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**Body**

Legendary athlete, actor and millionaire: O.J. Simpson's murder trial lost him the American dream

LAS VEGAS — For a long time, O.J. Simpson was the man who had it all.

He lived the American dream as a sports legend, movie actor, commercial pitchman and millionaire. With his wildly successful career, startling good looks and a gorgeous wife, he became an image of success for Black Americans and was embraced by people of all races. It was safe for everyone to love Simpson, who inhabited a world of glamour and privilege available to few.

“I’m not Black, I’m O.J.,” he liked to tell friends.

It all came crashing down in the summer of 1994, when Simpson’s ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, was found dead outside her condominium in Los Angeles. Her friend Ronald Goldman, a waiter who had come to her home to return a pair of eyeglasses left behind at a restaurant, was lying a few feet away, stabbed to death.

Simpson, who died Wednesday at 76 of prostate cancer, immediately came under suspicion amid talk of domestic abuse and jealousy.

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Before murder charges tarnished his legacy, O.J. Simpson was one of the NFL's greatest running backs

Long before the Bronco chase gripped a national television audience and the “Trial of the Century” captivated the country, O.J. Simpson was making his mark on the football field.

The Juice was the best running back of his era during an 11-year NFL career mostly played with the Buffalo Bills. He won a national championship and a Heisman Trophy in college and set records in the NFL. But Simpson’s accomplishments on the field were overshadowed and his image was forever ruined by charges that he killed his former wife and her male friend in 1994. Though he was acquitted of murder, Simpson was later found liable for the deaths in a separate civil case.

Simpson’s tarnished legacy resulted in a muted reaction to news of his death Thursday. He wasn’t acknowledged publicly by the NFL, the Bills or the San Francisco 49ers, where he played his final two seasons.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame issued a statement attributed to its President Jim Porter that said: “O.J. Simpson was the first player to reach a rushing mark many thought could not be attained in a 14-game season when he topped 2,000 yards. His on-field contributions will be preserved in the Hall’s archives in Canton, Ohio."

Simpson’s name remains on the Bills’ Wall of Fame, which rings the inside of Highmark Stadium, known as Rich Stadium during his playing days. That could change in a few years when the Bills move into a new stadium set to open across the street in 2026. Fans previously petitioned the team to remove Simpson’s name from the wall.

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The OJ Simpson saga was a unique American moment. 3 decades on, we're still wondering what it means

NEW YORK (AP) — A dog’s plaintive wail. A courtroom couplet-turned-cultural catchphrase about gloves. A judge and attorneys who became media darlings and villains. A slightly bewildered houseguest elevated, briefly, into a slightly bewildered celebrity. Troubling questions about race that echo still. The beginning of the Kardashian dynasty. An epic slow-motion highway chase. And, lest we forget, two people whose lives ended brutally.

And a nation watched — a nation far different than today's, where the ravenousness for reality television has multiplied. The spectator mentality of those jumbled days in 1994 and 1995, then novel, has since become an intrinsic part of the American fabric. Smack at the center of the national conversation was O.J. Simpson, one of the most curious cultural figures of recent U.S. history.

Simpson's death Wednesday, almost exactly three decades after the killings that changed his reputation from football hero to suspect, summoned remembrances of an odd moment in time — no, let's call it what it was, which was deeply weird — in which a smartphone-less country craned its neck toward clunky TVs to watch a Ford Bronco inch its way along a California freeway.

“It was an incredible moment in American history,” said Wolf Blitzer, anchoring coverage of Simpson's death Thursday on CNN. What made it so — beyond, of course, tabloid culture and the fundamental news value of such a famous person accused in such brutal killings?

In an era when the internet as we know it was still being born, when “platform” was still just a place to board a train, Simpson was a unique breed of celebrity. He was truly transmedia, a harbinger of the digital age — a walking, talking crossover story for multiple audiences.

