



Above, left to right: Student Jeremy White is interviewed on "Good Morning America." A victim of the shootings is buried in Jonesboro. The mother of suspect Mitchell Johnson appears on "20/20."



- Byron Pitts reports from Pearl, Miss. An interview with the father of a child killed in a shooting there is featured.

NBC

- Jim Avila opens with a Jonesboro wrap-up. He is the first to report that 20% of students were absent that day.
- Pete Williams reports on juvenile justice system vs. adult system, state vs. federal laws and murky legal areas.
- "In Depth" piece covers a Los Angeles area school and its conflict-resolution program for students.

ANALYSIS

NBC came closest to doing what television journalism should do in its two pieces following the news of the day; that is, taking serious looks at juvenile justice and a story on a positive response to a complex problem in one part of the country. Williams' piece on juvenile justice was lucid and worthwhile.

March 27

MORNING TALK SHOWS

"Good Morning America" (ABC)

- Profile of the slain teacher followed by an interview with her husband.
- Parents of a wounded child talk about their feelings.
- A piece on young offenders, which evolves into a survey story on laws in various states.
- Interview with the author of a book on juvenile courts.

"Today" (NBC)

- Jim Avila profiles of one of the suspects. Also, absentee rate at the school; funerals; an update on the wounded.
- Katie Couric interviews the father of one of the suspects.
- Interview with husband of the slain teacher and her parents.
- An interview with a specialist on juvenile law.

ANALYSIS

The "Good Morning America" segment on young offenders and juvenile justice had much helpful information in it. The final interview on "Today" was solid, posing questions that many viewers must have been asking.

EVENING NEWSCASTS

ABC

- Dean Reynolds reports on the first funeral. Interview with the mother of one of the suspects. An inventory of firearms carried by the accused.
- Erin Hayes with a mixture: funeral shots, children as they cope, husband of slain teacher.

CBS

- Opens with report that no federal charges will be filed in

the case, an exclusive.

- Jim Axelrod reports on funerals, with an update on the progress of the investigation.
- Dan Rather updates the condition of the wounded, followed by a Bob McNamara profile of the two suspects and interviews with the father and grandfather of one.
- Rather interviews a court-appointed defense lawyer.

NBC

- Funerals are the introductory story. Jim Avila also reports that federal law does not apply in this case. The shooters will not spend an adult day in prison, he says.
- An "In Depth" segment looks at students and violence in Jonesboro, Kentucky and Mississippi. Ann Thompson's report from Kentucky makes comparisons to Jonesboro. Fred Francis in Mississippi seeks reasons why young boys behave as they do. "Do young kids," one resident asks, "understand death?" Blurring of fantasy and reality discussed. Guns in rural America called a cultural phenomenon out of control.
- Bob Dotson picks up the guns issue: Rural crime is up, metropolitan crime is down.
- Profile of the slain teacher.

ANALYSIS

At this period in the story the networks have wrung the emotional video rag about as hard as it can be. In the ABC broadcast, the story began to blur as elements from one piece could just as easily have gone into another. One got a sense the networks were trying to feed the viewers' baser appetites: "Tell me about it and then tell me more about it." In his interview with the court-appointed attorney, Rather fell into the pit of asking the subject "to share" something instead of saying "tell me." Nothing of substance came out of the interview.

MAGAZINE SHOWS

"Dateline" (NBC)

- A profile of the slain teacher and an exchange on juvenile vs. adult criminal justice.

"20/20" (ABC)

- An interview with the mother of one suspect. Reporter John Quinones presses her: "Where were you" if her son had wanted to talk to her?

ANALYSIS

"Dateline" was little more than an expanded version of what one would see on a nightly newscast. The "20/20" segment with the mother was strong and interesting, without too much artificial emotion.