

[Charles Thomson](#), Contributor

Award-winning writer

One of the Most Shameful Episodes In Journalistic History

HUFFPOST 06/13/2010 **Updated** May 25, 2011

It was five years ago today that twelve jurors unanimously acquitted Michael Jackson on various charges of child molestation, conspiracy and providing alcohol to a minor. It is difficult to know how history will remember the Michael Jackson trial. Perhaps as the epitome of western celebrity obsession. Perhaps as a 21st century lynching. Personally, I think it will be remembered as one of the most shameful episodes in journalistic history.

It's not until you find yourself digging through newspaper archives and re-watching hours of TV coverage that you truly understand the magnitude of the media's failings. It was industry-wide. No doubt, there were certain reporters and even certain publications and TV stations that overtly favored the prosecution, but many of the media's shortcomings were institutional. In a media obsessed with soundbites, how do you reduce eight hours of testimony into two sentences and remain accurate? In an era of rolling news and instant blogging, how do you resist the temptation to dash out of the courtroom at the earliest opportunity to break news of the latest salacious allegations, even if it means missing a slice of the day's testimony?

Looking back on the Michael Jackson trial, I see a media out of control. The sheer amount of propaganda, bias, distortion and misinformation is almost beyond comprehension. Reading the court transcripts and comparing them to the newspaper cuttings, the trial that was relayed to us didn't even resemble the trial that was going on inside the courtroom. The transcripts show an endless parade of seedy prosecution witnesses perjuring themselves on an almost hourly basis and crumbling under cross examination. The newspaper cuttings and the TV news clips detail day after day of heinous accusations and lurid innuendo.

It was November 18th 2003 when 70 sheriffs swooped on Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch. As soon as news of the raid broke, news channels abandoned their schedules and switched to 24 hour coverage. When it emerged that Jackson was accused of molesting young cancer survivor Gavin Arvizo, the boy who famously held the singer's hand in Martin Bashir's 'Living With Michael Jackson', the media went into overdrive. Networks were so obsessed by the Jackson scandal that a terrorist attack in Turkey went almost entirely unreported, with only *CNN* bothering to broadcast George Bush and Tony Blair's joint press conference about the disaster.

All three major networks immediately set about producing hour-long specials on the Jackson case, apparently undeterred by the fact that nothing was yet known about the allegations and prosecutors weren't answering questions. *CBS* dedicated an episode of *48 Hours Investigates* to the arrest, while *NBC's Dateline* and *ABC's 20/20* also rushed out Jackson specials. Within

two days of the Neverland raid, and before Jackson had even been arrested, *VH1* announced a half-hour documentary called 'Michael Jackson Sex Scandal'.

Daily Variety described the Jackson story as "a godsend for... media outlets, particularly cable news channels and local stations looking to pump up Nielsen numbers in the final week of the all-important November sweeps."

Daily Variety was right. Celebrity-oriented news shows saw figures spike when the Jackson story hit. Viewing figures for *Access Hollywood* were up 10% on the previous week. *Entertainment Tonight* and *Extra* both achieved season best audience numbers and *Celebrity Justice* also enjoyed an 8% rise.

Newspapers reacted just as hysterically as TV stations. 'Sicko!' shrieked the *New York Daily News*. 'Jacko: Now Get Out Of This One' goaded the *New York Post*.

The Sun - Britain's biggest newspaper - ran an article titled 'He's Bad, He's Dangerous, He's History'. The piece branded Jackson an 'ex-black ex-superstar', a 'freak' and a 'twisted individual' and called for his children to be taken into care. "If he weren't a pop idol with piles of cash to hide behind," it said, "he would have been picked up years ago."

Encouraged by the audience boosts the Jackson scandal had produced, media outlets made it their mission to milk the case for all that they could. *Entertainment Weekly's* Tom Sinclair wrote, "Media mavens, from the tackiest tabloid reporter to the nattiest network news anchor, are in overdrive scrambling to fill column inches and airtime with Jacko scoops and talking heads."