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Biden says US support for Philippines, Japan defense 'ironclad' amid growing China provocations

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Thursday that U.S. defense commitment to Pacific allies was “ironclad” as he gathered Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House in the midst of growing concern about provocative Chinese military action in the Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. and the Philippines have had a mutual treaty in place for more than 70 years. Biden's forceful reinforcement of the American commitment comes in the midst of persistent skirmishes between the Philippine and Chinese coast guards in the disputed South China Sea.

“The United States defense commitments to Japan and to the Philippines are ironclad. They’re ironclad," Biden said as he began three-way talks at the White House with Kishida and Marcos. "As I said before, any attack on Philippine aircraft, vessels or armed forces in the South China Sea would invoke our mutual defense treaty.”

Relations between China and the Philippines have been repeatedly tested by confrontations involving the two nations’ coast guard vessels in the disputed South China Sea. Chinese coast guard ships also regularly approach disputed Japanese-controlled East China Sea islands near Taiwan.

The so-called “gray-zone” harassment by China has included shining military-grade lasers at the Philippine Coast Guard, firing water cannons at vessels and ramming into Philippine ships near the Second Thomas Shoal, which both Manila and Beijing claim. In 1999, Manila intentionally ran a World War II–era ship aground on the shoal, establishing a permanent military presence there.

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House Speaker Mike Johnson negotiating with White House to advance Ukraine aid

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson is negotiating with the White House as he prepares for the treacherous task of advancing wartime funding for Ukraine and Israel through the House, a top House Republican said Thursday.

House Republican Leader Steve Scalise told reporters that Johnson had been talking with White House officials about a package that would deviate from the Senate's $95 billion foreign security package and include several Republican demands. It comes after Johnson has delayed for months on advancing aid that would provide desperately needed ammunition and weaponry for Kyiv, trying to find the right time to advance a package that will be a painful political lift.

“There's been no agreement reached,” Scalise said. “Obviously there would have to an agreement reached not just with the White House, but with our own members.”

Johnson, R-La., is being stretched between a Republican conference deeply divided in its support for Ukraine, as well as two presidential contenders at odds over the U.S.'s posture towards the rest of the world. President Joe Biden has repeatedly chastised Republicans for not helping Ukraine, saying they are doing the bidding of Russian President Vladimir Putin and hurting U.S. security. Meanwhile, Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican candidate, has said he would negotiate an end to the conflict as he tries to push the U.S. to a more isolationist stance.

The Republican speaker is set to travel to the former president’s Mar-a-Lago club in Florida on Friday to meet with Trump and has been consulting him in recent weeks on the Ukraine funding to gain his support — or at least prevent him from openly opposing the package.

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Mali's junta bans the media from reporting on political activities in a deepening crackdown

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — In a deepening crackdown, Mali’s ruling junta on Thursday banned the media from reporting on activities of political parties and associations, a day after suspending all political activities in the country until further notice.

The order, issued by Mali's high authority for communication, was distributed on social media. The notice said it applied to all forms of the media, including television, radio, online and print newspapers.

Mali has experienced two coups since 2020, leading a wave of political instability that has swept across West and Central Africa in recent years. Along with its political troubles, the country is also in the grip of a worsening insurgency by militants linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

The scope of the ban — or how it would be applied in practice — was not immediately clear. It was also not known if journalists would still be allowed to report on issues such as the economy, which are closely tied to ***politics*** and who would monitor their work.

The umbrella organization that represents journalists in Mali responded with an unusually stern rebuttal.

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10 years after Chibok, Nigerian families cope with the trauma of more school kidnappings

KADUNA, Nigeria (AP) — His weak body stood in the doorway, exhausted and covered in dirt. For two years, the boy had been among Nigeria’s ghosts, one of at least 1,500 schoolchildren and others seized by armed groups and held for ransom.

But paying a ransom didn't work for 12-year-old Treasure, the only captive held back from the more than 100 schoolchildren kidnapped from their school in July 2021 in the northwestern Kaduna state. Instead, his captors hung on, and he had to escape the forests on his own in November.

