



LASALLECUNMUN 2025

INTERPOL

(International Criminal
Police Organization)

“Influence or Distortion?
Media Coverage in Legal
Battles with a Focus on the
Menendez Case”

Background Guide





Dear delegates,

It is a pleasure to be able to join you at this year's edition of LASALLECUNMUN 2025! I am Derek González, and I have the honor to be your president of the INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL POLICE ORGANIZATION this year, I extend a warm welcome to all participants. Our esteemed panel will be composed of Leonardo Anglada as Moderator and Ambar Mendoza as Conference Officer. This will be my third MUN conference, but the first time on the chair's behalf as the president of INTERPOL. I have had the chance to be delegate of ULSACUNMUN2023 and LASALLECUNMUN2024. I know the thrilling and nerve-wracking it can be, so I encourage you to embrace this opportunity to enhance your skills and I am confident in our readiness to provide a memorable experience for all involved this year.

I am currently 17 years old, enrolled as a senior specializing in the physical-mathematical field. My passion lies in the field of chemical engineering, which I plan to pursue in the future. Alongside my academic endeavors, I play basketball, I am involved in two scientific projects one is about the creation of a sargassum-based bioplastic and the other one is about the use of reporter proteins in the laboratory, another thing about me is that I love French, and I have already passed some certifications. During my free time, I enjoy writing poems and short stories, watch films; I love old movies like Rashomon (1950), The Red Shoes (1948), Metropolis (1927) and The Wizard of Oz (1939). My musical tastes range from José José to Mitski. I also never say no to an outing with friends and if it is to the movies, even better. I like to do a little bit of everything, I like to participate in all kinds of activities. It is fun to see how everything you learn can be useful for another situation. MUN is special for me because I met good friends, stumbled, and made it through, it is a good way to get out of the routine and learn something different from what is taught in a classroom.

If you like famous celebrities' cases and you are looking for a debatable committee that contains different points of view, interesting, out of the ordinary, where excitement and controversy are guaranteed, then the International Criminal Police Organization is just for you. Join us for an in-depth and informative discussion on the role of the media in public perception and do not miss the opportunity to be part of a discussion that goes beyond the headlines and reveals the truth behind the hype! My advice is not to be afraid to speak up, make yourself known and enjoy the conference, because it is made for you. I know each of you will do very well and achieve satisfactory results. Do not hesitate to reach out if you have any doubts or questions, we are eager and willing to help you in any way we can!

Your sincerely,

Derek González

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COMMITTEE DESCRIPTION:

The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) is an inter-governmental organization. It has 195 member countries, and it helps police in all of them to work together to make the world a safer place. To do this, it enables them to share and access data crimes and criminals, and it offers a range of technical and operational support. It enables the police to collaborate directly with their counterparts, even between countries which do not have diplomatic relations. All their actions are politically neutral and taken within the limits of existing laws in deferent countries.

Topic: "Influence or Distortion? Media Coverage in Legal Battles with a Focus on the Menendez Case"

INTRODUCTION:

On the night of August 20, 1989, Lyle and Erik Menendez murdered his parents, Jose, and Kitty Menendez, in their Beverly Hills home. The brothers claimed to be acting in self-defense due to years of physical and sexual abuse by their father. However, the jury found insufficient evidence and convicted them of premeditated murder. Both were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

The Menendez brothers' case is one of the most notorious examples of how the media can shape public perception and, in some cases, distort reality. Beyond the details of why they committed the crime or the order of events, the purpose of this topic is to illustrate the powerful influence of the media in celebrity cases.

From the moment Lyle and Erik Menendez were charged with the 1989 murder of their parents, the media poured into coverage of the case, transforming it into a media spectacle. Live television broadcasts, sensational headlines and endless analysis not only informed the public, but also shaped their opinions. The narrative presented by the media often emphasized sensational and emotional aspects, leading to a national debate about justice, morality, and truth.

During this lecture, we will explore how media representation can divert attention from essential facts and create a dramatized version of reality. We will discuss whether the media report in a balanced manner or whether, in their quest for audiences, they sacrifice accuracy and objectivity, thereby distorting public perception and reality itself.

We will also examine specific cases where the media have significantly shaped public perception. We will assess the extent to which the media can distort the facts in their coverage of high-profile cases. And finally, propose measures to improve ethics and accuracy in media coverage of court cases.