"Pressure on news people is enormous," attorney Harland Braun told Sinclair. "So lawyers you've never heard of wind up on television talking about cases that they have no connection to."

Sinclair added, "And not just lawyers. Everyone from doctors, writers, and psychiatrists to convenience-store clerks who once waited on Jackson are weighing in on TV and in print." While the media was busy badgering a host of quacks and distant acquaintances for their views on the scandal, the team of prosecutors behind the latest Jackson case was engaging in some highly questionable behavior - but the media didn't seem to care.

During the Neverland raid District Attorney Tom Sneddon - the prosecutor who unsuccessfully pursued Jackson in 1993 - and his officers breached the terms of their own search warrant by entering Jackson's office and seizing hoards of irrelevant business papers. They also illegally raided the office of a PI working for Jackson's defense team and lifted defense documents from the home of the singer's personal assistant.

Sneddon also appeared to be tampering with fundamental elements of his case whenever evidence came to light which undermined the Arvizo family's claims. For instance, when the DA found out about two taped interviews in which the entire Arvizo family sang Jackson's praises and denied any abuse, he introduced a conspiracy charge and claimed they'd been forced to lie against their will.

In a similar instance, Jackson's lawyer Mark Geragos appeared on *NBC* in January 2004 and announced that the singer had a 'concrete, iron-clad alibi' for the dates on the charge sheet. By the time Jackson was re-arraigned in April for the conspiracy charge, the molestation dates on the rap sheet had been shifted by almost two weeks.

Sneddon was later caught seemingly trying to plant fingerprint evidence against Jackson, allowing accuser Gavin Arvizo to handle adult magazines during the grand jury hearings, then bagging them up and sending them away for fingerprint analysis.

Not only did the majority of the media overlook this flurry of questionable and occasionally illegal activity on the part of the prosecution, it also seemed perfectly content to perpetuate damning propaganda on the prosecution's behalf, despite a complete lack of corroborative evidence. For example, Diane Dimond appeared on *Larry King Live* days after Jackson's arrest and spoke repeatedly about a 'stack of love letters' the star had supposedly written to Gavin Arvizo.

"Does anyone here... know of the existence of these letters?" asked King.

"Absolutely," Dimond replied. "I do. I absolutely know of their existence!"

"Diane, have you read them?"

"No, I have not read them."

Dimond admitted that she'd never even seen the letters, let alone read them, but said she knew about them from "high law enforcement sources". But those love letters never materialized. When Dimond said she 'absolutely knew' of their existence she was basing her comments solely on the words of police sources. At best, the police sources were parroting the Arvizos' allegations in good faith. At worst, they'd concocted the story themselves to sully Jackson's name. Either way, the story went around the world with not a shred of evidence to support it.

It was over a year between Jackson's arrest and the beginning of his trial and the media was forced to try to pad the story out for as long as they could in the interim. Aware that Jackson was bound by gag order and therefore powerless to respond, prosecution sympathizers started leaking documents such as Jordan Chandler's 1993 police statement. The media, hungry for scandal and sensationalism, pounced on them.

At the same time, allegations sold to tabloid TV shows by disgruntled ex-employees in the 1990s were constantly re-hashed and presented as news. Small details of the Arvizo family's allegations would also periodically leak.

While most media outlets reported these stories as allegations rather than facts, the sheer amount and frequency of stories connecting Jackson to ugly sexual abuse, coupled with his inability to refute them, had a devastating effect on the star's public image.

The trial began in early 2005 with jury selection. Asked by *NBC* about prosecution and defense jury selection tactics, Dimond said the difference was that prosecutors would be looking for jurors who had a sense of 'good versus evil' and 'right and wrong'.

