

# “Love Letters to Baltimore”: Civic Memory, Citizenship, and Urban Community Narrative

Stacy Spaulding  
Towson University, U.S.A.

*Newspaper columns offer a unique perspective on civic life, as this examination of the work of two Baltimore newsmen reveals.*

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My affair with the city of Baltimore became out-in-the-open, I don't care who knows about it LOVE in the autumn of 1977, when, at the tender age of 19, I began writing about my hometown for publication.

In the decades since, as AC/DC so gently put it, “I’ve been around the world. . . . I’ve seen a million girls.” Yet to this day, a half-step slower and thirty years wiser, my obsession with and devotion to the Jewel of the Patapsco remains the longest intimate relationship of my life. My beloved—Crabtown in all its shame and glory—is the hard-headed, kind-hearted lover with whom I am in a constant state of reconciliation. It’s the romance that has survived all others.

‘Til death, my sad and gorgeous baby, do us part.

— Rafael Alvarez, A Love Letter to Baltimore<sup>1</sup>

Just as it is important to recognize the “different national manifestations”<sup>2</sup> of literary journalism, this study argues for investigation of the little-noted regional varieties as well. This paper focuses on the five published books by former *Baltimore Sun* journalists Michael Olesker and Rafael Alvarez, three

of which are compilations of their newspaper work. In works such as *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore* and *Hometown Boy*, these writers document city life, history, culture, and identity. I argue this body of work represents a contemporary, non-fictional descendent of the “narrative of community” genre of literature, a strain I propose calling “urban community narrative.” Furthermore, I argue that such urban community narratives are important sites of civic memory—explaining the city’s traditions; profiling its citizens, politicians, heroes, and villains; honoring artifacts; passing along oral anecdotes; celebrating shared values and mourning shared tragedies. These narratives give “voice to the drama of civic life,”<sup>3</sup> and value “the equivalent of material folk culture,”<sup>4</sup> illustrating the role narrative journalism can play in the city-citizen connection.

This essay first describes the theoretical framework of this study—the link between city, citizenship, and public memory—and then describes a collection of work by Rafael Alvarez and Michael Olesker that includes the books *Hometown Boy*, *Storyteller*, *Michael Olesker’s Baltimore*, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore* and *The Colts’ Baltimore: A City and Its Love Affair in the 1950s*. In an effort to “break down the wall that divides scholars from writers”<sup>5</sup> and learn from writers, this study draws on interviews with Olesker and Alvarez<sup>6</sup> to explore the connections between this body of narrative journalism and a genre of literary fiction known as narrative of community. This study concludes by discussing the use of an urban lens in literary journalism analysis.

#### CITIZENSHIP, MEMORY, AND NARRATIVE

The city has long been analyzed as the center of citizenship, a concept that dates to Aristotelian political theory.<sup>7</sup> Today most people tend to associate citizenship with nationality, though the concept of global citizenship is becoming increasingly popular. World and national governments, however, are too large and inaccessible to be responsive to citizen demands or to encourage citizen involvement. “This is why anyone who wishes to revive (responsible) citizenship must look to the city,”<sup>8</sup> wrote political theorist Richard Dagger, whose conceptualization of the relationship between city, citizenship and civic memory is central to this study.

In his 1981 essay “Metropolis, Memory and Citizenship,” Dagger blamed the “sorry state of contemporary citizenship” on the size, political fragmentation, and mobility of modern cities. These “enemies” of citizenship, as he called them, contribute to a loss of civic memory, which he defined as “a shared recollection of a city’s past, of its accomplishments and failures, which both reflects and generates a sense of civic identity.”<sup>9</sup> According to Dagger, the loss of such memory diminishes the potential for citizenship:

What memory is to the self, civic memory is to the city. Civic memory is creative in the sense that it helps constitute the city—to give it shape and meaning in the mind of its residents. It is through the recollections of its people, in other words, that a city comes to be something more than a bewildering agglomeration of streets and buildings and nameless faces. Their memories give it its working identity, and this identity enables them to take the part of the citizen. Another way to put this is to say that civic memory points us backward and forward both, to the future as well as the past, thus providing the direction necessary to (ethical) citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

Understanding a city's story fosters feelings of community attachment, allowing citizens to see themselves as part of something meaningful and long lasting.<sup>11</sup> As a mediator of such stories, journalism has been recognized as playing a key role in creating, maintaining, and curating collective memory, as the work of journalism historians such as Janice Hume and Carolyn Kitch has demonstrated.<sup>12</sup> Journalism has also been central to conceptualizations of ethical or responsible citizenship. In the view of Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, such citizenship included reading the news in order to engage in public debate.<sup>13</sup>

This study identifies the presence of civic memory in the works of narrative journalists Michael Olesker and Rafael Alvarez. Narratives—the stories we tell about ourselves—are ideal for transmitting social knowledge, as Charlotte Linde observed. Such narratives consist of accounts of events and an evaluation of their moral meanings.<sup>14</sup> J. Rappaport proposed three dominant narrative typologies: cultural narratives, personal stories, and community narratives. These community narratives “are descriptive and historical accounts of life in a particular community, which are accessible to community members. Community narratives are identified through consistent themes present in the personal stories expressed by individual community members.”<sup>15</sup> The presence of these themes indicates common experiences and a shared community identity.<sup>16</sup> Recent scholarship has shown that community narratives, whether urban dance performances in San Francisco, folk festivals in Canada, or reading programs focused on regional writers, have been used to pass along civic history and create community identity.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, “the beginning of narrative intelligibility signals the beginning of community,”<sup>18</sup> as the works of Michael Olesker and Rafael Alvarez demonstrate.

