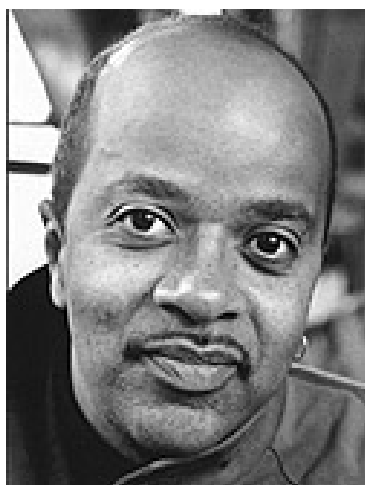

Distinguished Gentleman: J McB

Author, musician, journalist to receive top alumni award this month



James McBride, '80, author, musician and composer, journalist and most recently screenplay writer, will be among four people receiving the Distinguished Journalism Alumni Award from Columbia University. The event is set for 6:30 p.m. Friday, April 24 inside Low Library.

McBride is author of an American classic, "The Color of Water," his 1996 New York Times bestseller that is a must-read on public high school reading lists. "Water," was an investigative memoir because McBride revealed the story of his white, Jewish mother who was twice widowed and raised a dozen children who grew up to be contributors to society.

McBride's "Miracle at St. Anna" [2002] was a novel based on the true story of black GIs fighting in Italy during a pivotal stage of World War II. Last fall "Anna" was a Spike Lee movie, and McBride wrote the screenplay. [Continued on back page]

Alumni weekend activities, festivities

Members of the Columbia J-school chapter of NABJ would like to meet for drinks with visiting alumni immediately after the awards program reception, which traditionally ends promptly at 9 p.m. The plan is to reconvene at The Heights on Broadway between 111th and 112th streets. To RSVP, e-mail Kathleen Fieffe at writeme.kat@gmail.com or Daarel Burnette at daarel@earthlink.net

Reunion events

Which class will have the biggest, baddest reunion?

There was a friendly competition among class agents to see which class will have the strongest turnout. Reunion classes include 2004, 1999, 1994, 1989, 1984 and 1979.

\$29 special

The class of 1980, which includes founders of the BA Network, started a \$29 for 29 years campaign in support of the annual Journalism Alumni Fund. [Continued on back page]

Future of newspapers

Smaller and sharing sandbox with independent and alternative ventures



In assessing the future of newspapers, the panel tasked with the job was distinguished, but too inbred. James Stewart, the moderator, Norman Pearlstine and Steven Swartz were all former Wall Street Journal newsies. They joked about their special DNA, but was it a curse that made them too aloof to really understand the meltdown of the mainstream media?

I'm irritable and impatient. I'm tired about reading about so many corpses, like the 1,600 McClatchy journalists who were "slain" day before the Tuesday program. The panelists' attempts at wit were flat as day-old soda pop. One of them suggested that it was surprising that some newspaper owners did not ask the government for a bailout like the auto industries or Wall Street.

Read more of Wayne Dawkins' March 14 [commentary](#) at [politicsincolor.com](#)

A warrior with words

Remember John Hope Franklin and tell stories with purpose and urgency

The accolades written on news of the death of Wednesday of historian/author John Hope Franklin, 94, jolted the senses. "It was more than Franklin's voluminous writings that cemented his reputation among academics, politicians and civil rights figures as an inestimable historian," wrote Wil Haygood in the Washington Post. "It was the reality that Franklin, himself a black man, had seen racial horrors up close and thus was able to give his academic work a stinging ballast." *Read more of Wayne Dawkins' March 30 [commentary](#) at [politicsincolor.com](#)*

Joyce Shelby, reporter and J-school adjunct, -30-

Joyce Young Shelby, a 1969 Columbia University J-school graduate and longtime adjunct professor, died March 19. She was 62.

Shelby collapsed on the sidewalk outside the [New York Daily News'](#) downtown Brooklyn offices as she left work, explained colleague Clem Richardson. Though a doctor was one of the passersby who rushed to her aid, said Richardson, all efforts to revive her proved inadequate.

Shelby was a reporter with the Daily News for the past 22 years. She was originally from Augusta Ga. Shelby was a graduate of Spellman College. She is survived by two adult children and her mother.

NBC correspondent inspires students in N.C.



Rehema Ellis, '77, of NBC News was the keynote speaker at the March 24 Elizabeth City State University Media Conference, titled "Making the Net Work." She [challenged](#) dozens of students to embrace change: "Don't be afraid of evolution. TV news will have to evolve, too, not just newspapers. I see more people reading newspapers on Blackberries and iPhones, but no matter where the material is read we still need someone to gather it, to report it, and to write it." The conference was organized by **Kip Branch**, '79, an assistant professor at the ECSU Department of Language, Literature and Communications.

