

AP's Court Reporter Linda Deutsch Keynotes Missoula FOI Conference

Linda Deutsch, the Associated Press special correspondent who has covered many high profile trials in her 30 years with the news cooperative, doesn't believe in the "trial of the century" label.

While she calls the Charles Manson and O.J. Simpson trials the most sensational, Deutsch said that each of the major trials she has covered "were memorable in their own way."

Deutsch, who works out of Los Angeles, was interviewed April 11 by Missoulian reporter Gary Jahrig while she was at the University of Montana to speak at the School of Journalism's annual Dean Stone Night Awards Banquet and keynote the Montana Freedom of Information Conference.

AP's veteran trial reporter said the gavel-to-gavel television coverage of Simpson's murder trial provided a new perspective on the judicial system. "In the O.J. trial, it was clear there were people playing to the camera -- the attorneys, the witnesses and even the judge at times."



AP Special Correspondent Linda Deutsch [Kurt Wilson - Missoulian]

"If the Manson trial had been televised, I'm convinced the country would have stopped," she said. "In that trial, every witness was Kato Kaelin. There were so many bizarre characters."

Speaking at the FOI conference, Deutsch said that the issue of "cameras in the courtroom will haunt us for a long time" because of the circus atmosphere surrounding Simpson's criminal trial.

Referring to that trial's judge, she said "Lance Ito grew up with TV, embraced television and it destroyed him."

As for trials mirroring their times, Deutsch said that in the 1970s the Angela Davis trial shed light on black revolutionaries, Daniel Ellsberg's was a trial of the Vietnam War and Patricia Hearst was the story of "post-Vietnam alienation."

John De Lorean was typical of the 1980s in that it revolved around a celebrity with a lot of money. "He had made a fast car, he had a gorgeous wife and he was accused of selling the drug of the '80s, cocaine," she said.

Deutsch was also in Missoula on a book tour for her "best friend and mentor," Theo Wilson, a famous New York Daily News reporter who died in January, two days after her book "Headline Justice" was published. Deutsch, who wrote the forward for Wilson's book, said the book provides a look at the "great trials and another era in journalism."