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# How the Casey Anthony Case Came Apart

[](http://i.usatoday.net/news/_photos/2011/07/05/How-the-Casey-Anthony-case-crumbled-VR73LEN-x-large.jpg)All summer, the case against [Casey Anthony](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Casey+Anthony) in an Orlando courtroom had audiences discussing her life as if she were the star of a reality television show.

*Photograph: Defense attorney Jose Baez and Casey Anthony react as the verdict is read.*

The narrative became familiar: Hard-partying single mother fails to report her toddler missing for a month, then lies to police about a kidnapping by a non-existent nanny. Then there was the suspiciously foul smell in the trunk of the mother's car before [Caylee Anthony](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Caylee+Anthony)'s remains were found in a wooded area.

Inside Courtroom 23, however, the seven women and five men of the jury in the Anthony case had to look beyond the salacious details and decide: Was there enough evidence to prove Casey Anthony killed her 2-year-old daughter, Caylee?

Their answer was no. On Tuesday, the jury acquitted Anthony, 25, of murdering her child in June 2008. The reason, legal analysts and court watchers said, is that despite the seemingly endless hype surrounding the investigation and trial, the prosecution's case simply didn't hold up. There was no forensic evidence — such as [DNA](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/DNA) or fingerprints — directly linking Anthony to her daughter's death. In fact, the precise cause of the girl's death was unclear.

"The prosecution put out a lot of dots, but they couldn't connect them," says Lawrence Kobilinsky, chairman of the Department of Sciences at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. Kobilinsky had advised Anthony's attorneys on the forensic case against her but was not involved in the trial.

After a trial of a month and a half, jurors took less than 11 hours to find Anthony not guilty of first-degree murder, aggravated manslaughter and aggravated child abuse.

## Key arguments

Prosecutors said: Anthony suffocated Caylee with duct tape on her mouth and nose.  
  
But: There was no DNA from Anthony on the tape found on Caylee’s remains.  
  
Prosecutors said: Anthony wrapped the child’s body in a blanket.  
  
But: No fluid from decomposition was found on the blanket, which was with the child’s remains.  
  
Prosecutors said: Anthony kept the girl’s body in the trunk until it smelled.  
  
But: The defense said the smell came from rotten food in the trunk.

They convicted her of four misdemeanor counts of lying to police. She could face up to a year in county jail for each count, but because she has been in jail for almost three years, she could be set free. Her sentencing is set for Thursday.

Many in a crowd of about 500 people outside the courthouse reacted with anger after the verdict was read, chanting "Justice for Caylee!" One man yelled, "Baby killer!"

Given the speed with which the jury reached a verdict, many court watchers were expecting Anthony to be convicted of murder, and were stunned by the outcome.

## Key dates in the case

June 16, 2008: Caylee Anthony, 2, is last seen alive leaving the home of her grandparents, George and Cindy Anthony, along with her mother, Casey.  
  
June 18: Casey Anthony borrows a shovel from Brian Burner, a neighbor of her parents. Burner says Anthony returned it an hour later.  
  
June 19: Casey Anthony goes with boyfriend Tony Lazzaro to help him look for an apartment.  
  
June 20: Anthony is captured in various photos partying at a nightclub.  
  
June 23: Anthony and her boyfriend, Tony Lazzaro, break into a shed at the Anthony family home to borrow her father’s gas cans to fill her car, which had run empty.  
  
June 24: Casey Anthony gets into a fight with her father about the gas and storms out of the house. She tells her father that Caylee is with a babysitter named Zanny.  
  
June 25: Cell phone records show she was in the area of her parents' home.  
  
June 28, 2008: Casey Anthony's car is towed from the parking lot of a check cashing store after a supervisor calls to report it abandoned.  
  
June 30, 2008: Casey Anthony is captured in surveillance videos shopping at JC Penney and Target.  
  
July 1, 2008: Surveillance video shows Casey Anthony back in JC Penney buying more clothes.  
  
July 10, 2008: Casey Anthony is recorded in surveillance video at Target.  
  