Book report

Race against clock results in sweet harvest

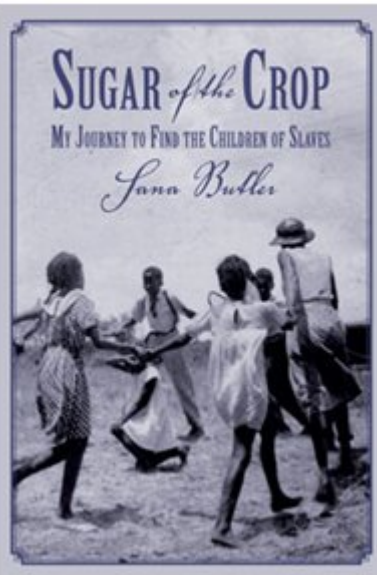


Sana Butler, J-'97, is author of “Sugar of the Crop: My Journey to Find the Children of Slaves” [February 2009, The Lyons Press]. Butler is the great-great granddaughter of emancipated slaves. She discovered this fact at age 19 when during a funeral in North Carolina, someone stated casually that the family elder who’d died was the daughter of a slave.

Years later, after Georgetown University and Columbia J-school, Butler was a working journalist at ABC “World News Tonight” determined to follow up on that lead: Who were the other children of slaves?

Some people greeted Butler’s questions with ridicule and condescension. In 1997, a bipartisan coalition of congressmen, led by a white Democrat from Ohio, proposed a law to apologize for slavery. U.S. Rep. Tony Hall’s press secretary suggested Butler was wasting her time, she recalled, because children of slaves would be about 200 years old – if they were alive.

It turned out that the spokesman was sloppy with arithmetic. When Butler began her journey in the late 1990s, she found people like Crispus Attucks Wright, an 87-year-old self-made millionaire and lawyer in Los Angeles whose father was born on a Louisiana bayou plantation. Wright got Butler’s attention when he gave \$2 million to the University of Southern California Law School, at that time the largest gift from an African-American.



Butler also interviewed Sammie Mason, 103, a retired teacher who strived to live up to the expectations of her father Sergeant John Jackson, a former slave and Civil War hero.

First and perhaps only book on the children of slaves based on primary interviews

The author traveled from Los Angeles to Louisiana, from a Harlem church to a Virginia nursing home, and to many other places during 10 years of research.

She produced the first and perhaps only book on the children of slaves based on primary interviews. Not since the Work Progress Administration gathered slave narratives during the Great Depression has a journalist conducted such in-depth primary interviews.

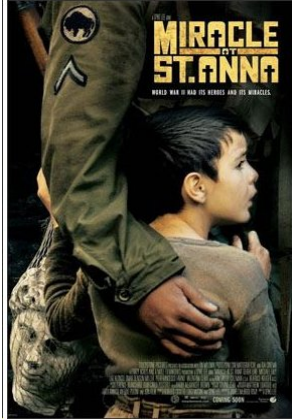
Butler had the exceptional journalist’s sense of urgency and good timing. All of the slave children she interviewed are now deceased. Some died just days after giving their stories to Butler. Because the elders held on, Butler has made a significant contribution to American history and biography.

Previously, historians and academics focused attention on the victimization of slaves and the horrors of slavery. They rarely documented the strength that enabled former slaves to function normally as parents.

“Sugar of the Crop” provides another perspective. – *Wayne Dawkins*

Author, musician to receive J-alumni award/

Continued from page 1



Last summer, McBride published “Song Yet Sung,” another novel, this time about slavery along the Eastern Shore of Maryland, region that was the birthplace of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

In 2007, McBride wrote a feature on the global impact of hip hop and recalled his introduction to the music at a raucous J-school graduation party in 1980.

McBride’s music credits include collaborations with Grover Washington Jr., Anita Baker and Little Jimmy Scott.

Myron Belkind, ’62, Susan Page, ’74, and Tim Weiner, ’79, are the other award recipients. -- *Wayne Dawkins*

Alumni weekend events/

Continued from page 1

Fund raising continues for the Phyllis T. Garland Memorial Fund, which when complete will become an endowed scholarship. An anonymous donor is still honoring a dollar-to-dollar match. Don’t miss this opportunity to contribute big-time.

The **Black Alumni Network** of Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism was founded in May 1980 and since July the group has published a monthly newsletter. The BA Newsletter’s mission is to keep people connected. We publish job changes and moves, news about books and films published or produced by alumni, and family milestones. And of course we keep alumni connected to news from the Columbia GSJ. Log on to our Web site at www.jrn.columbia.edu/alumni/services/ban/ or see our link on the home page of www.blackjournalist.com Wayne J. Dawkins – **editor**, Betty Winston Baye, Kip Branch, Kissette Bundy, Angela Chatman, Cheryl Devall, Dan Holly, Keith Rushing, **contributing editors**
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