



Campaign 2000

# Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ☆ Friday, June 23, 2000

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Networks Gave 30 Stories to Texas Capital Case vs. Two for 1992 Arkansas Execution

## Gary Graham vs. Ricky Ray Rector

Why are executions in Texas suddenly the focus of multiple stories on network and cable news? The network air blitz began on June 12. NBC's Lisa Myers announced the "special scrutiny" came because of the "131 inmates executed by Governor George W. Bush." Now that would be a hands-on chief executive.

The latest media rally against Bush's administration of capital punishment cases in Texas came with the case of Gary Graham, who went on a two-week crime spree in May of 1981, including ten robberies, the rape of a 57-year-old woman, and several shootings, including 19-year-old Greg Jones (see box.) Jones said of Graham: "I saw him smiling at me, his eyes just looking like death warmed over, and all of a sudden he smiled a little grin, and he pulled the trigger."

One eyewitness said she saw Graham kill Bobby Lambert outside a supermarket during that crime spree, the offense that led to his death sentence.

Through Thursday morning, ABC, CBS, and NBC together aired nine evening news stories and 16 morning news stories and interview segments on questions about the Graham case. NBC aired two *Nightly News* stories and six *Today* segments. CBS ran three stories on the *Evening News*, and five on *The Early Show*. ABC led the pack with four *World News Tonight* stories and five segments on *Good Morning America*. ABC also had the greatest tilt in sources: *World News Tonight* stories featured six Graham supporters to two Graham detractors. *Good Morning America* took on the tone of a crusade, with nine pro-Graham guests to two anti-Graham guests. CNN's *The World Today* also aired five stories on the Graham case.

In contrast to this blitz of 30 Gary Graham stories, how

many stories did the networks devote to the capital cases of Gov. Bill Clinton in 1992? On Friday, January 24, 1992, Clinton left the campaign trail to oversee the state of Arkansas executing Ricky Ray Rector, who shot himself in the head after killing two people, including a policeman.

MRC media analysts looked at network newscasts from

Monday, January 20 through Sunday, January 26. Rector only drew two full stories, and only one before his execution, the *CBS Evening News* on the 24th. *ABC's World News Tonight* aired a story on the 25th. (CNN's Gene Randall gave the news 18 seconds during *World News* on the 25th.)

CBS's Richard Threlkeld reported Clinton became a target for death penalty groups which claimed he was "playing politics with Rector's life." But ABC's Mike Von Fremd found: "Political analysts say the death penalty is a winner with voters,

particularly in the South....But now that a majority of Democratic candidates support the death penalty, the Republicans might not be able to make it an issue in this year's election."

Executions did become a hot topic two months later. Through March and April, the networks focused on the California killer Robert Alton Harris. But the Governor involved was Pete Wilson, a Republican. — *Tim Graham*

### Gary Graham: Devil or Jesus?

**"I saw the devil in his eyes. I saw hatred in his eyes that just appeared out of nowhere. Those eyes, it's so hard to describe. It was a nightmare in his eyes."** — Greg Jones, whom Graham shot in the neck during a two-week crime spree. Graham pleaded guilty to shooting Jones. Reported in the June 5, 1993 *Houston Chronicle*.  
Vs.

**"This is coming back to the Pontius Pilate dilemma, where Pontius Pilate knew that the thief and the robber were guilty. He was not sure whether Jesus was or not, so he said 'Well, let me check with the polls. Let me ask the crowds.' And they said 'Crucify him.'"** — Rev. Jesse Jackson on MSNBC's *Hardball*, June 20.

L. Brent Bozell III, Publisher; Brent Baker, Tim Graham, Editors; Jessica Anderson, Brian Boyd, Geoffrey Dickens, Ted King, Paul Smith, Brad Wilmoth, Media Analysts; Kristina Sewell, Research Associate; Liz Swasey, Director of Communications. See the latest Gary Graham coverage update in the Cyber Alert at [www.mrc.org](http://www.mrc.org)