2.5 times their annual income; white households had amassed wealth equal to four years' income.

O'Hare cites a study of 7,000 families by economists Robert B. Pearl and Matilda Frankel to show where the two groups had their assets in 1979. Home ownership absorbed 46 percent of blacks' wealth but only a third of whites'—blacks had little money remaining for other "nonessential" investments. Another 21 percent of black and 15 percent of white assets were in rental housing. Household goods and vehicles accounted for 24 percent of black wealth; four percent of blacks' money and 13 percent of whites' was invested in small businesses or farms.

Only seven percent of black wealth was in the form of financial assets—stocks, bank accounts—and 22 percent of black households (1.9 million) had no such assets at all, not even a checking account.

PRESS & TELEVISION

Washington's Elite Beats

"The Golden Triangle: The Press at the White House, State, and Defense" by Stephen Hess, in *The Brookings Review* (Summer 1983), 1775 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

About 150 reporters regularly cover Washington's high-status "Golden Triangle"—the White House, State Department, and Pentagon. Although many have worked on two or even three of these prestigious beats, each of the three news contingents is different. Why? Because of the nature of the institutions they cover.

So argues Hess, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. Under current practice, most of the roughly 75 print and TV newsmen who cover the President, for example, are those who covered his election campaign. The recent high turnover in the Oval Office is mirrored in the White House pressroom. The result, says Hess, is a press corps of "high energy and low historical memory."

These campaign-oriented reporters have not covered past presidents, and thus have no predecessor against whom to measure "their man"; they tend to see White House policy decisions chiefly in terms of domestic political impact and often give short shrift to substantive issues.

State Department reporters, by contrast, are often seasoned pros. They have to be. The department employs 42 full-time press officers and hosts a daily briefing for reporters. But due to the traditional secrecy shrouding diplomacy, Hess says, the prevailing official attitude around Foggy Bottom is that "ideally there should be no news at all."

Newsmen on the State beat learn "nuance journalism," a subtle system of code words, cues, and even body language from which they must infer what is happening. (An example: "No comment" usually means "yes"; "can neither confirm nor deny" might mean "yes.") Hess wor-

ries that such practices leave "too much room for misunderstanding."

Contrary to popular myth, the most open of the Golden Triangle's three institutions is the Defense Department, regularly covered by 34 reporters. The Pentagon's large staff of press officers strains to be helpful. Conflict is kept to a minimum because, in military matters, it is far easier for journalists and officials to agree on what is an official secret, and what is merely embarrassing. Perhaps more important is the sheer size of the bureaucracy. As Richard Halloran of the *New York Times* put it, "If someone is promoting the M-1 tank, there are plenty of people around who will tell you what's wrong with the M-1."

Hess adds that while Golden Triangle reporters tend to be liberals, their shoptalk rarely reflects ideology; their chief preoccupation is how various officials help or hinder them as fact-seekers. "An administration never gets the press that it thinks it deserves," Hess observes, "it almost always gets the press that it brings upon itself."

Soft on Reagan?

"With Friends Like These. . . ." by Michael Robinson, Maura Clancey, and Lisa Grand, in *Public Opinion* (June-July 1983), American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1150 17th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Ronald Reagan's personal charm has disarmed the news media—at least, that is the self-criticism circulating among many Washington print and broadcast journalists. Robinson, Clancey, and Grand, George Washington University political scientists, say that reporters are being too hard on themselves; they have been plenty tough on the President.

The authors sifted through some 100 "soft news" clips—commentary and feature stories—that appeared on the three major TV networks' evening broadcasts during the first two months of 1983, when midterm assessments were in full swing. Of the 29 segments that were unambiguously "positive" or "negative," 27 were the latter, yielding a bad-news/good-news ratio of 13.5 to one.

TV commentators criticized "just about everything but Reagan's personality"—his nomination of Kenneth Adelman as head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency's sluggishness, and, repeatedly, his economic policies.

While the negative stories were often hard-hitting, the two positive ones were at best backhanded, the authors report. For example, NBC's John Chancellor opened his favorable commentary on Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's January 17 reception in Washington with a slap: "The administration has handled the visit . . . with the kind of skill and dexterity it does not always show in foreign affairs."

Examination of the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and the three news magazines show that the print media have been even more critical of the President than have broadcast journalists. The *Times*, for example, flatly editorialized on January 9: "The stench of failure hangs over the Reagan White House."