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been a slave himself.

Black slave-owners do not fit easily into today's stereotypes of the slave master, notes Burnham, a Washington-based free-lance journalist. Yet black slave-owners were a reality in ante-bellum America, albeit "a tiny minority within a minority."

Nearly one in eight blacks, or more than 300,000, according to the 1830 census, were so-called free persons of color, having reached that status by birthright, manumission, or the purchase of their freedom. Of those, 3,775 blacks, living mostly in the South, owned a total of 12,760 slaves. The vast majority of these masters had no more than a few slaves, but some in Louisiana and South Carolina owned as many as 70 or 80.

In most cases, Burnham says, the motive for ownership appears to have been benevolent. Mosby Shepherd, for instance, manumitted by the Virginia legislature for having provided information about an insurrection in 1800, bought his own son with the intent of later freeing him. "Owning blood relatives could be a convenient legal fiction to protect them from the hostility that free blacks attracted," Burnham notes. "Often it was a way to evade stringent laws requiring newly freed slaves to leave the state within a certain period." (Sometimes, ownership added a new dimension to fam-

ily disputes. After Dilsey Pope, a free woman of color in Columbus, Georgia, quarreled with her husband, whom she owned, she sold him to a white slave-owner. Husband and wife eventually settled their differences, but the new owner refused to sell him back to her.)

Not all black slave-owners, however, were motivated by a desire to protect family members. A "significant minority," Burnham observes, owned slaves "for the same reasons that motivated white slave-owners: commercial profit and prestige." Andrew Durnford, a free man of color, bought slaves at auction for use on his sugar plantation south of New Orleans. He did not think manumission would become widespread. "Self-interest is too strongly rooted in the bosom of all that breathes the American atmosphere," he once explained. At his death in 1859, he owned 77 human beings.

As the Civil War approached, Burnham says, the position of black slave-owners grew more uneasy. In 1860, several wrote to the New Orleans *Daily Delta* that "the free colored population (native) of Louisiana . . . own slaves, and they are dearly attached to their native land . . . and they are ready to shed their blood for her defence. They have no sympathy for abolitionism; no love for the North, but they have plenty for Louisiana."

## PRESS & MEDIA

### The Cheerleaders on the Bus

*A Survey of Recent Articles*

Never before had a presidential candidate donned shades and played the saxophone on a late-night television talk show. And never before had a serious contender for the nation's highest office announced his candidacy on a television call-in show. No doubt about it: The Making of the President 1992 was different. But if TV chat shows assumed unprecedented political importance last year, most Americans, according to the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, still got their news about the presidential contest from the traditional sources: TV news programs and daily newspapers.

Many journalists thought the press had done badly in covering the 1988 presidential contest, in

which visual images—of Willie Horton, of George Bush at a flag factory, of Michael Dukakis in a tank—seemed to predominate. "This time, there was a real determination to keep the candidates from controlling our agenda," *Newsday* campaign correspondent Susan Page comments in a survey in *The Finish Line: Covering the Campaign's Final Days* (Jan. 1993), a special report from the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center. "The best example," she says, "may be the tough coverage . . . of television ads for distortion and lack of context."

Yet if the press in 1992 succeeded in correcting its worst failures of '88, and tried hard to give thoughtful coverage to economic and other issues, it still managed to stumble badly, in the view of



some media veterans. "No one denies the press tilted toward Clinton during the campaign and was hostile to Bush," the *New Republic's* (Nov. 30, 1992) Fred Barnes writes. (Robert and Linda Lichter's *Media Monitor* [Nov. 1992] lends some statistical support: TV news' negative evaluations of Bush exceeded those of Bill Clinton by 23 percentage points.) "Egregious as that was," Barnes continues, "there was something worse. The press was unashamedly pro-Clinton. I think an important line was crossed." While journalists in previous presidential campaigns at least kept up "the pretense of fairness," Barnes says, that restraint was thrown off in 1992.

Although there was no "orchestrated, partisan press assault" on Bush and the Republicans, Christopher Hanson, Washington correspondent for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, observes in *Columbia Journalism Review* (Nov.-Dec. 1992), some of the coverage did indeed have a fan-magazine quality to it. "There was, for instance, the breezy, 1,700-word, July 22 *Washington Post* piece about Bill Clinton and Al Gore's post-convention [Midwest] bus tour, whose headline, ... NEW HEARTTHROBS OF THE HEARTLAND, drew understandable groans of disgust from GOP operatives."

Still, readers were able to recognize "the gushing copy about Clinton" for what it was, *New Republic* (Nov. 23, 1992) Deputy Editor Jacob Weisberg asserts: "The real unfairness occurs in the stories that

aren't covered, or [aren't] covered aggressively." A case in point, he says, was an allegation made by Gennifer Flowers, whose claim to have been Clinton's mistress made its controversial way early in the year from the disreputable supermarket tabloid *Star* to the reluctant *New York Times*. Charges of infidelity may be none of the public's business, but "Flowers's charge that Clinton put her on the state payroll, at least, bore looking into." The press, however, "didn't want to spoil Clinton's party." But, then, neither did Weisberg. He complains about the absence of "a good story on Clinton's contradictory positions on the Gulf

war," then adds: "Of course, I'm guilty too. I saved this point for November 4."

