



Abstract

If you've ever found yourself confused on where you stand with a current event in the criminal justice world, you've probably fallen victim to media framing. All frames are supported by some portion of the public, and often, people tend to support more than one frame at a time. Many true crime consumers and justice system enthusiasts are able to perceive each case differently when the stories are constructed using different frames. For example, through the Faulty Criminal Justice System Frame, O.J. Simpson can be seen as guilty. This is accomplished by using the narrative that pins the criminal justice system as corrupt, or unable to complete the one task it was designed to do. However, when the story is told using the Racist System Frame, he appears to be innocent. This frame shows the criminal justice system as a tool to further oppress and discriminate against those who belong to minority groups.

Frames

- The media is known for packaging stories into different “frames” so the general public will consume the information easier (Surette, 2015).
- The five frames of world events are the Faulty Criminal Justice System Frame, the Blocked Opportunities Frame, the Social Breakdown Frame, the Racist System Frame, and the Violent Media frame.
- Many true crime stories fall underneath one of these five frames.
- **The Blocked Opportunities Frame:**
 - Crime is a consequence of inequality and discrimination. People commit crime because legitimate means are blocked.
 - *Example: Lavetta Langdon, battered woman syndrome*
- **The Social Breakdown Frame:**
 - Crime is a consequence of family and community disintegration, divorce, out of wedlock births, racial discrimination, unemployment, and loss of income.
 - *Example: Riots, looting, and protests.*
- **The Racist System Frame:**
 - Focuses on the criminal justice system rather than on the crime. Depicts the courts and police as racist agents of oppression.
 - *Example: The beating of Rodney King*
- **The Violent Media Frame:**
 - Crime and social violence is the consequence of violent television, music, and video games.
 - *Example: Aurora, CO Movie Theater Shooting*

Alex Murdaugh Case Background

- **1920-2005:** Three generations of the Murdaugh family serve as the South Carolina 14th Circuit Solicitor. (Responsible for overseeing the prosecution of criminal cases in that area).
- **February 24, 2019:** Mallory Beach, 19, goes overboard on a boat and drowns while Paul Murdaugh (Alex Murdaugh's son) is driving, intoxicated.
- **May 6, 2019:** Paul Murdaugh pleads not guilty to all charges.
- **June 7, 2021:** Alex Murdaugh discovers the bodies of his son Paul and wife Maggie at their hunting lodge on Moselle Road in Islandton, Colleton County. Their death is ruled as a homicide from multiple gunshot wounds.
- **August 6, 2021:** The South Carolina Attorney General's Office drops all charges against Paul Murdaugh in the death of Mallory Beach due to his own death.
- **September 2, 2021:** The PMPED law firm begins an investigation into Alex Murdaugh after finding he had been taking money from the firm and clients for personal use.
- **September 4, 2021:** Alex Murdaugh is rushed to the hospital with a gunshot wound to the head.
- **September 12, 2021:** Alex Murdaugh admits to his surviving son, Buster, and brothers, Randy and John that he staged the roadside shooting. It was an attempt to kill himself so Buster could get a \$10 million life insurance policy.
- **September 16, 2021:** Alex Murdaugh turns himself in to the Hampton County Detention Center.
- **November 19, 2021:** Alex Murdaugh is indicted on nearly 30 criminal counts (multiple deaths, finances, corruption).
- **July 12, 2022:** The South Carolina Supreme Court officially disbars Alex Murdaugh.
- **December 20, 2022:** South Carolina Attorney Alan Wilson announces they are seeking life without parole at Alex Murdaugh's double murder trial.
- **January 26-March 2, 2023:** Trial takes place.
- **March 2, 2023:** Alex Murdaugh is found guilty on all counts.



Faulty Criminal Justice System Frame

- **The Faulty Criminal Justice System Frame:**
 - Crime is a consequence of a lack of law and order. People are able to find loopholes to escape apprehension or imprisonment.
 - *Example: Alex Murdaugh*
- Time and time again, Alex Murdaugh had escaped the mousetrap of punishment. After a multitude of events that should have landed him in prison and disbarred, he finally met his criminal fate on March 2nd, 2023.
- Through the Faulty Criminal Justice System frame, the media constructs his story as a corrupt attorney who used his occupation to dodge repercussions not only for his own crimes, but for crimes his son committed as well.



Conclusion

As a true crime viewer, or someone who consumes various forms of media, it is important to identify the frames being used to enforce certain narratives. It must also be noted that a frame being used is not an indication that the story is fictitious, as frames are a way to deliver information for the public to easily understand. Once a frame is identified, the information can be taken one of few ways. The viewer can absorb the information as displayed, use that information to look past the frame and research more on their own, or ignore the information and frame all together. Frames are everywhere, one must be able to pinpoint them.