No sooner had the jurors been selected than *Newsweek* was trying to undermine them, claiming that a middle class jury would be unable to fairly judge a family of lower class accusers. In an article titled 'Playing the Class Card' the magazine said, "The Jackson trial may hinge on something other than race. And we don't mean the evidence."

As the trial kicked into gear, it became quickly apparent that the case was full of holes. The prosecution's only 'evidence' was a stack of heterosexual porn magazines and a couple of legal art books. Thomas Mesereau wrote in a court motion, "The effort to try Mr. Jackson for having one of the largest private libraries in the world is alarming. Not since the dark day of almost three quarters of a century ago has anyone witnessed a prosecution which claimed that the possession of books by well known artists were evidence of a crime against the state."

Gavin Arvizo's brother, Star, took the stand early in the trial and claimed to have witnessed two specific acts of molestation but his testimony was completely inconsistent. Regarding one alleged act, he claimed in court that Jackson had been fondling Gavin, but in a previous description of the same incident he told a wildly different story, claiming Jackson had been rubbing his penis against Gavin's buttocks. He also told two different stories about the other alleged act on two consecutive days in court.

During cross examination Jackson's lawyer, Thomas Mesereau, showed the boy a copy of *Barely Legal* and repeatedly asked if it was the specific edition Jackson had shown him and his brother. The boy insisted that it was, only for Mesereau to reveal that it was published in August 2003; five months after the Arvizo family had left Neverland.

But this information went almost entirely unreported, the media focusing on the boy's allegations rather than the cross examination which undermined them. Allegations make good soundbites. Complex cross examination does not.

When Gavin Arvizo took the stand, he claimed that Jackson had instigated the first act of molestation by telling him that all boys had to masturbate or else they would turn into rapists. But Mesereau showed under cross examination that the boy had previously admitted his

grandmother made that comment, not Jackson, meaning that the whole molestation story was predicated on a lie.

Under cross examination the boy severely undermined the prosecution's conspiracy charge by claiming he'd never felt afraid at Neverland and he'd never wanted to leave. His accounts of the alleged molestation also differed from his brother's.

Unfortunately for Jackson, Gavin Arvizo's cross examination was all but ignored as newspapers giggled and gossiped about what became known as 'pajama day'. On the first day of the boy's direct examination Jackson slipped in his shower, bruised his lung and was rushed to hospital. When Judge Rodney Melville ordered a bench warrant for Jackson's arrest unless he arrived within an hour, the singer sped to the courthouse in the pajama trousers he'd been wearing when he was rushed to hospital.

The photographs of Jackson in his pajamas went all over the world, often with no mention of Jackson's injury or the reason he was wearing them. Many journalists accused Jackson of faking the entire event in order to gain sympathy, although sympathetic is the last word you'd use to describe the media's reaction.

The incident didn't stop the media from sending Gavin Arvizo's lurid allegations around the world the following day. Some outlets even ran the boy's testimony as fact rather than conjecture. "He Said If Boys Don't Do It They Might Turn Into Rapists - Cancer Boy Gavin Tells Court of Jacko Sex," wrote *The Mirror*.

But the boy's cross examination was another story. It went almost completely unreported. Instead of stories about Gavin Arvizo's lies and the two brothers' contradictory allegations, newspaper pages were filled with snarky opinion pieces about Jackson's pajamas, even though 'pajama day' had been days previously. Thousands of words were dedicated to whether or not Jackson wore a wig and the *Sun* even ran an article attacking Jackson for the accessories he pinned to his waistcoats every day. It seemed like the press would write anything to avoid discussing the boy's cross examination, which severely undermined the prosecution's case. This habit of reporting lurid allegations but ignoring the cross examination which discredited them became a distinct trend throughout Jackson's trial. In an April 2005 interview with Matt Drudge, *Fox* columnist Roger Friedman explained, "What's not reported is that the cross examination of these witnesses is usually fatal to them." He added that whenever anybody said anything salacious or dramatic about Jackson, the media 'went running outside to report on it' and missed the subsequent cross examination.

