

On the Casey Anthony Murder Case  
Robert S. Griffin  
www.robertsgriffin.com

I had a good experience with a couple of true-crime books by attorneys for the prosecution and defense in the Casey Anthony trial in 2011. Casey Anthony was a 25-year-old single mother from Florida who was charged with murdering her not-quite-three-year-old daughter Caylee in 2008. The trial was televised nationally and received 24/7 cable coverage. I've ditched my television set since, but I was glued to the tube back then. Print media couldn't get enough of the case either. I'm not on social media, but I understand social media had a field day with it. The word from the media at the time was that Casey was guilty, not a sliver of a doubt about that, and I went along with the consensus take on the case.

Assuming you aren't familiar with the Caylee Anthony murder, here's a portion of the Wikipedia entry on it:

Caylee Marie Anthony (August 9, 2005 – 2008) was an American girl who lived in Orlando, Florida with her mother Casey Marie Anthony (born March 19, 1986), and her maternal grandparents, George and Cindy Anthony. On July 15, 2008, she was reported missing in a 9-1-1 call made by Cindy, who said she had not seen Caylee for 31 days and that Casey's car smelled like a dead body had been inside it. Cindy said Casey had given varied explanations as to Caylee's whereabouts before finally telling her that she had not seen Caylee for weeks. Casey lied to detectives, telling them Caylee had been kidnapped by a nanny on June 9th and that she had been trying to find her, too frightened to alert the authorities. She was charged with first-degree murder in October 2008 and pleaded not guilty.

On December 11, 2008, two-year-old Caylee's skeletal remains were found with a blanket inside a trash bag in a wooded area near the Anthony family's house. Investigative reports and trial testimony varied between duct-tape being found near the front of the skull and on the mouth of the skull. The medical examiner mentioned duct tape as one reason she ruled the death

a homicide, but officially listed it as "death by undetermined means."

The trial lasted six weeks, from May to July 2011. The prosecution sought the death penalty and alleged Casey wished to free herself from parental responsibilities and murdered her daughter by administering chloroform and applying duct tape.

The defense team, led by Jose Baez, countered that the child had drowned accidentally in the family's swimming pool on June 16, 2008, and that George Anthony disposed of the body. The defense contended that Casey lied about this and other issues because of a dysfunctional upbringing, which they said included sexual abuse by her father.

The defense did not present evidence as to how Caylee died, nor evidence that Casey was sexually abused as a child, but challenged every piece of the prosecution's evidence, calling much of it "fantasy forensics." Casey did not testify.

On July 5, 2011, the jury found Casey not guilty of first-degree murder, aggravated child abuse, and aggravated manslaughter of a child, but guilty of four misdemeanor counts of providing false information to a law enforcement officer. With credit for time served, she was released on July 17, 2011. A Florida appeals court overturned two of the misdemeanor convictions on January 25, 2013.

The not-guilty murder verdict was greeted with public outrage and was both attacked and defended by media and legal commentators. Some complained that the jury misunderstood the meaning of reasonable doubt, while others said the prosecution relied too heavily on the defendant's allegedly poor moral character because they had been unable to show conclusively how the victim had died. *Time* magazine described the case as "the social media trial of the century."

The two books I read are this one by one of the prosecuting attorneys, Jeff Ashton: *Imperfect Justice: Prosecuting Casey Anthony* (William Morrow, 2011), and this one by the lead defense attorney, Jose Baez: *Presumed Guilty: Casey Anthony: The Inside Story* (BenBella Books, 2013).

I won't go into details, but reading the two books, which obviously present conflicting perspectives on the case, was a fascinating and eye-opening experience. It was good for me to compare how I saw the case when it happened and how I see it now after reading the two books. Plus, I'm a different person now a decade later: I'm sure the person I am now affected what I took from the two books; and that the person I am now would have viewed case differently back then (I'd like to think more autonomously and insightfully). Even if you didn't follow the trial when it occurred, and even if you know nothing about the case other than what was in the Wikipedia entry above, I think there's a good chance you'll find it worth your time to compare the two books.

The big questions to answer: What really happened to Caylee Anthony? How did she die? Who was responsible for her death? How did the competing attorneys, Jeff Ashton and Jose Baez, go about their jobs and what's your best thinking about that? If you followed the trial, what are your insights about how the media covered it? and what did you learn about what you were like back then and what you are like now, a decade later? In what way(s) are you better for having grappled with these conflicting perspectives on this case?

Today, I read a 2018 article by Breeanna Hare for CNN called "What Really Happened? The Casey Anthony Case 10 Years Later." <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/29/us/casey-anthony-10-years-later/index.html> After you read the two books, see what thoughts the article brings up for you.

Have a good time.