#### LOVE LETTERS TO BALTIMORE

Rafael Alvarez never dreamed of becoming a reporter. Yet he worked in *The Baltimore Sun's* newsroom from 1978 to 2001, a span of twenty three years, working sports, cops, obits, general assignment, city features and rewrite. “It happened and I am glad of it,” he wrote. “I learned to write on the

City Desk, was given the freedom to wander the city on company time and had license to walk into strangers' homes to see what hung on their walls and stewed in their pots."<sup>19</sup> The two books examined here, *Hometown Boy* (1999) and *Storyteller* (2001), represent what he called "Ralphie's greatest hits,"<sup>20</sup> some of his best newspaper work. And while the books offer a mixture of readings—*Storyteller* includes a number of his fictional short stories and both books contain several on-the-road type features and profiles of blues musicians—the heart of this work resides in the white, ethnic, working-class neighborhoods Alvarez knows best, "Baltimore's immigrant holy land—Highlandtown, Broadway and Canton,"<sup>21</sup> and Greektown, where he lives today in the house once owned by his grandparents. This work distinguished Alvarez as a sort of newsroom "folklorist,"<sup>22</sup> He asserts: "I memorialized what I cared about, and I cared about it because it was my own personal history. No one had to point me in that direction."<sup>23</sup>

The books include profiles and obituaries of Baltimore's characters and legends, "flawed and beautiful eccentrics who didn't waste a breath aiming for fame;"<sup>24</sup> local landmarks such as the basketball-court size neon Domino Sugar sign, the "incandescent soul of a city,"<sup>25</sup> and traditions, from the neighborhood pleasure clubs to the ritual cleaning of the city's rowhouse<sup>26</sup> stairs, "tiny marble altars to hard work upon which thousands knelt with scrub brush in hand."<sup>27</sup> Evident throughout is a community identity based on faith, hard work, good times, and shared values, as exemplified in the familiarity of the city's rowhouse bars: "most of the people who frequent Sis's [basement bar in South Baltimore] consider each other family—both good eggs and bad apples—and regard South Baltimore as a village where the neighborhood's dead are as familiar as those who still drop in for a cold one."<sup>28</sup>

Amid the celebration of cultural landmarks and community identity, Alvarez mourned the passing of the old city amid changes caused by deindustrialization, urban renewal, and the death of an older generation of residents. Much of Alvarez's journalism in these books was published during an era of staggering job losses that hit working-class Baltimoreans particularly hard,<sup>29</sup> while the city received national acclaim for Mayor (and later Governor) William Donald Schaefer's urban renewal efforts, which included building downtown hotels, a ball park, inner harbor shopping, a convention center, and a modern tourist industry.<sup>30</sup> Alvarez's writing demonstrated that such gains came at a cost to the community's collective identity. For example, the Domino Sugar sign is a symbol "of a city built not on pleasure—as the modern waterfront's marinas might suggest—but the kind of hard work that takes place in the refinery whose product the sign represents."<sup>31</sup> He extolled the last bread baker in Little Italy, the last corner butcher, and the death of the dean

of the arabbers.<sup>32</sup> He mourned the demolition of buildings, including Memorial Stadium, the original home of the Colts and Orioles; the Jewish meat and poultry shops along East Lombard Street, where “if history is measured in racks of meat butchered to order . . . then something more than bricks came down when the row houses were razed”<sup>33</sup>; and the paid-for ethnic-owned Canton row homes taken by the city for a highway that was never built. In this case, the land became the site of high-priced homes for a new gentry: “That lingering sense of betrayal . . . has made for a splintered Canton, a neighborhood split between fixed incomes and big incomes, the lifestyles of the old working class and the new professional class—between people who won’t ever forget what happened to their friends and relatives in the 1960s, and the new residents who don’t even know there was a neighborhood before they came.”<sup>34</sup>

The cityscape is central even to essays about his family. In the opening story of *Hometown Boy*, Alvarez mourned the death of his father’s mother in a story that opens with this line: “The year after my grandmother died I went looking for the spirit of Christmas on Eastern Avenue.”<sup>35</sup> The story is followed by another about his mother’s mother and her days as a bean snipper in the canneries that lined Canton. For this story, Alvarez knocked on row house doors to find the women who—like his Polish grandmother—had also worked in the waterfront packing houses:

As a kid who hankered to play with the hoodles<sup>36</sup> on weekends and get in their games, I didn’t pay much mind to the sour-faced women who stared at us out their front windows when the ball bounced up against their storm doors. Back then I didn’t know them, I didn’t know how hard and how long they had worked to say with pride that their house was their own: little row houses paid for in sweat by women who put spinach in cans. . . . Now I know.<sup>37</sup>

As a narrative journalist, Alvarez is a subjective participant observer of urban life. Readers see the city through the eyes of a working journalist and “hometown boy” searching for—and preserving—the municipal soul. This perspective is also evident in the work of Michael Olesker. Olesker began his career as an intern on the *Baltimore News-American’s* sports desk in 1967 and worked his way to investigative reporter where he investigated corruption in the courts, sheriff’s office, police department, and prisons. He became a columnist in 1976 and three years later moved to *The Sun* where he continued writing columns until 2006. From 1983 to 2002 he was also a commentator for WJZ-TV’s Eyewitness News.

In the columns reprinted in the book *Michael Olesker’s Baltimore*, Olesker portrayed daily city life as “tribal ritual, an affirmation of the value of urban

living.”<sup>38</sup> Published between 1976 and 1995, these human-interest columns include both profiles of politicians such as the forlorn portrait of Mayor William Donald Schaefer, who pouted instead of celebrating when *Esquire* called him “The Best Mayor in America,”<sup>39</sup> and descriptions of daily life such as public-housing “high-rise living” in “The Other Baltimore,” where “the great renaissance of the city is only a rumor.”<sup>40</sup> One aspect of these columns is Olesker’s ability to collect colorful anecdotes through interviews that are not only telling, but distinctly Baltimorean. Consider this short example, a quote from a club owner regarding a scandal on The Block, the city’s red-light district, involving a man who solicited prostitutes and racked up over \$6,700 in credit card debt. Said the club owner: “In the first place . . . we don’t allow prostitution here. And, in the second place, we never take credit cards for it.”<sup>41</sup>

Much as an oral historian or folklorist might, Olesker collected these anecdotes and stories, the “family tales told around kitchen tables,”<sup>42</sup> and wove them into larger book-length narratives, cultural and social histories of the city. In *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore* (2001), Olesker addressed the dilemmas of ethnicity and race in municipal life through a social history that spans the twentieth century—from immigration in the early 1900s to mid-century civil rights to the contemporary experiences of Latino/a immigrants today. In *The Colts’ Baltimore* (2008), he celebrated the city’s popular culture and its obsession with the Baltimore Colts.

