

## **GROWING LITTLE TRADITIONS: BALTIMORE'S LITTLE MISS HON CONTEST**

DAVID J. PUGLIA

Baltimore's HonFest festival draws folkloristic attention because it is one of the few urban public festivals to celebrate a folk group not based on any particular ethnic, religious, or occupational affiliation. The Little Miss Hon contest is one popular part of the two-day HonFest festival.<sup>1</sup> Recognized as a "Baltimore" tradition, 60,000 festivalgoers attend HonFest each year. These range from neighborhood locals to out-of-state revelers. Many hail from in between: the Baltimore metropolitan area, but not the city proper. Some of the notice the festival receives derives from its controversial depictions of longtime, blue-collar, local residents, especially apparent in the two featured stage contests: the adult's Best Hon Contest and the children's Little Miss Hon contest. The performed "Hon" image is perceived by some as a buffoonish characterization, while others see it as an exaggerated celebration of strong women based in an accurate historical past. Additionally, the festival—and particularly the stage contests—raises folkloristic questions of the invention of tradition in urban America as a means of battling an inferiority complex. Baltimore, a once great city, lives in the shadows of New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Elaborating on this urban issue, the Little Miss Hon contest reveals a devotion to a tradition, a tradition that itself is devoted to the image of a white, blue-collar city. Further, in the Baltimore context, both supporters and detractors have heightened the symbolic meaning of the "Hon" image because of the perceived connection to ideas of local identity, belonging, race, class, gender, and occupation.

There is a small body of scholarly research on or related to HonFest (Gadsby and Chidester 2007, Rizzo 2008, Shackel and Gadsby 2008, Chidester 2009, Chidester and Gadsby 2009, Rizzo 2010, Gadsby 2011, Britton and Faust 2012, Puglia 2015). In addition, it has received much attention in the local media, from the *Baltimore Sun* to the blogosphere. The event that receives the most attention is the adult Best Hon Contest. But little attention has been paid to the children's version, the Little Miss Hon contest, which takes place in advance of the Best Hon Contest and on the same stage. In some ways, the Little Miss Hon contest is the Best Hon Contest's undercard. The junior event is quicker, breezier, and receives less notice than its older sibling. But it has also become some festivalgoers' most anticipated HonFest event. The Best Hon Contest is a rhetorical attempt to reclaim Baltimore as a white, blue-collar city, differentiated by a down-to-earth, quirky, and kitsch aesthetic, in the face of Baltimore's class and racial discord—a fact that became national headline in 2015 following the death of Freddie Gray and the subsequent Baltimore protests (Berlinger 2015). But what can the Little Miss Hon contest tell us about the uses of tradition in Baltimore? One might assume the Little Miss Hon contest would portray the same message, albeit watered down to suit children's needs. In fact, the Little Miss Hon contest has a much stronger message than that. It is a continuation of the sociocultural program set forth by the Best

Hon Contest, that is, an attempt at growing and cultivating a “little tradition”<sup>2</sup> that boldly proclaims white, blue-collar ownership of a majority black, postindustrial city.

The Little Miss Hon contest takes place during HonFest, which is held one weekend each June. The girls, or their parents, register to participate the day of the contest. Some prepare in advance, while others sign up on a whim. This essay focuses on the Little Miss Hon contest, attempting to understand it in relation to the adult version of the tradition, the Best Hon Contest.<sup>3</sup> I conduct a brief ethnographic description, followed by a rhetorical and contextual analysis of the Little Miss Hon contest tradition, in the context of my HonFest and Best Hon Contest research.

### **The Little Miss Hon Contest**

A girl bearing a number “1” walks onto the stage. She wears cat-eye glasses, a beehive hairdo, and a leopard print dress. She appears tentative, but she receives roaring approval from the large festival crowd, many of whom are dressed the same way. A woman in a similar outfit approaches the girl, microphone in hand. “Kaylee, can you say hi, hon?”

“Hi, hon.”

“Where are you from?”

“Bal-ti-more.”

“Yeah? And what school do you go to?”

The girl at first appears stumped. Somebody shouts from the crowd that she doesn’t go to school.

“Oh, are you in school yet? Do you go to preschool?”

“I go to ballet school!”

The crowd roars with laughter. The woman sends the girl to stand on a bench at the back of the stage. And with that, the number “2” is on stage. She also has a beehive hair-do and cat-eye glasses, but in place of a leopard skin dress, she wears a flower patterned house dress.

