"They know I'm innocent. But they cannot acknowledge my innocence, because to do so would be to publicly admit their guilt. This is something these racist people will never do."-Last statement of Gary Graham

In the third presidential debate, Bush was confronted about his apparent pride in the previous debate when he announced the execution of three men. In response, Bush said the death penalty was something he took very seriously. In a night filled with half-truths and exaggerations, this was the biggest lie of the event. It was almost as bad as the first debate, in which Bush, the man also known as "Governor Death", claimed he wanted to create a culture of life.

Both Bush and Gore professed that the death Penalty is a deterrent for crime, and Bush used the same phrase he had once said at Calvin College: "I believe the death penalty saves lives." I don't know how Bush gets away with saying that, since the death penalty has never ever been shown to deter crime more effectively then other punishments. Nor is it cheaper. By the time all the appeals have been exhausted, the death penalty is 3 times more expensive then life imprisonment.

But more disturbing, the death penalty is one of America's most racist institutions. Despite the fact that whites and blacks are murdered with equal frequency, 80 % of the people sentenced to death were charged with killing a white person. 9 out of 10 people prosecuted for the death penalty between 1988 and 1994 were either African American or Hispanic. And African Americans are 4 times more likely than whites to receive the death penalty for similar crimes.

And Texas is no exception. In fact, Dallas County used to train their prosecutors to remove minority races, Jews, and people with physical afflictions from the jury

selection because they “almost always sympathize with the defendant.” Although this is no longer an official policy, many prosecutors remain who were originally trained under these guidelines, and Amnesty International claims that 91 % of African American jurors were systematically removed from juries in all capital murder cases between 1980 and 1986. Although Bush was not governor then, people who were convicted during these years, such as African American Brian Roberson, were executed under Bush.

How seriously does Bush take capital punishment? Consider the case of Karla Fay Tucker. She became a born again Christian and even married the prison chaplain well on death row, and appealed to Bush to save her life. Religious right leader Pat Robertson also lobbied Bush to spare her. Bush sadistically kept Tucker hoping she would be saved right up until the moment of her execution. Then, when being interviewed by TALK magazine, Bush actually did an imitation of Karla Tucker pleading for her life. “Please,” he said in mock voice, “don’t kill me.” Gary Bauer, who ran against Bush in the Republican primary, said, “I think it is nothing short of unbelievable that the governor of a major state running for president thought it was acceptable to mock a woman he decided to put to death.”

Or consider the case of Gary Graham. He was executed on the testimony of one eyewitness who had seen him from a dark parking lot 30 to 40 feet away. Two other eyewitnesses said Graham was the wrong man, and several others stated that the gun man was shorter. Because of Graham’s criminal past, his defense lawyer simply assumed he was guilty, and the jury never even heard the other witnesses. Five other people claimed Graham was with them at the time of the murder, but they were not allowed to testify.

Graham protested his innocence to the end, as Amnesty International, the United Nations, France, Italy and Germany all called upon Bush to stop the execution. Graham was also 17 when the supposed crime took place. It is worth noting that the United States and Iran are the only two countries that execute offenders under 18, violating international law.

Bush not only refused to stop the execution, he canceled a press conference to avoid answering questions about it. To be fair though, his decision to execute Graham was not unpopular with everyone. Charles Lee, the Grand Dragon of the KKK, told USA Today, "People say the system is racist and that he got a raw deal...Gary Graham's victims were all white, his murders, his rapes, his assaults were all racist, since he is black. It is time for him to die." The local Klan group campaigned for Graham's execution, saying on their web page, "It's time that whites let the black community know that we are fed up with their threats of civil disobedience. Whites need to seen all non-white communities a strong and clear message. The message should read, "we're sick and tired of you and your threats." Local Klan members also celebrated outside when Graham was executed.

Since Bush took office in 1995, Texas has executed 142 individuals and counting. That's more then any other state (and most countries) has executed in the past 2 decades. The list includes Betty Beets, a 62-year-old great-grandmother with battered woman syndrome, whose jury never knew of her history of abuse. It includes Oliver Cruz, a mentally impaired Latino whose white co-defendant received life in prison for the same murder. It includes several mentally ill patients, some of whom are described as having a the mental capacity of children.

Bush opposed a bill that would have barred the execution of the mentally ill. He even vetoed legislation that would have required each county to set up a system for appointing attorneys to represent poor defendants in a state notorious for public defenders falling asleep during the trial. George W. Bush is a multi-millionaire and son of a multimillionaire who has been signing the death sentences of people to poor to afford their own lawyers. Don't let him fool you when he says he takes seriously the lives on death row. He couldn't care less.