Reporters have climbed on presidential band-wagons before. Hugh Sidey, *Time's* long-time Washington observer, admits in *Finish Line* that as a campaign correspondent in 1960, he promoted Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy. That year, he says, "I was one of the sinners along with Ben Bradlee and all the others who defected to Kennedy. We were propagandists, and there wasn't any question about it. We tried to skewer [Republican candidate Richard] Nixon every time we could, and we raised Kennedy up. But we had editors back in the old home office who could offer a pretty good balance. So we got a pretty fair accounting." In 1992, however, the news media's self-correcting mechanisms too often broke down, in Sidey's view.

Not so many years ago, editors had to guard against bias of a different sort. During the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, newspaper publishers, as two-time Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson once complained, were "automatically against Democrats ... as dogs are against cats." That translated into a lot of editorial endorsements for Republicans, and the publishers' conservative views often affected news content, sometimes in heavy-handed ways. When reporters or others objected, it was usually in the name of objectivity and fairness.

Today, Richard Harwood, a former ombudsman at the *Washington Post*, observes in *Nieman Reports* (Winter 1992), owners and publishers mostly keep

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hands off the news. But the old ideal of fairness seems to have lost some of its force. When they have strongly held views about, for example, abortion or environmentalism or (it seems) competing presidential contenders, some editors and reporters do not hesitate to take sides.

Yet the Clinton cheerleaders did not constitute a majority of the press. R. W. Apple Jr., a veteran *New York Times* reporter, argues in *Nieman Reports*. Clinton, after all, did take a fierce pounding from the press during the primaries. More than once his candidacy was left for dead. The general election seemed a different story. William A. Henry III, a *Time* senior writer, writes in *Media Studies Journal* (Fall 1992), that he observed in print during the campaign's waning days that the press did have a liberal bias, that hardly any "big league" journalists

intended to vote for Bush, and that most of the White House press corps openly scorned the president. Henry, a Pulitzer Prize winner, expected his assertions to make waves—but they didn't. "Journalists didn't seem shocked by these facts," he writes, "and the public didn't seem surprised."

With the election over, *Congressional Quarterly* reporter Jeffrey L. Katz notes in the *Washington Journalism Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1993), journalists themselves "are now questioning whether Clinton got better coverage than he deserved." That may presage some journalistic efforts at correction in the next presidential election. Meanwhile it will be interesting to see whether the media's apparent affection for Clinton will survive its traditional skepticism of sitting presidents, Democrats and Republicans alike.

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### *Journalism's Worst-Kept Secret Is Out Again*

Murray Kempton, who recently turned 75, writes exquisite prose and a column for *Newsday*. He has won a Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Award, two George Polk Awards, *MORE's* A. J. Liebling Award, and even a piece of a Grammy. His work has been featured prominently for decades in the *New York Review of Books* and also has appeared in numerous other national publications, from *Esquire* and *Playboy* to the *Saturday Evening Post* and *House & Garden*. Yet to some of Kempton's admirers, it seems necessary, every five or six years, to proclaim him to be unknown and undeservedly neglected, a hidden treasure known, alas, only to the fortunate few.

"He is surely among the greatest of all living newspapermen, and yet he is for the most part a secret west of the Hudson River. His columns—there have been roughly 9,600 of them since 1949—have never been very popular in nationwide syndication. Most editors outside New York consider his material too local and his language too baroque for their pages."

—David Remnick, "Prince of the City," *The New Yorker* (March 1, 1993).

"He deserves better of us. Yes, he got a long-overdue Pulitzer Prize a couple of years ago; but here he is, appearing four times a week on almost every newsstand in New York now (in *New York Newsday*), and the recognition and appreciation he gets [are] so incommensurate with what his astonishing achievements deserve that it constitutes a major injustice, a disgraceful city scandal."

—Ron Rosenbaum, "Connoisseur of Scoundrels," *Manhattan, Inc.* (May 1987)

"Murray Kempton is... one of the real heroes of his profession.... He is an eloquent champion of the lowly and a tireless persecutor of the corrupt and unjust.... For more than 30 years he has covered politics, labor, sports, literature, and a dozen other topics with such consummate skill and wit that in some circles he is spoken of in the same breath with H. L. Mencken. And yet, Kempton's career has been mostly an obscure one. His colleagues and readers revere him, but in the vast territory beyond the suburbs of New York he is virtually unknown. He won a National Book Award a decade ago and a handful of other prizes, but he has never had anything resembling nationwide acclaim. His columns have never been syndicated, his books are out of print, he has never won a Pulitzer Prize. Murray Kempton is the best-kept secret in American journalism."

—David Owen, "The Best-Kept Secret in American Journalism Is Murray Kempton," *Esquire* (March 1982)