July 15, 2008: Casey Anthony is recorded in Blockbuster Video, Bank of America and Winn-Dixie surveillance videos.  
  
July 15: George and Cindy Anthony pick up Casey’s car from a tow yard. George Anthony notices a strong odor emanating from the vehicle. Later, back at the family home, Casey tells her mother and brother, Lee Anthony, that she hasn’t seen Caylee in a month and that a babysitter named Zanaida Fernandez Gonzalez (Zanny) kidnapped her.  
  
July 15-16: Casey Anthony takes police to the last place she says she saw Caylee. It turns out to be a vacant apartment. Authorities also take her to Universal Studios where she said she worked, but supervisors there say she hasn’t worked there in more than two years.  
  
Oct. 14: Casey Anthony is indicted on charges of first-degree murder, along with aggravated manslaughter, aggravated child abuse and four counts of lying to police.  
  
Dec. 11: Caylee Anthony’s remains are found in a wooded area near the Anthony family home.  
  
May 9, 2011: Jury selection begins in Clearwater, Fla. for Casey Anthony’s murder trial.  
  
May 24: Trial begins in Orlando. The prosecution shows jurors a photo during opening statements of Caylee Anthony alive and smiling, along with a picture of the girl’s skull as it was found in 2008. They say her mother used duct tape to suffocate her. The defense contends the child actually drowned accidentally in her grandparents’ swimming pool.  
  
July 5: Casey Anthony is acquitted of murder, manslaughter and child abuse but convicted of lying to police.

"Hard to believe," was the initial terse Twitter comment from HLN host [Nancy Grace](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Nancy+Grace), whose relentless focus on the case helped propel it onto the national consciousness.

Jurors declined to talk to reporters after their decision, but an alternate juror told NBC's Today show Wednesday he thought they came to the right verdict."When they explained to us what reasonable doubt was, I definitely had reasonable doubt then," Russell Huekler said. Huekler also said he didn't think prosecutors provided a motive for why Anthony would kill her daughter."Just because Casey was a party girl did not show why she would possibly kill Caylee," he said.Also on NBC, prosecutor Jeff Ashton said the verdict left him and other prosecutors in shock."I think I mouthed the word 'wow' about five times," he said.

**What the public saw**

The case became a media sensation from the outset, when little Caylee was reported missing three years ago.Photos of the smiling, brown-haired toddler and home videos of her singing [*You Are My Sunshine*](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/You+Are+My+Sunshine) tugged at viewers.Those viewers also saw Caylee's mother — scantily clad and grinding against other women at dance clubs. Many wondered what kind of mother would party while her daughter was missing.

During the trial, they heard about Anthony getting a tattoo — "*bella vita*," it said, or "beautiful life" in Italian — after her daughter disappeared.

Nancy Grace, a former prosecutor, made it clear where she stood, deriding the defendant with the nickname "Tot Mom" and highlighting Anthony's partying after Caylee's disappearance.

Anthony's attorney, Cheney Mason, blasted the media after the verdict for its coverage of the case, suggesting that such images were an attempt to define his client in the court of public opinion regardless of the evidence in the case. "Well, I hope that this is a lesson to those of you having indulged in media assassination for three years — bias, prejudice and incompetent talking heads," Mason said.

"I'm disgusted by some of the lawyers who have done this, and I can tell you that my colleagues from coast to coast and border to border have condemned this whole process of lawyers getting on television and talking about cases that they don't know a damn thing about," he said.

The media focus wasn't as great as it was during some other sensational trials of the past, such as the one that acquitted O.J. Simpson of murder, but cable TV news used the case for what its managers most want to achieve — ratings — said Judy Muller, associate journalism professor at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communications.

That the jury came to a different verdict from some commentators is unlikely to cause soul-searching among news media outlets that promoted the trial, she said. "Nobody's going to do any soul searching when you have these ratings," said Muller, a former [ABC News](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/ABC+News) correspondent who covered the Simpson trial in [Los Angeles](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Places,+Geography/Towns,+Cities,+Counties/Los+Angeles).