Drudge agreed, adding, "You're not hearing how witness after witness is disintegrating on the stand. There is not one witness, at least lately, that hasn't admitted to perjuring themselves in previous proceedings either in this case or in some other case."

This alarming trend of ignoring cross examination was perhaps most apparent in the media's coverage of Kiki Fournier's testimony. Under direct examination by the prosecution, Fournier - a Neverland housekeeper - testified that when at Neverland children often became unruly and she had sometimes seen children so hyperactive that they could, feasibly, have been intoxicated. The media scurried outside to report this apparent bombshell and missed one of the most significant pieces of testimony in the entire trial.

Under cross examination by Thomas Mesereau, Fournier said that during the Arvizo family's final weeks at Neverland - the period during which the molestation supposedly happened - the two boys' guest room had been constantly messy, leading her to believe they'd been sleeping in their own quarters all along - not Michael Jackson's bedroom.

She also testified that Star Arvizo had once pulled a knife on her in the kitchen, explaining that she did not feel it had been intended as a joke and that she thought he'd been 'trying to assert some sort of authority'.

In a devastating blow to the prosecution's increasingly hilarious conspiracy charge, Fournier laughed at the idea that anybody could be held prisoner at Neverland Ranch, telling the jurors that there was no high fence around the property and the family could have walked out at any time 'with ease'.

When Gavin and Star's mother Janet Arvizo took the stand Tom Sneddon was seen with his head in his hands. She claimed that a videotape of herself and her children praising Jackson had been scripted word for word by a German man who barely spoke English. In outtakes she was seen singing Jackson's praises then looking embarrassed and asking if she was being recorded. She said that had been scripted too.

She claimed she'd been held hostage at Neverland even though log books and receipts showed that she'd left the ranch and returned on three occasions during the period of 'captivity'. It became apparent that she was currently under investigation for welfare fraud and had also been falsely obtaining money on the back of her son's illness, holding benefits to pay for his cancer treatment when he was already covered by insurance.

Even the most ardent prosecution supporters had to admit that Janet Arvizo was a disastrous witness for the state. Except Diane Dimond, who in March 2005 seemed to use Janet Arvizo's welfare fraud (she was convicted in the wake of Jackson's trial) as roundabout proof of Jackson's guilt, signing off a *New York Post* article with the gob smacking line, "Pedophiles don't target kids with Ozzie and Harriet parents."

Watching their case crumble before their eyes, the prosecution applied to the judge for permission to admit evidence of 'prior bad acts'. Permission was granted. Prosecutors told the jury they would hear evidence of five former victims. But those five prior cases turned out to be even more laughable than the Arvizos' claims.

A parade of disgruntled security guards and housekeepers took the stand to testify that they had witnessed molestation, much of it carried out on three boys; Wade Robson, Brett Barnes and Macauley Culkin. But those three boys were the defense's first three witnesses, each of them testifying that Jackson had never touched them and they resented the implication.

Moreover, it was revealed that each of these former employees had been fired by Jackson for stealing from his property or had lost a wrongful termination suit and wound up owing Jackson huge amounts of money. They'd also neglected to tell the police when they supposedly witnessed this molestation, even when questioned in connection with Jordy Chandler's 1993 allegations, but subsequently tried to sell stories to the press - sometimes successfully. The more money on the table, the more salacious the allegations became.

Roger Friedman complained in an interview with Matt Drudge that the media was ignoring the cross examination of the 'prior bad acts' witnesses, resulting in skewed reporting. He said, "When Thursday started, that first hour was with this guy Ralph Chacon who had worked at the Ranch as a security guard. He told the most outrageous story. It was so graphic. And of course everybody went running outside to report on it. But there were ten minutes right before the first break on Thursday when Tom Mesereau got up and cross examined this guy and obliterated him."