Treasure's ordeal is part of a worrying new development in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country where the mass abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls a decade ago marked a new era of fear —with nearly 100 of the girls still in captivity. Since the Chibok abductions, at least 1,500 students have been kidnapped, as armed groups increasingly find in them a lucrative way to fund other crimes and control villages in the nation's mineral-rich but poorly policed northwestern region.

The Associated Press spoke with five families whose children have been taken hostage in recent years and witnessed a pattern of trauma and struggle with education among the children. Parents are becoming more reluctant to send their children to school in parts of northern Nigeria, worsening the education crisis in a country of over 200 million where at least 10 million children are out of school — one of the world's highest rates.

The AP could not speak with Treasure, who is undergoing therapy after escaping captivity in November. His relatives, however, were interviewed at their home in Kaduna state, including Jennifer, his cousin, who was also kidnapped when her boarding school was attacked in March 2021.

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Lawsuit settled: 2 top US gun parts makers agree to temporarily halt sales in Philadelphia

Two of America's leading gun parts manufacturers have agreed to temporarily halt sales of their products in Philadelphia and elsewhere in Pennsylvania, city officials said Thursday, announcing a settlement of their lawsuit against the companies.

Philadelphia filed suit against Polymer80 and JSD Supply in July, accusing the manufacturers of perpetuating gun violence in the city by manufacturing and selling untraceable, self-manufactured weapons commonly known as “ghost guns.” The suit came under a broader legal effort to restrict where manufacturers can market their assemble-at-home guns.

David Pucino, legal director of Giffords Law Center, which represented the city, accusing Polymer80 and JSD Supply of “reckless business practices ... that threatened public safety.”

“The gun industry must be held accountable when it breaks the law and endangers Americans,” he said in a statement.

Under the settlement, JSD Supply, based in Butler, Pennsylvania, agreed it would no longer sell its products in the state for four years, city officials said. JSD-owned Eagle Shows, which bills itself as Pennsylvania's largest gun show, will be required to prohibit vendors from selling such gun parts for two years.

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More aid is supposed to be entering the Gaza Strip. Why isn’t it helping?

JERUSALEM (AP) — Under heavy U.S. pressure, Israel has promised to ramp up aid to Gaza dramatically, saying last week it would open another cargo crossing and surge more trucks than ever before into the besieged enclave.

But days later, there are few signs of those promises materializing and international officials say starvation is widespread in hard-hit northern Gaza.

Samantha Power, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, said this week she accepted “credible” reports that famine is now occurring in the area and urged Israel to take further steps to expedite humanitarian aid shipments.

Power's remarks echoed those of U.S. President Joe Biden, who said on Wednesday that Israeli efforts to increase aid were “not enough.”

While Israel says it has dramatically increased the number of aid trucks entering the territory, U.N. workers report only a slight uptick — possibly because they count trucks differently.

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Muslim leaders are 'out of words' as they tire of the White House outreach on the war in Gaza

WASHINGTON (AP) — Osama Siblani was sipping his morning coffee at the office when his phone buzzed with a message from one of President Joe Biden's advisers. As publisher of the Arab American News in Dearborn, Michigan, Siblani serves as an occasional sounding board, and the White House wanted to know what he thought of Biden's recent call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

After months of mounting concerns over the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, Biden had publicly, albeit vaguely, threatened to cut U.S. assistance to Israel's military operations in the Hamas-controlled territory.

“This is baby steps,” Siblani said he responded. “What we need is giant steps rather than baby steps.”

The text exchange is an example of the behind-the-scenes communication that the White House has nurtured at a time of anger at the Democratic president over his support for Israel. Such informal contacts have become more important as some Muslim and Arab American leaders have turned down opportunities to talk with Biden or his advisers, frustrated by the sense their private conversations and public anguish have done little or nothing to persuade him to change course.

The White House says it is keeping an open door for difficult conversations, but it can be hard to get people to walk through.

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