and conflicting testimony. A friend of hers witnessed Lizzie burying the blue dress she was wearing the morning of the murders. Although Lizzie was the only one home at the time of the murders, she presented an alibi. A friend had sent her a note to come visit. The note was never found.

Predict the Verdict:

Classic Trials (C)

Sleepy Lagoon Murder Case

The People vs. Zamora



Background

The 38th Street Gang was located in South Los Angeles. The gang, along with other

community members, frequented a water reservoir in a gravel pit located on the Williams Ranch in East Los Angeles. This reservoir was used as a swimming pool by Mexican youth who were not allowed to use segregated public pools. The community called it "Sleepy Lagoon."

On the evening of August 1, 1942, two sweethearts had a violent confrontation at Sleepy Lagoon with a neighboring gang from Downey. When they returned later with their gang in search of the attackers, the attackers had already fled the scene.

Unable to find the rival gang, the 38th Street Gang went to a party at the home of the Delgadillo family. When a fight broke out at the Delgadillo home, Henry Leyvas and the rest of the 38th Street Gang fled the scene. The following morning, the dead body of José Díaz was found on a dirt road near the Delgadillo home.

The Governor of the State of California used the murder as a call to action to address the growing "juvenile delinquency problem." The main piece of evidence against Henry Leyvas and the 38th Street Gang is that they were identified as being at the scene of the murder. A total of twenty-two youths were charged with the murder of Jose Diaz. The Sleepy Lagoon Murder Trial dominated the news in Los Angeles. The defendants were not allowed to change clothes during the trial.

Predict the Verdict:

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/e_murder.html

Classic Trials (D): The Trial of Galileo



The **Galileo affair** was a sequence of events, beginning around 1610, during which Galileo Galilei came into conflict with the Catholic Church over his support of Copernican astronomy.^[1]

In 1610, Galileo published his *Sidereus Nuncius* (*Starry Messenger*), describing the surprising observations that he had made with the new telescope, namely the phases of Venus and the Galilean moons of Jupiter. With these observations he promoted the heliocentric theory of Nicolaus Copernicus (published in *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* in 1543). Galileo's initial discoveries were met with opposition within the Catholic Church, and in 1616 the Inquisition declared heliocentrism to be formally heretical. Heliocentric books were banned and Galileo was ordered to refrain from holding, teaching or defending heliocentric ideas.

Galileo went on to propose a theory of tides in 1616, and of comets in 1619; he argued that the tides were evidence for the motion of the Earth. In 1632 Galileo, now an old man, published his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, which implicitly defended heliocentrism, and was immensely popular. Responding to mounting controversy over theology, astronomy and philosophy, the Roman Inquisition tried Galileo in 1633 and found him "gravely suspect of heresy", sentencing him to indefinite imprisonment. Galileo was kept under house arrest for the rest of his life.

Predict the Verdict:

Classic Trials (E)

State of Florida vs. Defendant E

Background

On February 26, a 17-year-old African American youth was walking home from a convenience store after buying snacks. As he walked to his father's house, he chatted on the phone with a friend.

Defendant E, a Neighborhood Watch Captain, followed the youth in his car. He made a phone call to 911. He was told not to apprehend the youth and wait instead for the police.

Defendant E approached the youth because he believed the youth was "up to no good." The defendant was concerned because there had been recent break-ins in the area.

When the defendant approached the youth, a fight broke out. The defendant claimed he was worried for his life and was beat up by the youth. A photo of him taken after the attack showed numerous cuts and bruises. He took out his gun and shot the 17 year old. Neighbors hear the fight and a gunshot. The prosecution charged the defendant with second-degree murder.

Florida has "stand your ground" laws for self-defense, although they were not brought up at the trial. At his trial, his lawyers pleaded a "classic self-defense case."



Predict the Verdict:

<http://www.newyorktimes.com>