The fourth 'victim', Jason Francia, took the stand and claimed that when he was a child, Jackson had molested him on three separate occasions. Pushed for details of the 'molestation', he said Jackson had tickled him three times outside his clothes and he'd needed years of therapy to get over it. The jury was seen rolling their eyes but reporters including Dan Abrams heralded him as 'compelling', predicting that he could be the witness who put Jackson behind bars.

The media repeatedly claimed that Francia's allegations had been made in 1990, leading audiences to believe that the Jordy Chandler allegations were predated. In actuality, although Jason Francia claimed that the acts of molestation occurred in 1990, he didn't report them until after the media storm over Chandler's claims, at which point his mother, Neverland maid Blanca Francia, promptly extracted \$20,000 from *Hard Copy* for an interview with Diane Dimond and another \$2.4million in a settlement from Jackson.

Moreover, transcripts from police interviews showed that the Francia had repeatedly changed his story and had originally insisted that he'd never been molested. Transcripts also showed that he only said he was molested after police officers repeatedly overstepped the mark during interviews. Officers repeatedly referred to Jackson as a 'molester'. On one occasion they told the boy that Jackson was molesting Macauley Culkin as they spoke, claiming that the only way they could rescue Culkin was if Francia told them he'd been sexually abused by the star. Transcripts also showed that Francia had previously said of the police, "They made me come up with stuff. They kept pushing. I wanted to hit them in the head."

The fifth 'victim' was Jordy Chandler, who fled the country rather than testify against his former friend. Thomas Mesereau said in a Harvard lecture later that year, "The prosecutors tried to get him to show up and he wouldn't. If he had, I had witnesses who were going to come in and say he told them it never happened and that he would never talk to his parents again for what they made him say. It turned out he'd gone into court and got legal emancipation from his parents."

June Chandler, Jordy's mother, testified that she hadn't spoken to her son in 11 years. Questioned about the 1993 case, she seemed to suffer from a severe case of selective memory. At one point she claimed she couldn't remember being sued by Michael Jackson and at another she said she'd never heard of her own attorney. She also never witnessed any molestation.

When the prosecution rested, the media seemed to lose interest in the trial. The defense case was given comparatively little newspaper space and air time. *The Hollywood Reporter*, which had been diligently reporting on the Jackson trial, missed out two whole weeks of the defense case. The attitude seemed to be that unless the testimony was graphic and salacious - unless it made a good soundbite - it wasn't worth reporting.

The defense called numerous fantastic witnesses; boys and girls who had stayed with Jackson time and again and never witnessed any inappropriate behavior, employees who had witnessed the Arviso boys helping themselves to alcohol in Jackson's absence and celebrities who had also been targeted for handouts by the accuser. But little of this testimony was relayed to the public. When DA Tom Sneddon referred to black comic Chris Tucker as 'boy' during his cross examination, the media didn't bat an eyelid.

When both sides rested jurors were told that if they found reasonable doubt, they had to acquit. Anybody who had been paying attention to proceedings could see that the doubt was so far beyond reasonable it wasn't even funny. Almost every single prosecution witness either perjured themselves or wound up helping the defense. There wasn't a shred of evidence connecting Jackson to any crime and there wasn't a single credible witness connecting him to a crime either.

But that didn't stop journalists and pundits from predicting guilty verdicts, *CNN*'s Nancy Grace leading the way. Defense attorney Robert Shapiro, who had once represented the Chandler family, stated with certainty on *CNN*, "He's going to be convicted." Ex-prosecutor Wendy Murphy told *Fox News*, "There is no question we will see convictions here."

The hysteria of the fans outside the courthouse was mirrored by that of the reporters who secured seats inside, who were so excitable that Judge Rodney Melville ordered them to 'restrain themselves'. Thomas Mesereau commented retrospectively that the media had been "almost salivating about having [Jackson] hauled off to jail."

