

Johnnie Cochran



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Johnnie Cochran was an infamous American lawyer, who gained recognition from his highly publicized and controversial cases as a successful defense attorney. Born as an African-American on October 2, 1937 in Shreveport, Louisiana, Cochran grew up facing extreme racial prejudice and learned valuable life experience at a young age (Cochran Biography 1). Turning a deaf ear to discrimination, Cochran did well in school and got good grades. His father and mother always stressed education, and Cochran learned to apply himself at various public schools (Cochran Biography 1).

His ability to succeed was, in part, due to a more accepting community in Los Angeles, where Cochran spent most of his later childhood (Cochran 12). Johnnie Cochran was not poor by any standards; his dad had a stable and well-paying job in life insurance (Cochran Biography 1). However, Cochran was known to envision himself with more money and the possibilities thereafter. He would often befriend richer classmates in order to experience a more luxurious lifestyle (Cochran Biography 1). Johnnie Cochran understood that hard work and his natural people skills allowed him to integrate well with his rich friends.

Unaware of his wildly, successful future, Cochran would first have to discover a field in which his skills and opportunities could be utilized. Johnnie Cochran's adherence to the 10,000 hour rule, his exposure to meaningful work, and his ability to express what he wanted all support Gladwell's theory of what defines an outlier. Without these qualities, Johnnie Cochran would have never been one of America's best lawyers. Furthermore, the opportunities that allowed Cochran to achieve and acknowledge these qualities provided him with the proud status of a unique outlier. Johnnie

Cochran Jr. as named after his father and grew up in a stable household with loving parents. Education became a philosophy for success and was clearly ingrained in Cochran at early age (Cochran 11). His hard work ethic proved to serve him well in grade-school and resulted in his acceptance to the University of California in 1959 (Cochran Biography 1). Cochran loved to argue and always knew he wanted to be a lawyer. Excelling in high school debate, Cochran recalls the “incredible surge of power and satisfaction [he] felt when [he] made a strong argument and dragged people over to [his] side of the question” (Cochran 11).

His dad always supported an environment in which Cochran could express his views, but his mother would not tolerate any misbehavior. As a “hardworking businessman” himself, Cochran’s father always pushed his children to work their hardest in order to reach their full potential (Cochran 11). Opportunities to practice debating at both school and at home provided Cochran with the basis for 10,000 hours of practice as a lawyer (Gladwell). Johnnie Cochran graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration and went on to pursue his doctorate in law at Loyola Law School (Cochran Biography 1).

Cochran’s first job outside of school was as a deputy city attorney, defending the city in a small claims court. Winning around fifteen cases in row, Cochran was very pleased with himself. After losing his first case, Cochran realized that “any attorney who has spent considerable time in a courtroom has lost cases” and that he was no exception (Cochran 15). Losing a few cases did not mean Cochran was bad a lawyer; on the contrary, his losses solely signified his experience in lawsuits. Johnnie Cochran was on his way to

mastering a career in law after facing hundreds of juries as a city attorney and soon afterward as a criminal lawyer.

Eventually, Johnnie Cochran would found his own firm, Cochran, Atkins & Evans (Cochran Biography 1). By then, he had gained significantly north of 10,000 hours practicing law. From debate in high school, to passing the bar, and prosecuting endless traffic violations, Johnnie Cochran's experience was evident, and his success was definitely due to his early, painstaking years studying and practicing law. Little did he know, his newfound mastery would be tested with a highly publicized case. The family of Leonard Deadwyler, a man killed by Los Angeles police, approached Cochran's firm in 1966.

The family accused the police of "needless brutality" after their son attempted to speed his pregnant wife to the hospital. Cochran agreed to defend the family, despite the Police Department insisting that the officers had "acted in self-defense" (Cochran Biography 1). The lawsuit was not successful. Johnnie Cochran had discovered a flaw in the American legal system regarding the bias toward prosecuting minorities. This case and others, including a Black Panther accused of murder, led to a deeper, personal mission for Johnnie Cochran (DeClamecy). He wished to upheave the injustice of minority prosecution, and he would do so in great numbers. He soon earned himself the title "Best in the West" according to Ebony magazine. (Cochran Biography 1). Johnnie Cochran had always been inspired by the struggle for racial equality, but now he had the opportunity to partake in such a struggle. Defending minorities from unjust prosecutions became meaningful work. His job as a criminal defense lawyer served a greater purpose, to protect the rights of African-Americans. This platform would soon

become Cochran's journey to fame and provides further evidence to describe the characteristics of a true outlier.

Johnnie Cochran was enveloped in his work because of its personal importance. Meaningful work, as described by Malcolm Gladwell, was yet another factor guiding Cochran closer to success. When Johnnie Cochran was 16 years, a decision made by the Supreme Court would change his life forever. Thurgood Marshall, a black lawyer, argued against the Jim Crow laws that legalized "separate but equal" facilities in 1954. The court favored his case and concluded that "separate but equal was inherently unequal" (Cochran 11). Johnnie Cochran idolized Marshall and therefore wished to follow in his footsteps as a lawyer.

Cochran's destiny was set. He knew that "a single dedicated man could use the law to change society" (Cochran 10). Johnnie Cochran was most definitely motivated to partake in this meaningful work. But first, he needed to be able to express what he wanted. Opportunities present themselves in odd ways, and as it so happens, one must have exceptional communication skills in order to become a successful lawyer. Achieving such skills wasn't difficult for the personable Johnnie Cochran, who also had the benefits of a good education and supportive family.

As the great grandson of slaves, Johnnie Cochran learned to express what he wanted or be overlooked by a largely white society (Cochran 10). Despite Cochran's upbringing in the poorly educated projects of California, his mother taught him "the value of the English language and the importance of using it correctly to make [himself] heard" (Cochran 11). And Cochran would not forget this advice, using his command of the language to promote

himself in the field of law and to win his first case: convincing his mother to accept his career in law rather than medicine.

Cochran was adept at integrating and communicating, both of which were useful characteristics for any outlier. Opportunities spawned from these abilities and provided Cochran with a way to change society. Johnnie Cochran eventually represented numerous celebrities such as Sean Combs, Michael Jackson, Tupac and Snoop Dogg (Deutsch 1). His firm focused on cases involving police brutality and racial bias. He is best known for the captivating defense of OJ Simpson regarding the murder of his wife and her friend, claiming that if the murder's glove " doesn't fit, you must acquit" (DeClamecy 1).

Johnnie Cochran has been criticized for taking advantage of a mostly black jury by suggesting the possibility of the police framing Simpson because of his skin color (Merida). Whether or not OJ Simpson is guilty of murder, Johnnie Cochran was an exceptional and prosperous lawyer. Malcolm Gladwell defines the qualities of a successful outlier, and Johnnie Cochran proved that a combination of perseverance and opportunities will lead to success. Johnnie Cochran died March 29, 2005 at the age of 67, but will forever be remembered as a unique outlier (Deutsch 1).

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