“Julie, can you say hi, hon?”

“Hi, hon”

“Can you say how you doin’?”

“How you doin’?”

“Can you say welcome to Baltimore?”

“Welcome to Baltimore”

“And where do you go to school?”

“Pine Grove Elementary”

“And where is that?”

“In Maryland” (more laughter)

Each girl is interviewed on stage for twenty to thirty seconds, twelve in total, all between the ages of four and seven. The host asks the same questions, with only slight variations. The girls give short, direct answers, rarely approaching a Baltimore accent, some even leaving out the “hon” altogether (although one peppers everything with hons, to howls of the crowd’s delight). The girls’

unpredictability and their costumes hold the attention of the crowd. When one young girl in a short leopard dress is complimented on her dress, she motions like a *Price is Right* model. Yet another whispers her answers into the hosts ear rather than the microphone. Another contestant, sporting a beehive with a long pink ribbon and dressed in a pink shirt and striped pink skirt is asked on stage “What brings you to Hampden today?” “I don’t know,” she replies. Each is dressed in an immaculate, exaggerated style, a combination of post-war women’s wear and trash connoisseur John Waters films. As the girls line up on the bench in the rear of the stage, they create a kaleidoscope of florescent colors. This is the Little Miss Hon contest, a tradition that is part of Baltimore’s ever-growing annual HonFest, a celebration of Baltimore’s Hon tradition.

While on the stage of the Little Miss Hon contest, host Denise Whiting sometimes uses the rhetoric of the beauty pageant, including occasionally telling girls that they look beautiful. Bits of the performance are similar to a classic beauty pageant. The girls strut across the stage, do interviews, listen to a concluding serenade, and blow kisses. However, differentiating this contest from other child beauty pageants, many conventions are turned on their head. The blatantly amateur contestants do not so much strut as stumble onto the stage. The interviews are softball questions that last in total no more than twenty to thirty seconds, yet the girls often flub them anyway. And rather than a tuxedoed host concluding the ceremonies with a rendition of “There She Is Miss America,” a four-year-old sings “Skiddy-Mer-Rink-A-Doo.”

Perhaps most importantly, the Little Miss Hon contest does *not* have a winner, whereas child beauty pageants and the Best Hon Contest do. The Little Miss Hon contest holds the experience higher than winning. There is little overt competition in the contest beyond the reactions of the crowd. In fact, at the conclusion, the girls are told that they are all winners.<sup>4</sup> Upon closer inspection, the lack of competition between contestants makes sense under the guise of promising a future generation of a particular type of Baltimorean. It is not the winner but the approval of the crowd and the consensus of the image. The Little Miss Hon contest is *growing* a tradition.

### **Growing Little Traditions**

What was the meaning of the Little Miss Hon contest as revealed in ethnographic observation in the opening scene? The practices I documented reveal that HonFest is a location, or “play frame”—to cite the folkloristic concept of a subaltern space in which behaviors outside that frame can be reversed and mocked, and inside the frame cultural expressions build solidarity—for Baltimoreans to create a current, idealized identity out of a romantic, nostalgic past (Bronner 2010). The local folk speech of “hon” transitions into the female “Hon” image. For some onlookers, the Hon is a folk hero who symbolizes hard-working women, strong communities, and Baltimore’s idiosyncrasies. For others, it is either a mischaracterization of Baltimore’s working class or an attempt to romanticize Baltimore’s white, working-class past in lieu of its African American present. According to U.S. Census data, Baltimore underwent a rapid demographic shift in the second half of the twentieth

century. Baltimore was majority white from its founding through the early 1970s. Today, Baltimore's racial demographics stand at approximately two-thirds black to one-third white, and its neighborhoods remain highly stratified.<sup>5</sup>

How did we get to this strange scene that plays annually in modern Baltimore? Baltimore has been growing the "hon" tradition for nearly three decades: linguistically, visually, and performatively. For those Baltimoreans whose value system is rooted in an industrial economy and a working-class ethos, the collapse of the local industrial economy in the second half of the twentieth century created an existential crisis questioning whom the city and its residents are and what they stand for. The difficult discourse on identity has shifted to more manageable battlegrounds, including the Little Miss Hon contest. In fact, HonFest has been at the front of these vernacular wars.

