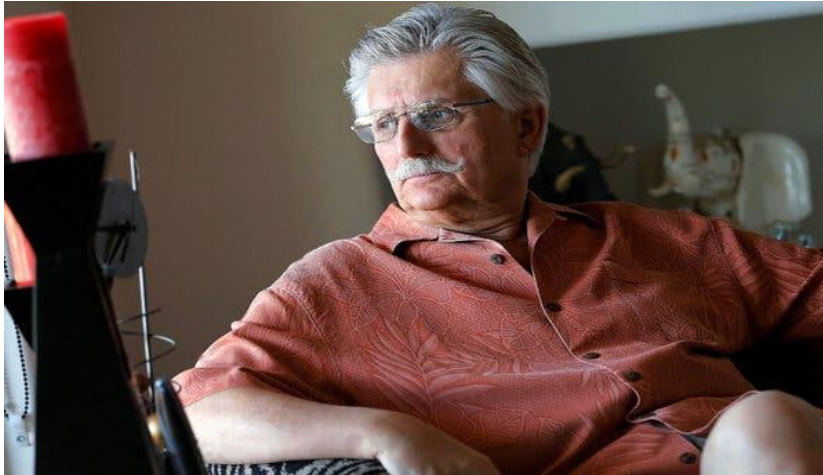


What Happened to Damages That O.J. Simpson Owed to the Victims' Families?

In 1997, a jury in a civil trial awarded the families of Ronald Goldman and Nicole Brown Simpson \$33 million. Today, the amount still owed has more than tripled.



Fred Goldman, father of Ronald Goldman, in 2014. A lawyer for the family said the judgment on damages “will be pursued as before.” Credit...Matt York/Associated Press

By Anna Betts

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More than 25 years ago, O.J. Simpson was found liable in civil court for the deaths of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, her friend, and was ordered to pay more than \$33 million to their families.

They have yet to recover the damages.

While it is still unclear where things stand with the Brown family, the Goldman family said its pursuit will not end despite the death of Mr. Simpson on Wednesday. David Cook, a lawyer for Fred Goldman, Ronald’s father, said in an interview on Saturday that he could not elaborate on their plans to acquire the money, but that “the judgment will be pursued as before.” In a previous email, Mr. Cook said that Mr. Simpson “died without penance.” Mr. Goldman could not be reached for comment.

Mr. Simpson was acquitted of the murders of Ms. Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman in the 1995 criminal trial, but the civil jury in 1997 concluded that he “willingly and wrongfully” caused their deaths, and the unanimous decision included \$25 million in punitive damages.

Of the total, according to court documents filed in 2022, the Goldman family had received from Mr. Simpson around \$132,000.

It was unclear if that figure reflected money from the auctioning of Mr. Simpson’s memorabilia, including his Heisman Trophy, which went toward the damages. Proceeds from the book Mr. Simpson wrote, “If I Did It” — in which he described, in hypothetical terms, how the brutal stabbings of Ms. Brown Simpson and Mr. Goldman might have occurred — also went toward the damages.

The Complex Life of O.J. Simpson

- **Acting Fame:** Before O.J. Simpson became synonymous with the sensational murder trial that riveted the nation in the mid-1990s, he was a football star turned Hollywood fixture who played roles as varied as an astronaut, a comic detective and a fake priest.
- **A Turbulent Era:** From the car chase to the verdict, the murder case became an inextricable part of Los Angeles history in the 1990s, and Angelenos to this day still ponder what happened.
- **The Victims' Families:** In 1997, a jury in a civil trial ordered Simpson to pay more than \$33 million to the families of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. They have yet to recover the damages.
- **The Kardashian Connection:** Long before the Kardashians became a star attraction on reality television, the family name first came to prominence when Simpson was on trial.

It was also unknown on Saturday how much of the damages the Brown family had recovered. Mr. Cook declined to respond to specific questions about the money the Goldman family received. But the total is still a fraction of what is owed.

Because of annual 10 percent increases in interest on the unpaid portion, the current amount owed now stands at \$114 million, Mr. Cook said.

On Friday, Mr. Simpson's will was filed in Clark County court in Nevada. Signed on Jan. 25, it places Mr. Simpson's property in a trust.

Malcolm LaVergne, a longtime attorney for Mr. Simpson who was appointed as the executor of his estate, said that he has legal experts and accountants advising him on the estate and that they will examine all of the claims, only one of which involves the Goldmans.

Mr. LaVergne said he believed Mr. Simpson had previous debts to the Internal Revenue Service of "a few hundred thousand dollars" but did not provide additional details.

He said he would pay amounts to the Goldman family and others if the advisers concluded that they were required. But he added that if there was a way to deal legally with the estate with the Goldmans getting nothing, that "will be the option" he chooses.

Mr. LaVergne is also helping the family with other matters. Mr. Simpson will be cremated on Tuesday, he said, and plans for a funeral have not been decided. Mr. LaVergne also said that he had received a call from a researcher studying chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative brain disease associated with repeated blows to the head that has been found in the brains of hundreds of former N.F.L. players. But Mr. LaVergne said the family will not be donating Mr. Simpson's brain for C.T.E. study.

Recovering any of the damages from Mr. Simpson has always been an arduous task for the Goldman family. After the civil trial, Mr. Simpson insisted he had no way of paying the amount. Christopher C. Melcher, a top family law attorney in California who specializes in family law and who is not involved in any legal matters related to Mr. Simpson, said that there were limits to how much of someone's wages could be garnished in such a judgment.

Mr. Simpson paid so little, he added, "because he denied having any sources of income or property from which the judgment could be collected."

In 2000, Mr. Simpson moved to Florida, where under state law his home could not be seized by creditors, and he continued to receive pensions from the N.F.L., the Screen Actors Guild and other sources, about \$400,000 a year, which were also protected from seizure.

In 2006, Fred Goldman told The Times that he was enraged by the idea that Mr. Simpson had avoided responsibility for the jury award. “How else can it be said?” he asked, adding that “He’s made every effort to avoid that judgment.”

But Mr. Melcher said that the judgment itself, even without the payment, was not without an impact.

“The judgment was really a debtor’s prison,” he said. “It was to haunt him for the rest of his life, to keep him from ever having anything, making anything, without fearing that Fred Goldman would be right there to collect that dollar.”

Claims on a person’s estate can take a while, Mr. Melcher said, pointing at the estate of Michael Jackson, who died in 2009, whose estate has not yet been closed.

The Goldman family will continue to wait. But according to a statement Mr. Goldman made after the civil trial, the verdict itself is what the family sought most.

“The money is not an issue. It never has been,” he said. “It’s holding the man who killed my son and Nicole responsible.”

An earlier version of this article misstated the details of a Florida law that applied to O.J. Simpson’s assets. The law prevented his home from being seized by creditors, not by debtors.

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