We hope that this discussion will lead to a deeper understanding of the media's impact on high-profile cases and allow us to formulate recommendations for fairer and more balanced coverage.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

On the night of August 20, 1989, Jose Menendez and Kitty Menendez sat in the living room of their Beverly Hills mansion watching a James Bond movie on TV. While they watched the movie and ate snacks there, they were brutally murdered. Jose was shot, one of them at close range, in the back of his head. Kitty was shot in the face and head. Their sons, Lyle, 21, and Erik, 18, returned just before midnight from a nearby movie theater where they had seen a movie. Lyle then called 911 and reported the murder.

Jose Menendez, being a successful video company executive, made headlines about his murder, and it hinted that there could be a connection to organized crime since the matter had to do with the mafia. The Menendez family seemed like a happy and successful family. The father was Cuban, had made a fortune, and lived in a mansion in Beverly Hills, where it is not usual for a married couple to be shot to death on their couch. Rand's report dealt with what happened that night, as well as several family stories told by Erik, so that three months after the report was published, the brothers were charged with murder.

For the next three years, before the case went to trial, the story told was that of two greedy brothers who, two days before the murders, after learning that their father was going to disinherit them, had bought some shotguns. And that Sunday night they shot their parents to death and then went to the movies to pretend that the bodies had been found. Then, confident of their impunity, the brothers devoted themselves to spending lavishly.

That was when the first trial began. It was then that each brother told, in detail, and separately, stories of sexual abuse and fights within the family. Lyle said that his father began to caress him when he was 6 years old and how, in the following two years, that abuse led to rape. Erik told a story similar to that of his brother but that it had continued during his adolescence and had lasted until his father's death.

This whole story, according to the brothers, broke out in the days before the murders. Five days before the murder, on Tuesday, Lyle had an incendiary argument with his mother. During the fight, she ripped off his toupee, something that was seen by his younger brother, who did not know about Lyle's toupee since he suffered from premature baldness, which is why he wore a toupee. Erik, traumatized and trying to comfort his brother after the fight, proceeded to tell his brother that they both had secrets and described the abuse he suffered from his father.

When Jose returned from a business trip, Lyle confronted him, telling him everything he knew and that if he did not stop touching his brother, he would tell everyone, so that after that confrontation Lyle was afraid that his father would get rid of him and his brother.

Erik testified that that night his father confronted him by violently throwing him on his bed and saying that he had warned him not to tell Lyle that he would tell everyone, so that his father told him that that was not going to happen, implying that he was going to get rid of them. After that, Erik saw his mother and she asked him why he was so upset. Erik says that when he told her that she would not understand, she answered him, Erik realized that mother knew everything that his father did with him and his brother.

The jury was unable to agree on whether the brothers were guilty of murder or manslaughter. The trial was declared a mistrial. But society in the nineties condemned them. It considered

the abuse a fabrication. The famous lawyer Alan Dershowitz coined in a newspaper column a phrase that became famous: “the abuse excuse.”

In 1995 a second trial began. This time less testimony about abuse and family trauma was allowed. The prosecution focused on the gruesome death scene and insisted that, even in the unproven case that there had been abuse, the jury would have to believe – in order not to convict them of murder – that the brothers were in imminent danger. Outcome: Lyle and Erik were found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison. Even their wish to be incarcerated in the same institution was rejected. It was argued that even behind bars they could conspire for future crimes. For 20 years they were not even allowed to speak on the phone. Finally, in 2018, Lyle was able to join his younger brother in a San Diego correctional facility.

CURRENT SITUATION:

Thanks to the huge improvement and popularity that the media has nowadays, young people, mostly teenagers, have learned about a closed 1980s double homicide, and they think the convicted killers’ case deserves revisiting. No member of Gen Z was alive to watch the high-profile court trial of Lyle and Erik Menendez’s 1989 murder of their parents play out in real time, but many young social-media users have recently discovered the sensational case during the coronavirus pandemic. Now, they are taking to TikTok to express their dismay at Lyle and Erik’s life sentences, which they have been serving since their conviction in 1996. Numerous accounts have been created for the same purpose, posting edited trial footage of the men, demanding justice for them and calling them “the most attractive murderers” in the world. Others, however, are disgusted by the idea that the brothers deserve “justice” for their crimes.

Los Angeles County’s district attorney said he will recommend that a judge resentence Lyle and Erik Menendez 30 years after the brothers were convicted of the murders of their parents, a recommendation that he said would make them eligible for immediate parole. “After very careful review of all arguments made from people on both sides of this equation, I came to a place where I believe under the law resentencing is appropriate and I am going to recommend that to a court tomorrow,” District Attorney George Gascón said at an afternoon news conference in Los Angeles.

