

LISA COLLINS

Behind The Scenes



Johnny Cochran's True Claim To Fame: His dream

team defense of O. J. Simpson made him one of the most renowned lawyers in the world. Getting Simpson freed set

loose a chain of events that sparked a national debate on race relations. A book is due out this fall. These days, Johnny Cochran's newfound celebrity status makes it difficult for him to go out in public without an escort. "And," he adds, "my friends don't want to walk with me any more because they can't get through a crowd anywhere." Ironically, one of the biggest criticisms of Cochran came with his use of scripture in closing statements.

However, Cochran counters "what better resource if you want to make a point? As to the criticism, there's nothing that anybody can say to me to make me lose sight of what I have to do, and that was to be an advocate for this one particular client. It wasn't so much this client, it was any client," states the 58-year-old attorney who won't take cases involving the sale of drugs. "If you're an advocate," he continues, "you do the best that you can. I'm not ever going to put a witness on the stand that I think or know is lying. But I wasn't going to back down because God gave me the talent to carry through."

And he has more than carried through, winning more than \$40 million for his clients, while representing the likes of Michael Jackson, Reginald Denny, former child star Todd Bridges and O.J. Simpson. His trial expertise has earned him the distinction of being the only lawyer in California who's ever won both the Criminal Trial Lawyer of the Year Award and the Civil Trial Lawyer of the Year Award. Fact is, Cochran has no desire to have the infamous "trial of the century" serve as his claim to fame. Instead, what he'd like to be most remembered for are cases where he feels he's changed the system and made a lasting impact. Those like the wrongful death suits of James Thomas Mincey and Ron Settles that earned him a reputation in defending African Americans against the system and led to the 1982 outlawing of the choke-hold once used by the LAPD. He goes on to



recount with pride his representation of 16 little girls molested by their teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District. "They said I was going to break the district (financially)," he recalls, "and I told them 'I don't care. You shouldn't have put this teacher with this kind of proclivity in schools with black girls. You took him out of a white school and put him in a black school.' We made them pay a record amount and I doubt they'll do that again." One of them Cochran - who doesn't give up - is still fighting. Fact is, the defense of former Black Panther member, Geronimo

Pratt which he took in 1970, is the most challenging of his career. Pratt was convicted to a life sentence in 1972: "A man who was wrongfully convicted," Cochran contends, "who is still in prison that I'm still trying to get out of prison until this day. We go to court the fourth of September and I'm going to fight. I will never quit until he gets out."

By the way: Gayle King, who is probably best known to national TV audiences as Oprah Winfrey's best friend, now has a lot more in common with her famed pal. King, who works as a news anchor at WFSB in Hartford, Conn. will host a new half-hour, magazine format talker being slated to make its debut next fall as a companion piece to a new "Martha Stewart Living" series. While Stewart's series keys in on the home, King's focus will be on the family...Samuel L. Jackson has been tagged to star in and produce the coming-of-age drama "Eve's Bayou," about a young Creole girl growing up in a small Louisiana town. Jackson will play the girl's father with Lynn Whitfield as her mother. The title role has not yet been cast. Production is set to get underway in late January or early February...

Finally, Rick James gave his first public performance since his release from prison on the stage at Billboard Live during a performance by the group Common Sense. James, who had been in the audience, got up on stage to join the group for their rendition of "Super Freak" before rendering his own. At present, James is reportedly negotiating a record deal with several labels.



JAMES

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Whitley received Excellent grades in her 2nd grade reporting period, and has started off the third grade with the same academic results.

She won the Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Martin Luther King Essay contest for her age category in January of 1996.

Whitley's summer was extremely busy participating in the Afro-American Children's Theatre's programs, and attending Charlotte Children's Choir's Music Camp. She auditioned, and has obtained a position in the Treble Choir for the 96-97 year.

Her hobbies are reading and playing the piano. She enjoys taking lessons from Diane Alexanders's Music School.

She is also involved in the community as a girl scout with the C.N. Jenkins Presbyterian Troop. Little Miss Saxton and her mother attend Friendship Missionary Baptist Church.

Whitley is the daughter of Edith Diane Saxton and Raymond C. Saxton.

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