In *Journeys*, Olesker created an auto-ethnographic portrait of the city’s ethnic and racial history drawing from his own family stories and extensive interviews with news sources, citizens, politicians, and classmates. Throughout the book, Olesker likened the Latino/a immigrant experience to that of the city’s Jewish, African American, and ethnic white residents who had struggled in the past with assimilation, or as he called it, “the eternal American conflict.”<sup>43</sup> This struggle is presented in the context of the Baltimore’s cityscape and historical landmarks, as well as its social and cultural past and present. Using this lens, Olesker gave new meaning to everyday events, such as the baseball games that former Baltimore County Executive and Greek-American Ted Venetoulis remembered from his childhood:

The athletic teams helped him fit in, but the process only went so far. It was one thing for a Greek kid and a Polish kid to toss a ball around Patterson Park. America thus becomes the ballgame. But black people were in some other country. The public schools were still segregated, and so were plenty of restaurants and movie theaters and swimming pools. In the public parks, there were separate pools and separate tennis courts. Downtown Baltimore department stores allowed blacks to buy clothing, but they couldn’t

try anything on for size before buying. Pale skin would not touch material first touched by dark skin. In such an atmosphere, ballgames played by kids became important. They were expeditionary ventures.<sup>44</sup>

Olesker explained the roots of the city's ethnic neighborhoods and how they began to come apart as whites integrated into these areas, though religious and racial barriers were slower to break down. As part of the first generation of Baltimore school children to be integrated in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Olesker depicted a brief moment of racial mixing in the city's schools before white flight effectively re-segregated the city's classrooms. He used his own experience in the *News-American* newsroom as to describe the 1968 riots, and the experiences of his classmates to explain the city's racial history. Ultimately, the book poses a compelling question: as we continue to redefine racial, ethnic, and social barriers today, are we losing the memory and heritage that defines our identity?

Today we move around. When the old ethnic enclaves began to come apart after the war, it was sometimes a gift. It helped us get past ancient suspicions of each other that were based mainly on distance and self-imposed ignorance. . . . Things got a little blurry. It was harder to stereotype an entire category of strangers once they had married into your family. And then came the new concern: Were we losing our sense of heritage in the process, willfully cutting ourselves off from our uniqueness in a desire to fit in, to make things smoother all around, and forgetting the ingredients that make us who we are?<sup>45</sup>

Implicit in the book is one answer: the ingredients of who we were and are—both nationally and ethnically—can be found in our municipal story.

While *Journeys* examines the city's ethnic and racial experiences, *The Colts' Baltimore* recounts the 1958 NFL championship, the first game to go into sudden-death overtime and the so-called "greatest game ever played."<sup>46</sup> Again, Olesker is a subjective participant observer, weaving his childhood memories and experiences as a reporter into a larger narrative to create a comprehensive cultural history of Baltimore in the 1950s. The book explored the pop culture from the *Buddy Deane Show*<sup>47</sup> and the Hilltop Diner<sup>48</sup> to Gussie's downbeat, where the bookmakers met on Monday nights to settle up after the games. The book also examined the city's relationship to New York, the source of its "municipal inferiority complex."<sup>49</sup> Olesker observed:

It wasn't just a football game; it was a reminder of our entire lives. New York had the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building as its great landmarks. Baltimore had the Bromo Seltzer tower. New York had Mickey Mantle in center field. Baltimore had Willie Tasby, who played one overcast afternoon in his stocking feet because he feared his spikes might attract

lightning. . . . New York not only had the baseball Yankees, who won every year—they had the football Giants, the glamour team of the National Football League. They were different from the Colts. [Quarterback Johnny] Unitas had put in his time at the steel mill, and [Defensive End Gino] Marchetti had set pins at a bowling alley. The Giants' Frank Gifford was cutting movie deals.<sup>50</sup>

But the soul of the book is the football: the retelling of the 1958 game and the relationship between the fans and the players, the men who embraced a “city hungry for something to hold it together.”<sup>51</sup> Olesker interviewed Art Donovan, Lenny Moore, and Raymond Berry, among others, and attended the funeral for Johnny Unitas. The famous Colts quarterback, himself the son of Lithuanian immigrants, particularly captured the city’s adoration: “He gave the city its identity. Maybe we were just rowhouses and marble steps and assembly lines, but we also had this guy throwing footballs across the horizon and doing it in our name. Maybe we weren’t much—but nobody thought Unitas was much, either, when they first saw him.”<sup>52</sup> And in an era when many football teams still had not integrated, this team of blacks and whites came to symbolize ethnic and racial cooperation across the city: “We had stepped out of the shadows of our separateness and found ourselves having the time of our lives together. And the moment stayed with us forever.”<sup>53</sup>

Though the book was published twenty four years after the team left town, “even the team’s kidnapping to Indianapolis one snowy night in March 1984 couldn’t dim the memory”<sup>54</sup> of these players. “Other cities got on with their histories,” he wrote. “Baltimore was left to consider its past. We nurtured our memories. . . . The names, and the stories, took root. The men who might have slipped from memory became the saintly figures who never deserted us.”<sup>55</sup> In spite of their absence, the Colts remained Baltimore’s “great secular religion.”<sup>56</sup> And after all, what is citizenship if not a secular religion of shared cultural devotions, rituals, and values?

Readers familiar with other Baltimore literary journalism, such as David Simon’s *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (1991) or *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (1998), will not find the same kind of intense fiction-like narrative in this body of work. These works combine reporting and memoir with the commentary of the journalist as a participant in—and observer of—city life. Specifically, Olesker’s and Alvarez’s books of newspaper work offer urban sketches, with Olesker’s book-length works providing more comprehensive auto-ethnographic cultural and social histories.

These works are further limited by their geographic focus. The south and east—home to Baltimore’s white, ethnic, immigrant working class—are well

represented. The Jewish experience is also explained, from the community's origins surrounding the old meat and poultry shops along East Lombard Street through its northwest migration. Missing in this narrative is west Baltimore, majority black neighborhoods in a majority black city.<sup>57</sup> This is not to imply that blacks are absent in Olesker's and Alvarez's work. *Journeys*, in fact, does an especially admirable job of addressing the black experience during the civil rights era, and both *Journeys* and *The Colts' Baltimore* describe in detail the racial experiences of the Baltimore Colts. But black neighborhoods are not as prominently featured in these works as white neighborhoods.