Baltimoreans have sought to solve Baltimore's problems through the creation of public traditions for many years. Proponents of these invented traditions have attempted to bring a cohesive identity to a fragmented, chaotic city. Examples abound over the centuries. The Baltimore Sesquicentennial and its successor, the Oriole Festival, heeded the zeitgeist of uniting the city and served as the first attempt to do so through the creation of a citywide tradition. Beginning in 1880, Baltimore endeavored to capture its penchant for public display through festival. On its 150th anniversary, Baltimore attempted to bring disparate Baltimore groups together as Baltimoreans for the Baltimore Sesquicentennial to celebrate their illustrious past and to prepare for the city's future. The festival returned the following year as the Oriole Festival.<sup>6</sup> The Oriole Festival only lasted three years, from 1881-1883, but the acclaimed<sup>7</sup> festival and pageant proved that Baltimore was capable of more than ethnic and neighborhood celebrations (Ammen 1912, 255-258). Other citywide festivals succeeded the Oriole Festival, including the couth and polite Flower Mart of the early twentieth century and the civic-corporate hybrid Baltimore City Fair of the late twentieth century.

These festivals have sought to create a sense of shared identity, although some residents have contested that vision. HonFest's tradition of staged events are a powerful form of symbolic practice that residents enact in an attempt to define an authentic sense of place and identity and that participants reshape to negotiate a cognitive sense of identity and belonging. Little Miss Hon performs and exaggerates the Hon image through a self-perpetuating, self-referential, and ever-growing tradition.

Geographically, Baltimore's regional identity remains ambiguous. Neither northern enough to be Northeast nor southern enough to be a southern city, and too far east to be a rustbelt city, Baltimore is left with the lukewarm designation of Middle Atlantic. That is, the Middle Atlantic is the "remainder" or "left overs" after the stronger regions of New England and the South are identified. Folklorist Simon J. Bronner has noted that the Middle Atlantic is "the least conspicuous of America's regions, both to outsiders and to its inhabitants" (Bronner 2006, 789). It was not always so. From 1830-1860, Baltimore was America's second largest city. It ceded that honor to Philadelphia after the Civil War and never regained it. Baltimore was also once a city of a million residents (1950s), but the population has declined

ever since then. Today, Baltimore is a midsized and prosaic city, set near the rich and the powerful.

Baltimore has some legitimate reasons to feel inferior. Officially “Charm City,” Baltimore has received some negative nicknames in the twentieth century, including “Harm City,” “The Heroin Capital of America,” “The City that Bleeds,” and “Bodimore, Murdaland”<sup>8</sup> due to the high per capita murder rate in the city, hitting its peak of violence in 1993 with 353 slayings.<sup>9</sup> Baltimore ranks 33rd among the most deadly places in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Although the murder rate has dropped substantially since its peak in the 1980s and 1990s (a low of 196 murders in 2011), Baltimore is still two to three times the national average in all varieties of violent and property crime. In addition, residents are referred to as (and sometimes refer to themselves by) the humorous folk demonym “Baltimorons,” referencing the city’s slack education accolades.<sup>11</sup> Fifty percent of Baltimoreans have a high school diploma or less, and Baltimore’s public schools are constantly mired in controversy.<sup>12</sup> In response to the negative publicity, energetic and optimistic mayors like William Donald Schaefer and Martin O’Malley have attempted to devise new images for the city with nicknames like “America’s Comeback City,” “The Greatest City in the World,” and the ubiquitous park bench placard “Believe.” But it is the non-institutional “Hon” image that has been the most powerful rebranding.

Baltimore is known as a “blue-collar” city.<sup>13</sup> But the city’s easy blue-collar designation merits examination, especially with its once blue-collar workers now employed in the service and information economy at a rate of 90%. The aesthetic leaks overtly into the city’s perception of its culture. Historian Kenneth D. Durr argues that Baltimore is indeed a blue-collar town, and a prescient one at that. Its blue-collar workers seem to be harbingers for working-class sentiment to come elsewhere. Durr notes particularly how “Baltimore was far ahead of the nation when it came to the era’s defining conflict—one staged by policymakers but waged by working whites and blacks—over the deteriorating institutions and the economic crumbs left over in the deindustrializing city” (Durr 2003, 4). The continued deindustrialization of the city and continuing competition for cultural ownership of the city has propelled the Hon image, showcased in the Little Miss Honfest, into Baltimore’s spotlight.

