

A Compelling Look at Slavery

To the Editor:

My appreciation to Professor Edward Littlejohn for his article, "Slaves, Judge Woodward, and the Supreme Court of the Michigan Territory," in the July issue of the *Michigan Bar Journal*. It was an excellent explanation of a critical part of our state and national history.

One aspect of the article I especially found compelling was the section entitled "No longer slaves, not yet citizens." I recall gradually learning, as stated by Littlejohn: "Although a majority of whites in Michigan [as well as in many other Northern states] opposed slavery and fugitive slave laws, most did not equate black freedom with equality."

That point was also well stated in a post in the November 26, 2014, edition of the *Wall Street Journal* by C. Norman: "I had the opportunity to ask Dr. James McPherson as to the cause of the Civil War. He replied, 'It wasn't slavery. There were very few white people who were willing to get killed over black people in 1861. Secession

caused the war. Slavery caused secession. Without slavery, there is no secession.'"

Again, thanks to Prof. Littlejohn.

George B. Walker
Farmington Hills

Unmistakable

To the Editor:

I was saddened to read in the September *Bar Journal* of Judge Robert A. Benson's death. I knew Benson well as a trial judge and also as a practicing attorney, and therein lies the story.

In the late '70s, I was trying cases for Plunkett Cooney. Charlie McGorisk, a senior partner, asked me to go to Houston for an expert's deposition in an oil rig injury case. Numerous attorneys were involved, including Benson. McGorisk wanted Benson to receive a copy of one of our reports before the deposition. I wanted to make sure I gave the report to the right person, so I asked how I might recognize Benson. McGorisk told me, "Just look for the biggest, baldest, ugliest guy there. That's him." This surprised me somewhat because up until that point

in time, I thought McGorisk was the biggest, baldest, ugliest lawyer in the state.

I was staying on the 18th floor of the hotel, which had a large open rotunda going through the center, and you could look down from each floor. I went to the rail and looked down. There he was, unmistakable from 18 stories. When I went down and handed Benson the report, I told him McGorisk told me what he would look like, but left out the description. He said, "Yeah, and I'll bet I know exactly what he told you."

Jim O'Leary
Cleveland, Ohio

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