Readers should also take into account Olesker's resignation from *The Sun* in 2006 amid allegations of plagiarism.<sup>58</sup> The resignation took place on the eve of the Baltimore *City Paper's* publication of an article that alleged Olesker's columns plagiarized articles from *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *The Sun*,<sup>59</sup> although *The Washington Post* reported that "in some cases this was routine information."<sup>60</sup> Reported Howard Kurtz:

Tom Rosenstiel of the Project for Excellence in Journalism said that "this does not seem like a clear-cut case" of plagiarism, since most of the examples involve "background factual material rather than descriptive narrative that is in the author's voice," and that Olesker's language was "not identical." He said it is "not uncommon practice to take background material from clippings."<sup>61</sup>

Though some felt Olesker seemed to be "mailing it in"<sup>62</sup> during his last years as a *Sun* columnist, colleagues such as David Simon and *Washington Post* columnist Marc Fisher defended him as having used "boilerplate" material.<sup>63</sup> "It wasn't as if he was stealing anyone's thoughts, just some routine journalese language," said Fisher in a Washingtonpost.com online chat. "I too fail to see this as a nuclear event. Sadly, we live in a time of Zero Tolerance and Gotcha Schadenfreude, and it's that climate that axed Olesker far more than any particular misdeeds of his own."<sup>64</sup> Simon questioned the political climate of the charges, noting that Olesker was "a voice that one of our political leaders wanted gone."<sup>65</sup> In 2004, Gov. Robert Ehrlich had banned state employees from speaking to two *Sun* reporters, including Olesker. *The Sun* sued on First Amendment grounds, but a judge dismissed the lawsuit in 2005.<sup>66</sup> Simon wondered at *The Sun's* insistence that Olesker resign before an internal review was completed and even before the *City Paper* published the allegations.<sup>67</sup>

Despite these considerations, the works examined here communicate the civic memory and identity that characterize Baltimore. Much of Olesker's and Alvarez's work is preoccupied with capturing "the rituals and cultural ties and belief systems, and the sense of sacrifice made generations earlier, sometimes on the other side of an ocean, to get to this place and time."<sup>68</sup> According to

Olesker, such stories serve up philosophy in a way that can be understood—and repeated to others. “It’s much easier to remember an anecdote than it is a philosophy,” he said.<sup>69</sup> These stories also give us a sense of shared identity, he said:

They validate the fact that we have something in common. They are a binding experience—a binding and a bonding experience. They tell us that we are a part of the same community. By sharing not only the initial experience, but the retelling of the story, they become our common history. They become our experience. And they remind us that we have things in common, that we’ve been through stuff together.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, these community narratives together form an important site of civic remembrance that preserves memory, explains identity, and outlines an important role that narrative journalism can play in civic life.

#### DEFINING THE URBAN COMMUNITY NARRATIVE GENRE

In his essay, “A Narrative of Collegial Discovery on Some Conceptual Essentials,” David Abrahamson provides a useful set of basic literary tools with which to reflect on a body of work: character, setting, plot, theme, voice and structure.<sup>71</sup> Plot and structure vary here. Alvarez’s and Olesker’s newspaper columns represent a loose collection of sketches, while Olesker’s *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore* and *The Colts’ Baltimore* create comprehensive historical narratives. In each, however, setting is paramount. Every other facet of these stories—character, plot, and theme, for example—is defined by the emphasis on setting. Setting defines characters. They may be politicians or residents, heroes or villains, but each is connected to the heart of the city. Setting influences theme throughout by focusing on distinct Baltimore traditions, culture, identity, and history. Setting also intimately defines the authors’ voices. Both are subjective, drawing on experiences acquired not just as reporters, but also during years growing up and living in the city. Both authors are committed to urban life.<sup>72</sup> Both have witnessed the transitions in the city—including the postwar boom, deindustrialization, and contemporary urban renewal. And both are participant observers who are intimately connected to the city: “We both love Baltimore like a parent loves a homely child,” Olesker said. “Sometimes we feel like nobody else loves her, so we’re gonna.”<sup>73</sup>

But where do these works fit in the landscape of literary journalism? In *The Art of Fact*, Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda provide a useful typology of literary journalism genres. The most likely home for these works, a genre the authors call “tales of the city,”<sup>74</sup> is defined as “human-interest story as a social parable.”<sup>75</sup> The authors trace this genre from Victorian reporters Charles Dickens, Henry Mayhew and W.T. Stead through the twentieth century’s Morris Markey and Ben Hecht to contemporary writers such as Jimmy Bres-

lin and Rick Bragg. The examples provided by Kerrane and Yagoda—Stead’s “If Christ Came to Chicago” and Mayhew’s “Watercress Girl,” for example—certainly resonate with the columns written by both Alvarez and Olesker on crime, children, homelessness, and other urban woes.<sup>76</sup>

Yet Olesker’s and Alvarez’s emphasis on community identity also reflects the qualities of a genre of fiction called “narrative of community” identified by Sandra A. Zagarell. Narrative of community is rooted in the nineteenth century fiction of middle-class female writers like Sarah Orne Jewett (1849-1909), known for her short stories, novels, and sketches such as *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Jewett’s work portrayed daily life as she found it in the seaports and fishing communities of Maine, narrated by a participant observer in the community. Jewett and other writers of this genre focus on “details of local life as integral parts of the semiotic systems of the community, and readers are urged to recognize local language and activities like washing and gardening as both absolutely ordinary and as expressions of community history and values.”<sup>77</sup>

Zagarell observed that while much of western literature is focused on the search for self, narrative of community is focused on the interdependency of the community and its residents.<sup>78</sup> Writers such as Jewett saw collective memory as vital to community preservation, and this is an intrinsic feature in the narrative of community genre.<sup>79</sup> These authors believed in the “restorative power”<sup>80</sup> of community narrative and its ability to “reconnect the present with the common culture of the past.”<sup>81</sup> Jewett and other narrative of community authors “give literary expression to a community they imagine to have characterized the preindustrial era. The genre thus represents a coherent response to the social, economic, cultural and demographic changes caused by industrialism, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism.”<sup>82</sup>

There are marked differences between the narrative of community genre and the body of work examined here. Most notable is that Alvarez’s and Olesker’s work is nonfiction and not as woman-centered or rooted in women’s culture as narrative of community.<sup>83</sup> And yet, there are common themes as well. Both demonstrate an allegiance to a particular way of life and to the working class. Both witnessed the devastating effects of de/industrialization. And both value shared history and identity as unifying forces, a narrative rarely seen in contemporary news media: “A lot of people don’t hold [Baltimore] close to their hearts because they don’t understand it,” Olesker said. “And they don’t understand it because they’ve lived by myth and rumor and hysterical television news reporting that has painted a picture of the city that is a picture of dysfunction and danger. And that’s not the full city.”<sup>84</sup>