But why is the word “hon,” heard across the United States, so closely associated with Baltimore and so dear to many Baltimoreans hearts? While “hon” is not unique or distinctive to Baltimore, it has been adopted as symbolic of Baltimorese—the local vernacular—and the related local, blue-collar aesthetic. The embracing of the term “hon” first became a citywide tradition when a mysterious gentlemen nicknamed “Hon Man” began plastering the word on the “Welcome to Baltimore” parkway sign. This word transitioned to the capitalized “Hon,” a beehived, cat-eyed woman in garish or frumpy dresses and indulgent make up sporting a strong Baltimore accent (and likely to use the word “hon”).<sup>14</sup>

An essential starting point to unpacking the Hon image and the Little Miss Hon contest is a closer look at filmmaker John Waters’ most successful movie, *Hairspray* (1988). Born near Baltimore in 1946, Baltimore filmmaker Waters embraced Baltimore’s quirks in a way few others had. He writes, “I would never

want to live anywhere but Baltimore. You can look far and wide, but you'll never discover a stranger city with such extreme style. It's as if every eccentric in the South decided to move north, ran out of gas in Baltimore, and decided to stay" (Waters 2005, 76). In 1988, Waters released *Hairspray*. Set in Baltimore in the 1960s, Tracy Turnblad and other beehived Baltimoreans endeavored to integrate a televised dancing show. Although never referred to as Hons, the big haired women who set the canon for HonFest are seen throughout. In fact, in many ways, HonFest is an unattributed *Hairspray* fan convention, although because the iconography has gone beyond the movie and into "tradition," attendees can reference previous HonFests rather than *Hairspray* directly.

Throughout the second half of the 1990s, "hon" continued to transition from the term of address, "hon," to a type of person, the admirable Baltimore "Hon." In 1996, for example, the *Baltimore Sun's* fashion editor, Vida Roberts offered an elaborate, mostly positive description of how a Hon dressed. The subtitle of her article, "Treasure those Baltimore ladies who call you 'hon,' hon. Because they're a vanishing treasure characterized by hearts of gold—and some other traits you can't miss" is reminiscent of the "eleventh-hour ethnography" of folkloristics' past (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 300). Boiled down to the essentials, Roberts article listed the characteristics of a Hon (1996). In her estimation, Hons are the big-haired, down-to-earth, friendly, maternal, hard-working women of Baltimore. Roberts' article was a clear transition toward the Hon as a type of woman, although she was not yet at the point where she was ready to capitalize the word "Hon."

Roberts made an effort to add benign feminist and maternal connotations to the "Hon" phenomenon. For example, she argued "big hair alone does not a hon make; a real hon has a generous spirit as big as her beehive. It's her willingness to scrub, hug, scold and help family and her neighbors that singles her out" (Roberts 1996). This connotation of the motherly Hon seems to have been created to give the "Hon" image a positive connotation, in contrast with the "slutty" Hon that some perceived. In addition, one can see the romanticism and nostalgia at play, reminiscing back to the time when neighbors looked out for and assisted one another. This is an embodiment of the nostalgic white, blue-collar image of Baltimore's past.

Since his upset victory in 2000, Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley had made it his mission to change the perception of Baltimore. But a horrendous murder rate and a national portrayal on *The Wire* (2002-2008) as a center of drugs, crime, violence, and corruption had done little to improve the city's image. As the official commissioned report would later state, "Baltimore is plagued by negative press and harmful characterizations by the media, resulting in an *inferiority complex*" (Donovan 2005). O'Malley and the City Council brought in branding strategy experts Landor Associates to change the image of the city and improve nationwide perception. Instead of attempting to compete directly with New York, Washington, D.C., Orlando, or Las Vegas, the report encouraged Baltimore to play up its downhome, authentic characteristics, what it referred to as "the Hon factor" (Donovan 2005). This factor brings a small town feel to a big city, something not to be found in Washington, D.C., or New York. The residents surveyed had

spoken positively of Baltimoreans as “quirky,” “funky,” “off-kilter,” “hilarious,” “bizarre,” and “a little-off center” (Donovan 2005). While this was never adopted as an “official” Baltimore brand, the Hon fills this need by playing precisely to these characteristics.

The “Hon” tradition in Baltimore seems to follow Dundes’ inferiority complex thesis that small countries (or cities in this case) suffering from poor self images are particularly active in using folklore to promote themselves and allow them to actively reflect on and debate their identity (Dundes 1985). In Baltimore, a city with a well-documented, century-long inferiority complex, “hon” and “the Hons,” best captured in the Best Hon Contest and the Little Miss Hon contest, are deployed to distinguish and redeem a location in the midst of the competing East Coast cities of Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and New York. As a little big city that has fallen on hard times since the 1970s, Baltimore is in the midst of a local inferiority complex.

