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## End in sight for Jackson media circus

By Matthew Davis  
BBC News, Santa Maria, California

**When a verdict is delivered in the Michael Jackson trial, expect a media frenzy like nothing before.**

Helicopters will scramble to track the singer's entourage as it leaves his home, a scrum of reporters will hurtle into court, news will spread among fans that the moment of truth has arrived.

Frantic calls to news desks will be followed by an explosion of punditry, protagonists will be hounded, pre-prepared stories hastily amended, while the clamour will continue for days.

Somewhere beneath it all, the lives of the Jacksons and Arvizos will change forever.

If the trial itself has not captivated as it promised to, its climax surely will.

That, at least, is the expectation of the ranks of journalists waiting in Santa Maria.

For most, the time for hand-wringing over the reasons for being there, has - if it was ever present - gone.

### Jostling for space

"People in the street will say they don't watch the coverage, then they will ask four questions about it," says Jim Avila, lead trial correspondent for ABC News.

"The fact is, people are watching it, the numbers show that. Yes we have devoted a lot of resources to it, but it is a competitive market.

"We have not covered it every day, we have exercised judgement. But when the story moves we are there and people want us to be there."

With the jury out, the atmosphere at Santa Maria courthouse is relaxed, yet liable to change with the buzzing of a pager.

Hacks may be preparing for an



News networks have had months to prepare for the verdict



Jesse Jackson has been a regular fixture

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#### Cost of freedom

Michael Jackson's winning legal team doesn't come cheap, writes Matthew Davis

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onslaught, but there is time for conversation and for some, to take souvenir photographs of what is a remarkable scene.

With dozens of television crews jostling for the best views of the courthouse, news organisations have designated, fenced-off spaces in the parking lot.

A row of canopies dominates, shading reporters and producers as well as cameras, computers and the mass of cabling underfoot.

There are at least a dozen satellite trucks in the car park behind the courthouse.

A nearby cafe, gift shop and even a swimming pool complex are now temporary offices.

Scaffolding towers or the roofs of adjacent buildings provide panoramic positions for live interviews.

### 'Courtroom and newsroom'

But pandemonium is never far away.

Joe Jackson, Michael's father, caused an ugly stampede when he arrived at court unannounced on Monday.

Vehicles leaving the singer's Neverland ranch send those staking out the gates scurrying to their cars.

In the relative calm before the storm, even the prospect of a fan releasing white doves in front of the courthouse is enough to generate a miniature whirlwind of activity.

"This has become a two-room trial," says the Rev Jesse Jackson, Michael Jackson's de facto spokesman, who is now making regular appearances in Santa Maria.

"You have the courtroom and the newsroom," he adds. "Michael's health problems are being discussed and his guilt or innocence debated."

America's freedom of speech laws allow the type of coverage alien to countries where discussion of court cases is outlawed to avoid prejudicing juries.

### 'American oddness'

Votes are being taken on the verdict, reporters are filming at the jail where Jackson could serve time if he is found guilty, and pundits are even analysing the jurors' clothes for clues to how they are minded.

The whole spectacle has become a sociology professor's dream.

Theorists are already writing about the trial as a "post-modern" concept.

Professor Toby Miller, of the University of California Riverside's cultural studies department, told the BBC: "What you are seeing played



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out in very public form is the tragedy of a psyche and the tragedy of an empire."

But he also alluded to the core reasons this trial is so followed.

"Internationally he [Jackson] remains a big name around the world. But he also represents the oddness of the United States around the world."

### 'Jaded'

It was a view echoed by Japanese journalist Shingo Horie, a producer for Fuji Television.


"There are a lot of crazy things that go on in California," he said.

"We worked hard on Arnold Schwarzenegger's election campaign. But this is the craziest yet."

Fuji's eight-strong crew has been in Santa Maria since 2003, and like many veterans of the Jackson trial, is glad to see an end in sight.

"There is still a lot of interest in Michael Jackson in Japan. We have been here since Neverland was raided," Horie added.

"But to be honest, I think we are all getting a bit jaded."

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