Though rooted in the nineteenth century, the narrative of community

genre grew significantly broader in the twentieth century, Zagarell wrote. An emerging characteristic of the genre today is the creation of political or cultural community as an author's main objective.<sup>85</sup> Modern examples include *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker and *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison. Traces of narrative of community are also present in Charles Dickens' portrayals of urban life and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, a book whose central character was a participant-observer newspaper reporter. This provides more points of resonance between the narrative of community and the works of Alvarez and Olesker, even beyond the fact that both narrate their work from the standpoint of reporter and resident. *Winesburg* was one of the literary works that influenced Alvarez's writing: "*Winesburg* was yet another example for me of how storytelling as journalism could use the tools of the short story in the spirit of Twain's 'the tale,' " Alvarez said. "At some point I had an epiphany that a newspaper was just a platform, that if you could persuade or earn an editor's trust to publish whatever you gave them, then a newspaper could be as malleable as your talent could dictate."<sup>86</sup> The narratives Alvarez chose to tell reinforce a cultural community through collective memory, an indicator of the narrative of community genre.

It could be argued that it is inappropriate to identify these works of journalism with a fictional genre. However scholars have recognized journalists as storytellers<sup>87</sup> and called attention to the narrative qualities of news<sup>88</sup> and its potential for myth<sup>89</sup> and folklore.<sup>90</sup> According to Zagarell, the relationship between genre and text is a fluid one, therefore classifications are not necessarily exclusive "Individual literary works participate in genres rather than belong to them, and a number of genres are often present in a given work," she asserts. "Narrative of community should be understood as a generative principle present in, and in some cases constituting the generic center of, a number of extended prose narratives."<sup>91</sup> Yet reality boundaries,<sup>92</sup> the borders between journalism and fiction, are of crucial concern to journalists and scholars: "Nonfiction means NO FICTION!" Gay Talese reminded one audience of college students.<sup>93</sup> But while journalism must be rooted in fact to be journalism, this should not exclude subjectivity, asserted Norman Sims: "Literary journalism speaks to the nature of our phenomenal reality *in spite* of the fact that our interpretations are inevitably subjective and personal."<sup>94</sup>

Though subjective, Olesker's and Alvarez's works are clearly rooted in fact. Because these works document civic memory and define community identity, they resonate with the narrative of community genre. For this reason, I propose calling these works "urban community narrative." Such a label honors the urban focus and journalistic nature of the material without erasing its connections to the narrative of community genre. As observed in the work

of Michael Olesker and Rafael Alvarez, I propose defining urban community narrative as a genre of literary journalism that filters one or more elements of story—such as character, plot, theme, voice or structure—through the lens of setting with the explicit intent or implicit effect of creating civic memory and/or identity that preserves, creates, or reinforces urban community.

### THE URBAN LENS

In his *Esquire* profile of Baltimore Mayor William Donald Schaefer, a piece that also might be classified as urban community narrative, journalist Richard Ben Cramer observed: “The best mayor keeps the city-citizen link scaled down, so everybody can feel it.”<sup>95</sup> That is precisely the effect of urban community narrative—allowing each resident to feel a connection to the city’s past, which, as Dagger theorized, fosters attachment and forestalls a loss of civic memory. The definition of urban community narrative offered here is a step toward greater clarity on literary journalism’s role in civic life, a question posed by John J. Pauly in his 2011 keynote address to the IAJLS.<sup>96</sup> Of the works presented in this analysis, Olesker’s *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore* particularly demonstrates that narrative journalism “as a mode of understanding, is capable of portraying the life of groups . . . with as much subtlety as it does individual characters and interpersonal relations.”<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, Olesker’s understanding of civic memory as the “the family tales told around kitchen tables”<sup>98</sup> and the “philosophy”<sup>99</sup> of civic life facilitates narrative journalism’s role in preserving and transmitting the social and cultural knowledge necessary for citizenship.

The identification of this genre poses interesting questions for future research: Is this narrative strain found in other communities? Is it found regionally, and with what similarities and differences? Which community stories are included and excluded from these narratives and why?<sup>100</sup> Which urban narratives compete for space within regional or national narratives, and which are excluded and why? Do such literary narratives tend to be conceptualized solely by journalists? Is there any evidence that the civic memory captured by urban community narrative fosters citizenship in the wake of the increased size, mobility and political fragmentation of today’s cities, as Dagger theorized? What are the parallel tools of global citizenship narratives?

Such questions lead to further observations on the body of work examined here. For example, how do journalistic media make use of these narratives? Alvarez asserts that most of his work appeared not on the news pages, but on the op-ed pages:

I could only get the stuff I truly cared about, journalism that aspired to literature, on the op-ed page and the Perspective pages, often after putting in

40 hours on the city desk in rewrite. It was still the last days of first-person journalism being heavily frowned upon. I was not a columnist in the classic sense of the newspaper word in that I cared less for government or politics. But I wanted to filter life in Baltimore or anywhere else I happened to be through my evolving sensibilities. . . . The bulk of which have proved—hooray for Ralphie—enduring in ways the scandal du jour that management wet their pants over every week would not.<sup>101</sup>

The locally-oriented pages of the working-class *Evening Sun* were apparently more receptive to such pieces than *The Sun*. Mike Bowler, editor of the *Evening Sun's* op-ed page, took pride in providing a space for essayists, op-ed obituaries, and even local poets, creating a community space absent in *The Sun's* own op-ed pages. “It was so great to be against the morning *Sun*, which was dry and lordly and would give half the page to Henry Kissinger and that kind of s[tuff]. Mine was really local,” Bowler said. “*The Sun* then, and I think still now, though maybe it’s loosened up a little bit, was a pretty stodgy newspaper, afraid to take chances with people’s writing. You were sort of pressed into a straight jacket, standard newspaper lingo and writing and style and Ralph didn’t have any of that. He was refreshingly different.”<sup>102</sup> Within the theoretical conceptualization of urban community narrative offered here, these comments suggest that local narratives can not only create and reinforce readers’ attachments to community and their roles as citizens, but can also privilege the paper’s position as a mediator in the city-citizen connection.