Enter the Baltimore Hon. In many ways, Baltimore’s Hon image is similar to the American folk heroes of yore, reminiscent of Richard M. Dorson’s “American Comic Demigods”: hard-working, kind, of the people, down-to-earth, and independent (Dorson 1941). While Dorson despised the commercially fabricated Paul Bunyan, Dundes pointed out that Dorson’s criticism is primarily a matter of *origins* rather than *function*. As far as function, Dundes saw fakelore filling “a national, psychological need: namely, to assert one’s national identity, especially in a time of crisis, and to instill pride in that identity” (Dundes 1985, 13). Further, he argued fakelore seemed to be invented “where folklore is deemed lacking or insufficient” and creative people “fill the void” by “creating a national epic or national ‘folk’ hero *ex niblio* if necessary” or, more common, “embroider and inflate fragments of folklore into folkloristic fabrications” (Dundes 1985, 13). That is, when needed, locals grow their own folk heroes.

When asked, the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association denied that “the Hon” was a Baltimore tourist draw or even on the average tourist’s radar. The association claimed tourists are primarily interested in strolling through the Inner Harbor, visiting historic neighborhoods, and feasting on steamed crabs. The spokesperson told the *Baltimore Sun*, “If you do a survey with visitors and you ask them, Hons wouldn’t rank...Hons wouldn’t even be on the radar screen...It’s not something that people think of, and it’s not as if visitors come in the Visitors Center and say, ‘Where’s the Hon?’” (Sessa 2008). While his comment was meant to downplay the importance of the Hon phenomenon in Baltimore, it proves HonFest to be even more locally important. According to the Baltimore’s tourist bureau, HonFest is not an important tourist destination. It is a performance by Baltimoreans for Baltimoreans, even if it is only organized by a select few and only appreciated by some others.<sup>15</sup>

As part of the land-language-lore complex (Abrahams 1993), urban American folk speech is used in an attempt to create a local tradition that connects people to place. In the face of a rapidly changing city, “hon” transitioned from a stigmatized vernacular term associated with the lower class to an esteemed vernacular term tied to local roots and city identity. “Hon” and the “Hon” image served both as Baltimore’s most prominent example of the esteemed vernacular

and as a rhetorical battleground where issues of race, class, gender, and belonging clash with conceptions of identity, heritage, and nostalgia over the attempt of civic leaders to construct a citywide local tradition. The Little Miss Hon contest demonstrates a commitment to an annual performance of this tradition.

Furthermore, “Hon” seeks to create a “natural” connection between an imagined group and a recently demarcated political boundary (Abrahams 1993). If Baltimore represents the epitome of an overindustrialized, and, now, postindustrial landscape, “hon” helps redeem a sacred homeland by referring not to the vacant buildings and shuttered plants, but instead to a nostalgia for an neighborly, folksy, down-to-earth city. While there was some stigma associated with “hon” in the 1990s<sup>16</sup> and earlier,<sup>17</sup> by the 2000s, “hon” had entered the esteemed vernacular. Baltimoreans now use “hon” in speech, on merchandise, and on highway signs to make what linguist Barbara Johnstone calls “self-conscious regional identity claims” (Johnstone, Andrus, and Danielson 2006, 78; see also Johnstone 2009). In response to Baltimore’s conflicted, volatile past, this esteemed vernacular tradition has been one growing attempt to connect residents to the local in a transient world.

Alan Dundes encouraged folklorists to collect not just folklore, but the meaning of folklore. These native interpretations are valuable, and I have attempted to elicit HonFest’s meaning from the festival’s devotees. However, crossing the “triviality barrier” has proved challenging (Sutton-Smith 1970). Most festivalgoers reiterate that the festival is fun and carefree, that they have a familial connection to Baltimore, that they want to celebrate the old way of life, or that they want their children to experience Baltimore. These native interpretations call attention to a deeper unspoken meaning that demands analytic interpretation. In such instances, Dundes hypothesized that “it is often the taboo activities and ideas which find expression outlets in symbolic form” and “if the folk consciously recognized the symbolic significance of the joke or folksong element, this element might not be able to continue to serve as a safe, socially sanctioned element” (2007, 85). Viewed in isolation, the native interpretations appear valid, perhaps even accurate. But when the festival is studied in the context of Baltimore’s race relations, perhaps best exemplified by the death of Freddie Gray and the 2015 Protests, a deeper meaning emerges. The Little Miss Hon Contest, and HonFest in general, is one battle waged in the larger, symbolic campaign for cultural ownership of Baltimore. Through this annually invoked and embodied ritual, Baltimore’s heritage as a white, blue-collar city is reassured for the audience and participants. The battle must be waged symbolically rather than overtly, lest the violent and chaotic Baltimore of 2015 become the constant state of the city.