Celebrated trials are not just a product of today's online and cable TV world of constant news cycles. The Lindbergh baby kidnapping trial in 1935 is one of many trials that became a riveting national spectacle.

But why did this case attract so much attention, when countless other children disappear or die under mysterious circumstances without becoming widely known?

The decision by cable outlets to focus on the trial is one part of the answer, Muller said. The case also had elements of a soap opera: a young woman whose daughter is dead, photos of her partying lifestyle, suggestions that Casey Anthony was sexually abused by her father and the emotions of Caylee's grandparents, who lost a grandchild and were openly critical of their daughter as she faced charges that could have led to her execution.

"It's got a lot of drama, It's a soap opera," Muller said. "I don't think we should beat up on the public for watching."

**What the jurors saw**

Inside Courtroom 23, the drama had a much different tone.

The burden was on prosecutors to prove their theory: that Anthony suffocated her daughter by placing duct tape on her mouth and nose, wrapped her in a Winnie the Pooh blanket and black trash bags, kept the body in the car's trunk until the odor was too strong, and then dumped it in the woods near her house.

Legal analysts say prosecutors could not tie Anthony definitively to Caylee's death. Prosecutors had no DNA, hair samples or other physical evidence that would do so.They introduced controversial forensic techniques, such as an air-sampling method never before used in a criminal court case.The researcher who pioneered the technique said the smell of decomposition filled the trunk of Anthony's car. A defense witness countered that the smell could have come from food that had been found rotting in the trunk.

Karin Moore, a law professor at Florida A&M University, said the state's case was circumstantial."Did they prove the manner of death? Did they prove the cause of death?" she said. "The state relied a lot on emotion."

She thought jurors might convict Anthony if they shared the disgust for the defendant that was reflected in online comments by the public.

Anthony's attorney, [Jose Baez](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Jose+Baez), created reasonable doubt, Moore and other legal analysts said, when he said Caylee drowned accidentially and that her grandfather, Casey's father, helped cover it up and dispose of the body. He also claimed that George Anthony had sexually abused Casey when she was a child. George Anthony denied both accusations.

Moore and other legal analysts said what surprised them was that the jury was able to get beyond the emotion and rely only on the facts of the case. Prosecutors spent half of their case depicting Anthony as a liar and a bad mother, but that didn't prove she killed her daughter, said [Donald Jones](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Donald+Jones), a professor at the [University of Miami School of Law](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/University+of+Miami+School+of+Law)."The jurors can't look at this case as a soap opera or a reality show," Jones said. "They had to put their emotions aside and look at the evidence. And they saw there wasn't any."

**Social media trial of the century**

*Time* called it the social media trial of the century. It didn't take long for people on Facebook and Twitter to compare Anthony's acquittal with O.J. Simpson's 1995 acquittal in the death of his wife, Nicole.

[Marcia Clark](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Marcia+Clark), prosecutor in the Simpson trial, was amused by the comparisons."There were many more differences than similarities," she said.

"She's not a famous athlete or a celebrity personality," Clark said. "She doesn't have years in the national spotlight with a lovable, affable persona. In fact, it was the opposite. She was viewed pretty quickly as guilty. And there were no racial over- or undertones."

Unlike Simpson's case, the Anthony trial was not getting much coverage until the allegations of molestation, giving the news media something to fill the quiet summer news days, she said."It was a circumstantial case that hinged very heavily on her behavior," she said.

In the Simpson case, by contrast, when it came to evidence, "We had it all — but we had a nightmare along with it. The forensic evidence was attacked on the methods of collection and analysis. The defense looked at all the things that 'could have happened' to the evidence. Remember, this case was nearly 16 years ago, when people were distrusting of police after the riots and when DNA was not yet accepted as it is today. I wound up telling the O.J. jury. 'Forget the DNA and look at everything else.'"

Anthony does share one thing with Simpson, Jones said.

"She will be marked by this trial," he said. "The best thing she could do is change her name and her hair color and move to a different town."

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