Consequences:

The Menéndez case received extensive media coverage due to the nature of the crime (the murder of both parents by their children) as well as the gruesome details and allegations of sexual abuse that the brothers claimed as the motive. The media presented this case in a sensational manner, turning it into a highly publicized spectacle. Audiences were drawn to the broadcast of testimonies, dramatic revelations, and details about the Menéndez family's lifestyle, creating a spectacle that was hard to separate from the legal proceedings.

Also, despite the brothers' claims of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by their parents over the years, many media outlets portrayed their story cynically, focusing on the fact that the wealthy, privileged children had committed the crime. This led to a negative public perception of the brothers, who were stigmatized as "rich and spoiled kids" who killed their

parents for money, rather than as victims of family abuse. The media coverage often skewed the narrative and reduced the case to a "rich people killing for inheritance" story.

Media coverage may have influenced the trial. Although the judge instructed the jury not to follow the media, it is likely that some jurors were exposed to news coverage about the case, which could have affected their perceptions. The media frenzy was so large that attorneys had to consider the opinions formed by the media in their strategies. In such a high-profile trial, it was difficult to maintain impartiality among the jurors.

Media coverage also focused on the emotional testimony of the brothers, especially Erik's account of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his father. This type of content, which included dramatic statements and intimate details, attracted a large audience, and while some considered it relevant to the case, it was also used as a sensationalist tool by the media to maintain public interest. This created an atmosphere where people were more focused on emotions than on the legal aspects of the trial.

Amid the vast amount of information provided by the media, there was also a significant amount of misinformation or misinterpretation, making it difficult for the public to fully understand all aspects of the case. The details of the trial, such as arguments about abuse and testimonies, were often exaggerated or distorted by some journalists, leading to public misunderstandings of the evidence and the central narrative of the case.

The Menéndez case was an early example of how the media can affect the public's perception of the accused, regardless of the legal verdicts. Although it was later acknowledged that the brothers may have been real victims of abuse, their public image as "spoiled children" persisted long after the trial. The media created a narrative that had a lasting impact on how the public viewed the Menéndez brothers.

Influence on public opinion:

The media has an enormous influence on public opinion, as it not only informs but also shapes the way people perceive events. Through the selection of topics and how they are presented, the media creates narratives that affect how the public views certain issues. They also set the agenda of what is important, build stereotypes, appeal to emotions, and in some cases, can contribute to the polarization or manipulation of opinion. Social media amplifies this impact, allowing opinions to form and change quickly. This highlights the importance of consuming media critically.

Examples:

1. U.S. Presidential Elections: Media coverage of the 2020 elections, debates, and conspiracy theories influenced voters' perceptions and further polarized society.
2. Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement: Coverage of George Floyd's death and protests raised awareness about racism, generating global support for the movement and promoting changes in justice policies.
3. COVID-19 Pandemic: Media coverage of the pandemic, vaccines, and conspiracy theories affected public attitudes toward restrictions and health policies, fostering distrust and polarization.

Distortions of reality:

The media have great power to shape public perception, but this power can be used in a distorted way, either through omission, sensationalism, narrative manipulation, or bias. This highlights the importance of critical media consumption, seeking diverse sources of information, and being aware of how facts can be presented in ways that distort reality.

Examples:

1. 2020 U.S. presidential election: Media focused excessively on fraud theories, causing distrust in the electoral process despite no substantial evidence.
2. Ukraine conflict: Media presented conflicting narratives based on political affiliations, leading to distorted perceptions of the war.
3. Australia wildfires (2020): Media exaggerated the devastation and overemphasized climate change, neglecting other factors like inadequate management.

COUNTRY BOX:

Argentine Republic

Commonwealth of Australia

Dominion of Canada

French Republic

Italian Republic

Japan

Kingdom of Spain

Kingdom of Thailand

New Zealand

People's Republic of China

Republic of Chile

Republic of Colombia

Republic of India

Republic of Indonesia

Republic of Korea

Republic of Peru

Russian Federation

United Mexican States

United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland United

United States of America

GUIDE QUESTIONS:

- I. Mention a case where in your country the media played a key role, was it an influence on public opinion or distortion of reality?
- II. How has the media coverage of the Menendez case influenced the way high-profile cases are covered today?
- III. What role have social networks played in the modern perception of the Menendez case and other current cases?
- IV. What measures can be implemented to minimize the distortion of reality in the coverage of court cases?
- V. How can the relationship between the media and the judicial system be improved to ensure fair and equitable coverage?

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