### **Conclusion: Baltimore’s Little Tradition**

In Baltimore, the Hon image, taken from and symbolizing the larger local, working class dialect known as Baltimorese, became a symbolic battlefield for issues of race, class, gender, identity, and belonging. While some residents and commentators dismiss the image as trivial, the attention the issue receives coincides with the symbolic significance that Baltimoreans implicitly understood about the image. In the land-language-lore complex, the owner of the local

language has the best claim to cultural ownership of the land. The Little Miss Hon contest is not a silly diversion, but a cultural battle over who can lay natural claim to Baltimore. Its function is an extension of the function of the Best Hon Contest (see Puglia forthcoming, “The Hons of HonFest” chapter). The difficult, unspeakable, symbolic discourse on racial and class identity has shifted to this safer, more manageable, and more respectable battleground. Children are paraded as extensions of their parents who have prepared them to play a role. While the Little Miss Hon contestants lack the agency and maturity of Best Hon Contest contestants, more important than their individual motivations is the event, the city, and the zeitgeist that celebrates them.

In Baltimore, the “Hon” image’s understated but understood commentary on local identity, belonging, race, class, gender, and occupation have made the “Hon” a powerful symbol. In this essay, I have attempted to show how this seemingly benign, recently invented tradition lends its support to the nostalgic vision of a white, blue-collar city of the past. In addition to the quickly changing demographics, Baltimoreans seem to have an inferiority complex, living in the shadow of New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. HonFest, and especially the Little His Hon contest and the Best Hon Contest, give folklorists ample opportunities to explore how inferiority complexes are addressed through the invention of tradition in the modern American city. Baltimore’s current answer, the “Hon,” is denigrated by some as a lampooning of Baltimore’s working class past, but celebrated by others as a commemoration of the strong, hard-working, maternal, and uniquely stylish women of Baltimore. The “Hon” tradition seems to hold importance to Little Miss Hon and Best Hon Contest participants and the HonFests tens of thousands of attendees, who come from both Baltimore and the Baltimore diaspora. The Little Miss Hon contest is an annual celebration of a perceived traditional group, one not based on any particular ethnic, religion, or occupation affiliation, but rather a group formed purely out of the American urban experience.

Children are presented strategically as part of this growing tradition. While adults provide the framework for the annual contest, it is exclusively children who perform as the little Hons. By performing, they confirm the establishment and continuity of the tradition, showing that this is a wide-ranging, multigenerational tradition that encompasses youth and that will carry forth. Now firmly planted, the little Hon tradition has spread its roots, blossomed, and continued to grow.

## NOTES

1. This is reminiscent of what Richard M. Dorson was searching for in Gary, Indiana in his classic article “Is There a Folk in the City?” (1970). Dorson yearned to find distinctive American traditions that came directly out of the American experience, rather than immigrant traditions imported from abroad.

2. My title is meant to be a double entendre, referencing both the small children who perform the annual tradition in Baltimore and the work of anthropologists such as McKim Marriott (1955), Robert Redfield (1955, 1960), Gustave E. von Grunebaum (1955), John H. Bodley (2000), and Knut Odner (2000)

who distinguished between “great” and “little” traditions. This school of thought referred to the cultural and religious tradition of nations and empires, including its art and literature, as the “great” traditions, and the local and informal traditions of the peasants as “little” traditions.

3. I chose to analyze the 2007 Little Miss Hon contest, as that year was the only time the contest was fully documented. A full recording can be found on YouTube uploaded by WBAL-TV 11 Baltimore titled “Lil Miss Hon Contest.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ari0VwXHXqA/> While it would be preferable to have a wide range of Little Miss Hon contests to observe, only one has ever been recorded in full.

4. Joel Best has written about the everyone-is-a-winner phenomenon extensively in *Everyone’s a Winner: Life in Our Congratulatory Culture*.