When the jury delivered 14 'not guilty' verdicts, the media was 'humiliated', Mesereau said in a subsequent interview. Media analyst Tim Rutten later commented, "So what happened when Jackson was acquitted on all counts? Red faces? Second thoughts? A little soul-searching, perhaps? Maybe one expression of regret for the rush to judgment? Naaawww. The reaction, instead, was rage liberally laced with contempt and the odd puzzled expression. Its targets were the jurors... Hell hath no fury like a cable anchor held up for scorn."

In a post-verdict news conference Sneddon continued to refer to Gavin Arvizo as a 'victim' and said he suspected that the 'celebrity factor' had impeded the jury's judgment - a line many media pundits swiftly appropriated as they set about undermining the jurors and their verdicts.

Within minutes of the announcement, Nancy Grace appeared on *CourtTV* to allege that jurors had been seduced by Jackson's fame and bizarrely claim that the prosecution's only weak link had been Janet Arvizo.

"I'm having a crow sandwich right now," she said. "It doesn't taste very good. But you know what? I'm also not surprised. I thought that celebrity is such a big factor. When you think you know somebody, when you have watched their concerts, listened to their records, read the lyrics, believed they were coming from somebody's heart... Jackson is very charismatic, although he never took the stand. That has an effect on this jury.

"I'm not gonna throw a stone at the mom, although I think she was the weak link in the state's case, but the reality is I'm not surprised. I thought that the jury would vote in favor of the similar transaction witnesses. Apparently the defense overwhelmed them with the cross-examining of the mother. I think it boils down to that, plain and simple."

Grace later stated that Jackson was 'not guilty by reason of celebrity' and was seen attempting to hound jury foreman Paul Rodriguez into saying he believed Jackson had molested children. One of Grace's guests, psychoanalyst Bethany Marshall, leveled personal attacks towards one female juror, saying, "This is a woman who has no life."

Over on *Fox News*, Wendy Murphy branded Jackson 'the Teflon molester' and said that the jurors needed IQ tests. She later added, "I really think it's the celebrity factor, not the evidence. I don't think the jurors even understand how influenced they were by who Michael Jackson is... They basically put targets on the backs of all, especially highly vulnerable, kids that will now come into Michael Jackson's life."

Legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin told *CNN* that he thought the 'prior bad acts' testimony had been 'effective evidence', even though various boys at the heart of that testimony had taken the stand as defense witnesses and denied ever being molested. He also claimed that the defense

had won because "they could tell a story, and juries, you know, always understand stories rather than sort of individual facts."

Only Robert Shapiro was dignified in the face of the verdicts, telling viewers that they should accept the jurors' decision because the jurors were from "a very conservative part of California and if they had no doubt, none of us should have any doubt."

The following day on *Good Morning America*, Diane Sawyer upheld the notion that the verdict had been influenced by Jackson's celebrity status. "Are you sure?" she pleaded. "Are you sure that this gigantically renowned guy walking into the room had no influence at all?"

The Washington Post commented, "An acquittal doesn't clear his name, it only muddies the water." Both the *New York Post* and the *New York Daily News* ran with the snide headline 'Boy, Oh, Boy!'

In her final *New York Post* article about the trial, Diane Dimond bemoaned the not guilty verdict, saying that it left Michael Jackson untouchable. She wrote, "He walked out of court a free man, not guilty on all counts. But Michael Jackson is so much more than free. He now has carte blanche to live his life any way he wants, with whomever he wants, because who would ever try to prosecute Michael Jackson now?"

In Britain's *Sun* newspaper, celebrity rent-a-gob and talking head extraordinaire Jane Moore penned an article titled 'If the jury agree Janet Arvizo is a bad mum (and she IS)... How did they let Jackson off?' It began: "Michael Jackson is innocent. Justice has been done. Or so the loony tunes gathered outside the courthouse would have us believe." She went on to question the jurors' mental capacity and dismiss the American legal system as 'half-baked'. "Nothing and no one truly emerges as a winner from this sorry mess," she finished, "least of all what they laughably call American 'justice'."