The question of what is missing from these narratives also yields insight. Regarding the omission of the city’s black-dominated west side, Alvarez explained:

I used to go to [Sun metro editor Tom Linthicum] often and say “you need someone to do on the west side what I’m doing on the east side.” I always felt guilty a little bit. It’s like ignoring half of the city. It’s geographically bigger, the houses are bigger, the architecture cooler. Why was west Baltimore ceded to *The Wire* instead of the Richard Wrights of Poplar Grove?<sup>103</sup>

Though a “truthful fiction”<sup>104</sup> rooted in the literary journalism of David Simon,<sup>105</sup> *The Wire* is nevertheless still fiction. And though set in west Baltimore, it was filmed largely on the east side of the city.<sup>106</sup> Yet this reference to the television show raises the possibility for interesting comparisons: what was the nature of collective memory and identity on the west side, and what type of citizenship did this memory and identity foster? Such questions are partially addressed in Simon’s *The Corner*, but a fuller examination is likely to be compelling given the stark differences between the experiences of black and white citizens in Baltimore. It is indeed unfortunate that *The Sun* did

not nurture a west-side counterpart to Olesker and Alvarez. To account for this loss, an examination of black urban community narrative in Baltimore should look to the reporting of the *Afro-American* and other nonfiction narrative such as biography and memoir. An analysis of works such as *The Beautiful Struggle* by Ta’Nehisi Coates<sup>107</sup> would likely yield rich comparisons regarding collective memory, identity and conceptualizations of citizenship.

Though some may say the Baltimore stories represented here are “all folklore, old anecdotes that Baltimoreans have heard to the point of screaming,”<sup>108</sup> this is not likely to be the case as foreign-born populations continue to increase and as city officials attempt to stem the decades-long population decline in the city.<sup>109</sup> In fact, world population data demonstrate that an urban focus is timely and warranted. For the first time in world history over half of the world’s population lives in urban centers, some 50.5 percent in 2010.<sup>110</sup> According to the United Nations Population Fund, the urban population will grow to 4.9 billion by 2030, while the world’s rural population will continue to decrease. All future population growth will occur in towns and cities, with most of this growth occurring in developing countries.<sup>111</sup> As urban populations swell, what happens to collective memory and identity? How is citizenship affected? And, an issue of interest to the audience of this journal: what role can nonfiction literary narrative play in preserving collective memory and identity in increasingly diverse communities?

The definition of urban community narrative offered here is intended to be expansive, not exclusive. As Zagarell observed, literature participates in genres rather than belongs to them. This paper does not intend to characterize all of the narrative journalism found in Baltimore or all of the narrative journalism produced by Olesker and Alvarez as urban community narrative. And though love of city motivated the work of Alvarez and Olesker, it is not a prerequisite for urban community narrative. The identification of other motivations such as poverty or disenfranchisement would enrich the comparisons possible within this genre of narrative nonfiction. The core characteristic identified by this paper is the use of urban community narrative as civic memory and identity, and the potential of that narrative to enhance citizenship in increasingly populated, challenged, diverse, and disconnected cities. After all, “newspaper stories don’t just occur in communities, they shape communities.”<sup>112</sup>

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Stacy Spaulding lives in Baltimore, Md., and teaches journalism and new media at Towson University. Her research interests include the history of Baltimore journalism. She can be found most Fridays at the weekly meeting of Baltimore's Aging Newspaperman's Club and online at [stacyspaulding.com](http://stacyspaulding.com).



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## NOTES

1. Rafael Alvarez, "A Love Letter to Baltimore," *Urbanite*, February 1, 2008, <http://www.urbanitebaltimore.com/baltimore/a-love-letter-to-baltimore/Content?oid=1247661>.
2. Norman Sims, "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," *Literary Journalism Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 9.
3. John J. Pauly, "Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life: Keynote address, IALJS, Brussels, Belgium May 13, 2011," *Literary Journalism Studies* 3, no. 2 (2011): 75.
4. Nancy L. Roberts, "Firing the Canon: the Historical Search for Literary Journalism's Missing Links," keynote speech, annual convention of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, Toronto, Canada (2012).
5. Sims, "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies."
6. In the spirit of full disclosure, it should be noted that the author regularly attends the meetings of the Aging Newspaperman's Club of Baltimore, a weekly lunch established by Olesker and Alvarez "in an effort to keep the stories we love best alive and not just in books." Rafael Alvarez, email to author, August 19, 2011. On the Aging Newspaperman's Club, see: Rafael Alvarez, "The Aging Newspapermen of Baltimore," *ValleyTimesOnline.com*, September, 2011. Reproduced at <http://alvarez-fiction.com/newspaper.html>.
7. Wayne H. Ambler, "Aristotle's Understanding of the Naturalness of the City," *The Review of Politics* 47, no. 2 (1985): 163–85; Robert Mayhew, "Part and Whole in Aristotle's Political Philosophy," *The Journal of Ethics* 1, no. 4 (1997): 325–40. Sanja Ivic, "The Postmodern Liberal Concept of Citizenship," *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries* 74(2011): 3–18. One line of modern political inquiry has debated the appropriateness of the city-state as the basic unit of governance and investigated the effect of population size on citizen involvement. Robert A. Dahl, "The City in the Future of Democracy," *The American Political Science Review* 61, no. 4 (1967): 953–70; Claude S. Fischer, "The City and Political Psychology," *The American Political Science Review* 69, no. 2 (1975): 559–71; J. Eric Oliver, "City Size and Civic Involvement in Metropolitan America," *The American Political Sci-*

ence Review 94, no. 2 (2000): 361–73. Scholars today continue to connect political theory to the study of cities, such as: Susan Bickford, “Constructing Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship,” *Political Theory* 28, no. 3 (2000): 355–76.

8. Richard Dagger, “Metropolis, Memory, and Citizenship,” *American Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 4 (1981): 720.