5. As of 2011, the U.S. Census reports that Baltimore is 63.7% black or African American and 29.6% white alone. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2404000/>. For additional demographic analysis, see Yeip (2015). Yeip points to the Baltimore’s low score on the U.S. Census Bureau’s “Diversity Index” as another indicator of Baltimore’s stratification.

6. The Oriole Festival as sometimes alternatively referred to as the Festival of the Oriole or the Oriole Celebration. The Oriole is the Maryland state bird and one of the mascots of Baltimore, not because it is native to Baltimore, which for the most part it is not, but rather because its orange and black coloring is similar to Lord Baltimore’s coat of arms.

7. It even received a September 13, 1882 write up in the *New York Times*. The author says the festival was “celebrated to-day with more than usual ceremony and display.”

8. This nickname was popularized by real street graffiti featured in the opening credits of the HBO television series *The Wire*.

9. If it had the same population as New York, New York, Baltimore would have recorded nearly 4,000 murders in 1993. (New York reported 1,960 homicides that year).

10. City-Data, Baltimore, Maryland, “Baltimore on our top lists” <http://www.city-data.com/city/Baltimore-Maryland.html>

11. Also see Baltimore local Ernest Smith’s *Hey Hon!: How to Talk Like a Real Bawlamoron*.

12. For an example of the accolades Maryland receives for its public school system, see “Maryland schools ranked number one—again,” *Washington Post*, January 12, 2012. The level of individual educational attainment can be found on United States Census Bureau’s Table 233 “Educational Attainment by State.” More Marylanders hold advanced degrees than any state but Massachusetts.

13. “Blue collar” can at times be polite code for “dowdy” or “depressed.”

14. For more on the events that led to HonFest and the Little Miss Hon contest, see Puglia (forthcoming).

15. Folklorist Regina Bendix refers to a similar phenomenon in Interlaken, Switzerland. She argues that in Interlaken, even if traditions are performed outwardly for tourists, the act of performing gives the Interlaken community the opportunity to express their culture in their own words and on their own terms.

16. There had been complaints about racial, gender, and class connotations and the general association of “hon” with diner-waitress speak. For more about the specific debates, see Puglia (forthcoming).

17. Informants in the podcast “Welcome to Baltimore, Hon: Exploring Hon as a Linguistic and Identity Marker in Baltimore” by Holly-Catherine Britton and Heidi J. Faust recall their parents attempting to eliminate their Baltimorese as a means of social advancement.

## WORKS CITED

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1993. Phantoms of Romantic Nationalism in Folkloristics. *Journal of American Folklore* 106(419): 3-37.
- Ammen, S. Z. 1912. History of Baltimore, 1875-1895. In *Baltimore: Its History and Its People*, Volume 1, ed. Clayton Coleman Hall, pp. 241-88. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company.
- Bendix, Regina. 1989. Tourism and Cultural Displays: Inventing Traditions for Who? *Journal of American Folklore* 102: 131-46.
- Berlinger, Joshua. 2015. Baltimore Riots: A Timeline. *CNN.com*, April 28. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/27/us/baltimore-riots-timeline/>.
- Best, Joel. 2011. *Everyone's a Winner: Life in Our Congratulatory Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bodley, John H. 2000. *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States, and the Global System*, 3rd ed. Mountain View: CA: Mayfield Publish Co.
- Britton, Holly-Catherine and Heidi J. Faust. 2012. “Welcome to Baltimore, Hon!” Exploring *Hon* as a Linguistic and Identity Marker in Baltimore. *American Speech* 87(2): 208.
- Bronner, Simon J. 2006. *Encyclopedia of American Folklife*, Volume 3. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- . 2010. Framing Folklore: An Introduction. *Western Folklore* 65: 401-34.
- Chidester, Robert C. 2009. *Class, Community, and Materiality in a Blue-Collar Baltimore Neighborhood: An Archaeology of Hampden-Woodberry*. PhD diss., University of Michigan.
- Chidester, Robert C. and David A. Gadsby. 2009. One Neighborhood, Two Communities: The Public Archaeology of Class in a Gentrifying Urban Neighborhood. *International Labor and Working-Class History* 76: 127-146.
- Donovan, Doug. 2005. Baltimore: The City in Search of a Slogan. *Baltimore Sun*, November 8. [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2005-11-08/news/0511080037\\_1\\_brand-baltimore-area-convention-slogan](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2005-11-08/news/0511080037_1_brand-baltimore-area-convention-slogan)
- Dorson, Richard M. 1941. America's Comic Demigods. *The American Scholar* 10(4): 389-401.
- . 1970. Is There a Folk in the City? *Journal of American Folklore* 83(328): 185-216.
- Dundes, Alan. 1985. Nationalistic Inferiority Complexes and the Fabrication of Folklore. *Journal of Folklore Research* 22: 5-18.