Sun contributor Ally Ross dismissed Jackson's fans as 'sad, solitary dick-wits'. Another *Sun* article, penned by daytime TV presenter Lorraine Kelly, titled 'Don't forget the kids still at risk... Jacko's own', overtly labeled Jackson a guilty man. Kelly - who never attended Jackson's trial - bemoaned the fact that Jackson 'got away with it', complaining that "instead of languishing in jail, Jackson is now back home in Neverland." Jackson, she concluded, was "a sad, sick loser who uses his fame and money to dazzle the parents of children he takes a shine to."

After the initial outrage, the Michael Jackson story slipped out of the headlines. There was little analysis of the not guilty verdicts and how they were reached. An acquittal was considered less profitable than a conviction.

Indeed, Thomas Mesereau said in later years that if Jackson had been convicted it would have created a 'cottage industry' for the media, generating a story a day for years to come. Long-running sagas like custody of Jackson's children, control of his financial empire, other 'victims'

filing civil suits and the long-winded appeals process would have generated thousands of stories each for months, years, perhaps even decades.

Jackson's imprisonment would have created a never ending supply of gratuitous headlines; *Who is visiting? Who isn't? Is he in solitary confinement? If not, who are his cellmates? What about his prison wardens? Does he have a prison pen-pal girlfriend? Can we fly a helicopter over the prison yard and film him exercising?* The possibilities were endless. A bidding war was raging over who would get the first leaked images of Jackson in his cell before the jury even began its deliberations.

A not guilty verdict was not quite so lucrative. In an interview with *Newsweek*, *CNN* boss Jonathan Klein recalled watching the not guilty verdicts come in and then telling his deputies, "We have a less interesting story now." *The Hollywood Reporter* noted that hastily assembled TV specials about Jackson's acquittal performed badly and were beaten in the ratings by a re-run of *Nanny 911*.

The story was over. There were no apologies and no retractions. There was no scrutiny - no inquiries or investigations. Nobody was held to account for what was done to Michael Jackson. The media was content to let people go on believing their heavily skewed and borderline fictitious account of the trial. That was that.

When Michael Jackson died the media went into overdrive again. What drugs had killed him? How long had he been using them? Who had prescribed them? What else was in his system? How much did he weigh?

But there was one question nobody seemed to want to ask: Why?

Why was Michael Jackson so stressed and so paranoid that he couldn't even get a decent night's sleep unless somebody stuck a tube full of anesthetic into his arm? I think the answer can be found in the results of various polls conducted in the wake of Michael Jackson's trial. A poll conducted by *Gallup* in the hours after the verdict showed that 54% of White Americans and 48% of the overall population disagreed with the jury's decision of 'not guilty'. The poll also found that 62% of people felt Jackson's celebrity status was instrumental in the verdicts. 34% said they were 'saddened' by the verdict and 24% said they were 'outraged'. In a *Fox News* poll 37% of voters said the verdict was 'wrong' while an additional 25% said 'celebrities buy justice'. A poll by *People Weekly* found that a staggering 88% of readers disagreed with the jury's decision.

The media did a number on its audience and it did a number on Jackson. After battling his way through an exhausting and horrifying trial, riddled with hideous accusations and character assassinations, Michael Jackson should have felt vindicated when the jury delivered 14 unanimous not guilty verdicts. But the media's irresponsible coverage of the trial made it impossible for Jackson to ever feel truly vindicated. The legal system may have declared him

innocent but the public, on the whole, still thought otherwise. Allegations which were disproven in court went unchallenged in the press. Shaky testimony was presented as fact. The defense's case was all but ignored.

When asked about those who doubted the verdicts, the jury replied, "They didn't see what we saw."

They're right. We didn't. But we should have done. And those who refused to tell us remain in their jobs unchecked, unpunished and free to do exactly the same thing to anybody they desire.

Now that's what I call injustice.