9. Dagger, 729.

10. Ibid.

11. Dagger, 730.

12. Janice Hume, “Press, Published History, and Regional Lore Shaping the Public Memory of a Revolutionary War Heroine,” *Journalism History* 30, no. 4 (2005): 200–09; Janice Hume and Noah Arceneaux, “Public Memory, Cultural Legacy, and Press Coverage of the Juneteenth Revival,” *Journalism History* 34, no. 3 (2008): 155–62; Janice Hume and Amber Roessner, “Surviving Sherman’s March: Press, Public memory and Georgia’s Salvation Mythology,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2009): 119–37; Karen Miller Russell, Janice Hume, and Karen Sichler, “Libbie Custer’s ‘Last Stand’: Image Restoration, the Press, and Public Memory,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2007): 582–99; Barbie Zelizer, “Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995): 214–39; Carolyn Kitch, “A Death in the American Family: Myth, Memory, and National Values in the Media Mourning of John f. Kennedy JR,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2002): 294–309; Carolyn Kitch, “Anniversary Journalism, Collective Memory, and the Cultural Authority to Tell the Story of the American Past,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 1 (2002): 44–67; Jill A. Edy, “Journalistic Uses of Collective Memory,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 2 (1999): 71–85; Carolyn Kitch, “Twentieth-Century Tales: Newsmagazines and American Memory,” *Journalism & Communication Monographs* 1, no. 2 (1999): 119–55.

13. Christopher J. Schroll, “Theorizing the flip side of civic journalism: Democratic citizenship and ethical readership,” *Communication Theory* 9, no. 3 (1999): 321.

14. Charlotte Linde, “Narrative and Social Tacit Knowledge,” *Journal of Knowledge Management* 5, no. 2 (2001): 160–71.

15. J. Rappaport, “Community Narratives and Personal Stories: An Introduction to Five Studies of Cross Level Relationships,” (Unpublished manuscript 1994). Discussed in Mark S. Salzer, “Narrative approach to assessing interactions between society, community, and person,” *Journal of Community Psychology* 26, no. 6 (1998): 569–80.

16. Ibid.

17. Katrinka Somdahl-Sands, “Citizenship, Civic Memory and Urban Performance: Mission Wall Dances,” *Space and Polity* 12, no. 3 (2008): 329–52; Antonia Smith, “Cement for the Canadian Mosaic: Performing Canadian Citizenship in the Work of John Murray Gibbon,” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2007): 37–60; Elaine Yontz and Kathleen De la Peña McCook,

“Community, Identity, and Literature,” *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2004): 292–93.

18. Kenneth I. Gergen, “Narrative, Moral Identity and Historical Consciousness: a Social Constructionist Account,” in *Identität und historisches Bewusstsein* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), [http://www.swarthmore.edu/Documents/faculty/gergen/Narrative\\_Moral\\_Identity\\_and\\_Historical\\_Consciousness.pdf](http://www.swarthmore.edu/Documents/faculty/gergen/Narrative_Moral_Identity_and_Historical_Consciousness.pdf).

19. Rafael Alvarez, *Hometown Boy: The Hoodle Patrol and Other Curiosities of Baltimore* (The Baltimore Sun, 1999), ix.

20. Rafael Alvarez, interview with author, June 27, 2011.

21. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 5.

22. Alvarez, interview with author, January 21, 2012.

23. Alvarez, interview with author, August 22, 2011.

24. Rafael Alvarez, *Storyteller* (Baltimore: The Baltimore Sun, 2001), 82.

25. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 43.

26. In Baltimore-ese: a townhouse. Baltimore’s rowhouses are known for the marble stairs that lead to the front door.

27. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 48.

28. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 58.

29. Baltimore lost 22,792 jobs between 1980 and 1985 and a fifth of its overall population (including more than half of its white population) between 1962 and 1987. David Harvey, “A View from Federal Hill,” in *The Baltimore Book*, ed. Linda Shopes Elizabeth Fee, Linda Zeidman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 236. Peter Szanton, “Baltimore 2000: A Choice of Futures,” (Baltimore: Morris Goldseker Foundation of Maryland, 1986). Quoted in Harvey, “A View from Federal Hill,” 238.

30. See: Richard Ben Cramer, “Can the Best Mayor Win?,” *Esquire*, October, 1984, 52–72.

31. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 43–44.

32. An arabber is a street merchant who sells fruit and produce out of a horse-drawn cart. Though rare, a few still work the streets of Baltimore.

33. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 282.

34. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 276.

35. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 2.

36. In Baltimore-ese: hoodlums.

37. Alvarez, *Hometown Boy*: 8.

38. Michael Olesker, *Michael Olesker’s Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 175.

39. Olesker, *Michael Olesker’s Baltimore*: 69.

40. Olesker, *Michael Olesker’s Baltimore*: 93.

41. Olesker, *Michael Olesker’s Baltimore*: 132.

42. Olesker, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 345.

43. Olesker, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore*: 15.

44. Olesker, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore*: 83.

45. Olesker, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore*: 191.

46. According to journalist Frank Deford: “Actually, in chronicling the game for *Sports Illustrated*, Tex Maule’s headline called it merely ‘The Best Game,’ but people wouldn’t settle for that. Soon it was ‘the greatest.’ And it is yet.” Frank Deford, “Everything on the Line,” *Sports Illustrated*, July 17, 2007, [http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2007/writers/best\\_game/06/12/deford.best/](http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2007/writers/best_game/06/12/deford.best/).

47. The show resembled *American Bandstand* and provided the basis for John Waters’ 1988 movie *Hairspray*.

48. The Hilltop was a prominent fixture in Baltimore’s diner culture and the basis for the 1982 Barry Levinson film *Diner*.

49. Michael Olesker, *The Colts’ Baltimore: A City and Its Love Affair in the 1950s* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 5.

50. Olesker, *The Colts’ Baltimore*: 182, 86.

51. Olesker, *The Colts’ Baltimore*: 84.

52. Olesker, *The Colts’ Baltimore*: 87–88.

53. Olesker, *The Colts’ Baltimore*: 218.

54. Olesker, *The Colts’ Baltimore*: 18.

55. Olesker, *The Colts’ Baltimore*: 19.

56. Olesker, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore*: 149.

57. In 1970, 46 percent of Baltimore City residents were black. That percentage increased to 54.8 percent in 1980. “Historical Census for Baltimore City,” Government Public Library of Johns Hopkins University, <http://webapps.jhu.edu/census/>.

58. This was after the 2001 publication of *Journeys* and before the 2008 publication of *The Colts’ Baltimore*.

59. Gadi Dechter, “Sincere Flattery?,” *City Paper*, January 4, 2006, <http://www2.citypaper.com/news/story.asp?id=11319>, <http://www2.citypaper.com/news/story.asp?id=11319>.

60. Howard Kurtz, “Sun Columnist Dismissed; Attribution Issues Cited,” *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/04/AR2006010402179.html>.