- Dundes, Alan. 2007. Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism. In *The Meaning of Folklore: The Analytical Essays of Alan Dundes*, ed. Simon J. Bronner, pp. 88-87. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Durr, Kenneth D. 2003. *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Gadsby, David A. 2011. "We Had It Hard...but We Enjoyed It": Class, Poverty, and Pride in Baltimore's Hampden. *Historical Archeology* 45(3):11-25.
- Gadsby, David A. and Robert C. Chidester. 2007. Heritage in Hampden: A Participatory Research Design for Public Archaeology in a Working-Class Neighborhood, Baltimore, Maryland. In *Archaeology as a tool of Civic Engagement*, eds., Barbara J. Little and P. A. Shackel, pp. 223-242. AltaMira Press.
- Johnstone, Barbara, Jennifer Andrus, and Andrew E. Danielson. 2006. Mobility, Indexicality, and the Enregisterment of "Pittsburghese." *Journal of English Linguistics* 34:77-104.
- Johnstone, Barbara. 2009. "Pittsburghese Shirts: Commodification and the Enregisterment of an Urban Dialect. *American Speech* 84(2): 157-175.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1998. Folklore's Crisis. *Journal of American Folklore* 111(441): 281-337.
- Marriott, McKim. 1955. Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization. In *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*, ed. M. Marriott, pp. 171-222. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Odner, Knut. 2000. Tradition and Transmission: Bantu, Indo-European, and Circumpolar Great Traditions. Bergen, Norway: Norse Publications. Bergen Studies in Social Anthropology, no. 54.
- Puglia, David J. 2015. *Hon Culture Wars: Revering and Reviling the Vernacular in Baltimore and Beyond*. PhD diss., Penn State Harrisburg.
- . Forthcoming. *Welcome to Baltimore, Hon: Vernacular Wars and Local Identity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Redfield, Robert. 1955. Social Organization of Tradition. *The Far Eastern Quarterly* (15)1: 13-21.
- Redfield, Robert. 1960. *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Rizzo, Mary. 2008. The Café Hon: Working-Class White Femininity and Commodified Nostalgia in Postindustrial Baltimore. In *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American Culture*, ed. Anthony J. Stanonis, pp. 264-285. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press.
- . 2010. Hon-ouring the Past: Play-Publics and Gender at Baltimore's HonFest. *International Journal of Heritage* vol. 16, no. 4-5 July-September 2010: 337-351.
- Roberts, Vida. Hon Heaven Culture: Treasure those Baltimore Ladies who Call You 'Hon,' Hon. Because They're a Vanishing Treasure Characterized by Hearts of Gold—and Some Other Traits you Can't Miss, *Baltimore Sun*, June 7, 1996.

- Sessa, Sam. 2008. Hon-estly, Hon, It's Just Fun. *Baltimore Sun*, June 13. [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2008-06-13/news/0806120410\\_1\\_cafe-hon-hairspray-john-waters/](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2008-06-13/news/0806120410_1_cafe-hon-hairspray-john-waters/).
- Shackel, Paul A. and David A. Gadsby. 2008. "I Wish for Paradise:" Memory and Class in Hampden, Baltimore. In *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice: Engaging Descendant Communities*, eds., C. Colwell-Chanthaphonh and T. J. Ferguson, pp. 225-242. AltaMira Press.
- Smith, Ernest. 1993. *Hey Hon! How to Talk Like a Real Bawlamoron*. Baltimore, MD: 38th Street Press.
- Sutton-Smith, Brian. 1970. Psychology of Childlore: The Triviality Barrier. *Western Folklore* 29(1): 1-8.
- von Grunebaum, Gustave E. 1955. The Problem: Unity in Diversity. In *Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yeip, Randy. 2015. Baltimore's Demographic Divide. *Wall Street Journal*, May 1. <http://graphics.wsj.com/baltimore-demographics/>
- Waters, John. 2005. *Shock Value: A Tasteful Book about Bad Taste*. Philadelphia, PA: Running Press Book Publishers.