61. Kurtz, “Sun Columnist Dismissed; Attribution Issues Cited.”

62. Said an anonymous reader in a Washingtonpost.com online chat: “He seemed to be mailing it in, which could explain why he got lazy and pinched other people’s writings.” “Potomac Confidential: Washington’s Hour of Talk Power,” *Washingtonpost.com*, January 22, 2006.

63. David Simon, “Michael Olesker is a Plagiarist? Who Isn’t?,” *City Paper*, January 18, 2006, <http://www2.citypaper.com/story.asp?id=11362>, <http://www2.citypaper.com/story.asp?id=11362>.

64. “Potomac Confidential: Washington’s Hour of Talk Power.”

65. Simon, “Michael Olesker Is a Plagiarist? Who Isn’t?”

66. Paul McLeary, “Judge Upholds Gag on State Flacks,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, February 15, 2005, [http://www.cjr.org/politics/judge\\_upholds\\_gag\\_on\\_state fla.php](http://www.cjr.org/politics/judge_upholds_gag_on_state fla.php).

67. Simon, "Michael Olesker Is a Plagiarist? Who Isn't?"

68. Olesker, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore*: 345.

69. Olesker, interview with author, August 8, 2011.

70. Olesker, interview with author, July 19, 2011.

71. David Abrahamson, "A Narrative of Collegial Discovery on some Conceptual Essentials," *Literary Journalism Studies* 2, no. 2 (2010): 89–90.

72. Olesker: "Some of the biggest fights I had at *The Sun* were with editors that said to me that I wasn't writing enough about the suburbs. My feeling was that the suburbs were doing fine. The city was a daily struggle to keep things together. That's where life was, where ideas were, where people from different backgrounds were trying to work things out in what we think of as the American melting pot. And that means the world to me. To me the melting pot is the heart of it all and that's what cities are. If we don't learn to work that out, that's when communities fall apart." Interview with author, July 19, 2011.

73. *Ibid.*

74. Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, *The Art of Fact* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 17.

75. *Ibid.*

76. See Olesker, *Michael Olesker's Baltimore*: p. 119–64; Alvarez, *Storyteller*: 211–28.

77. Sandra A. Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 13, no. 3 (1988): 503.

78. Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," 519.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," 514.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," 499.

83. See Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," 510.

84. Olesker, interview with author, 19 July 2011.

85. Zagarell, "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," 527.

86. Alvarez, interview with author. 8 Aug. 2011.

87. For example: Robert Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," *Daedalus* 104, no. 2 (1975): 175–94; Steve Barkin, "Journalist as Storyteller: An Interdisciplinary Perspective," *American Journalism* 1, no. 2 (1984): 27–33.

88. For example: Charles Marsh, "Deeper Than the Fictional Model," *Journalism Studies* 11, no. 3 (2010): 295–310.

89. Elizabeth S. Bird and Robert W. Dardenne, "Myth, Chronicle and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News," in *Social Meanings of News*, ed. Dan Berkowitz (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 333–50; Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*, The Guilford communication series (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); Kitch, "'A Death in the American Family': Myth, Memory, and National Values in the Media Mourning of John f. Kennedy JR."

90. This includes both the media's use of folklore tales and the use of true anecdotal narratives that are also valued by folklorists: R. Frank, "Folklore in a

hurry: The community experience narrative in newspaper coverage of the Loma Prieta earthquake,” *Journal of American Folklore* 116, no. 460 (2003): 159–75; John T. Flanagan, “Folklore in the Newspapers,” *Journalism Quarterly* 35(1958): 205–11; Paulette D. Kilmer, “‘Madstones,’ ‘Clever Toads,’ and ‘Killer Tarantulas’ (Fairy-Tale Briefs in Wild West Newspapers),” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2001): 816–35.

91. Zagarell, “Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre,” 502.

92. See: Sims, “The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies,” 11.

93. Sims, “The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies,” 14.

94. Sims, “The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies,” 15.

95. Cramer, “Can the Best Mayor Win?,” 62.

96. Pauly, 74.

97. Pauly, 82.

98. Olesker, *Journeys to the Heart of Baltimore*: 345.

99. Olesker, interview with author, August 8, 2011.

100. For example, Alvarez in explaining why *The Sun* never cultivated a reporter on the west side to do what he was doing on the east side: “You could make an argument that west Baltimore is simply not as stereotypically Baltimore as east Baltimore. I don’t know if that’s a result of racism or if it’s a result of the lack of a laureate to sing its praises. When people think of ‘Bawlmer,’ [the pronunciation of Baltimore in Baltimore-ese] they almost always think of the Highlandtown and east Baltimore stereotypes. The fact that the waterfront is in downtown east Baltimore is part of that. The fact is that west Baltimore is not part of that.” Alvarez, interview with author, August 22, 2011.

101. Alvarez, interview with author, June 30, 2011.

102. Mike Bowler, interview with author, July 18, 2011.

103. Alvarez, interview with author, June 30, 2011.

104. This phrase comes from Finnish journalist Esa Kero’s description of his narrative nonfiction. Maria Lassila-Merisalo, “Exploring the Reality Boundary of Esa Kero,” *Literary Journalism Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010): 39.

105. In addition to his years of reporting for *The Sun*: David Simon, *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (New York: Holt, 1991); David Simon and Edward Burns, *The Corner: A Year in the Life of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (New York: Broadway, 1998).

106. Gadi Dechter, “Wish You Weren’t Here: A Guided Tour of The Wire’s East Baltimore,” *City Paper*, May 24, 2006, <http://www2.citypaper.com/bob/story.asp?id=11846>.

107. Ta’Nehisi Coates, *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009).

108. C. Fraser Smith, William Donald Schaefer: A Political Biography (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), x.

109. Julie Scharper, “Mayor’s Goal: 10,000 Families in 10 Years,” *The Baltimore Sun*, December 6, 2010, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-12-06/news/bs-md-ci-srb-looks-ahead-20111202\\_1\\_mayor-stephanie-rawlings-blake-property-](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-12-06/news/bs-md-ci-srb-looks-ahead-20111202_1_mayor-stephanie-rawlings-blake-property-)

tax-rate-half-century-of-population-decline.

110. CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html>. Date accessed: August 18, 2011.

111. United Nations Population Fund, "State of the World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth," (2007), 6.

112. Frank, 163.