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Michael B. Katz

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The Death of “Shorty”

Michael B. Katz

AT 1:27 A.M. on the morning of August 4, 2005, Herbert Manes stabbed Robert Monroe—known as “Shorty”—to death on the 1400 block of West Oakland Street in North Philadelphia. No newspaper reported the incident. Arrested and charged with homicide, Manes spent the next ten months incarcerated until his trial, which ended on June 8, 2006. After deliberating less than ninety minutes, the jury concluded that he had acted in self-defense and found him not guilty on all charges. I served as juror number 3.*

This is the story of the trial, what it meant for me, and what it signifies about marginalization, social isolation, and indifference in American cities. It is also the story of what I learned from Herbert Manes. It is not a neat story. Ambiguities remain unresolved, contradictions abound, ends dangle. The story begins with the two main characters and where they lived. Herbert Manes was born on June 29, 1938. His family lived south of Gerard St., around Ninth St., in what he says is now “upper Society Hill.” His parents had migrated from South Carolina before the Second World

War but met in Philadelphia, where, after knowing each other for only two weeks, they married. Their marriage lasted more than sixty years until their deaths in their seventies. Manes had three siblings, a brother who died, one who works for Blue Cross-Blue Shield, and a sister who works for the Youth Study Center. When Manes’s parents died, an aunt who lived to reach 104 managed the family. Everyone referred to her as “the boss.” Manes spent his entire early life in the neighborhood in which he was born, attending Jefferson School and then Benjamin Franklin High School. He left school at age eighteen, without graduating, to make money. Money became more important when, after a “shotgun wedding,” his first child was born when he was twenty. In all, Manes has eight sons, one daughter, and many grandchildren. His former wife, from whom he was divorced in the 1990s, lives in Cheltenham, a heavily African American suburb on the edge of Philadelphia. Until her retirement, she ran the dialysis unit at a local hospital. Manes speaks of her fondly, describing her as a “lovely lady,” with whom he stays in touch. Most of his children live in the Philadelphia area, some in Willingboro (formerly Levittown, N.J., and currently home to many African Americans), and three or four in the South. Manes sees his children and grandchildren only at family reunions.

For thirty-five years, Manes’s father worked for a moving company from which he received a pension. Manes describes him as a good father. Grown up, the younger Manes worked for the same firm for many years until, like most of the city’s manufacturers, it went out of business. He then worked in steel mills—“brutal work.” He retired after an injury and survives on social insurance. “Uncle Sam takes care of me,” he told the jury. He also drove an unlicensed cab.

Manes looks older than his years. Six feet

*I have changed all personal names and, with the exception of three major streets, the names of all streets. The nickname “Shorty,” however, is real, and for reasons that the essay makes clear could not be changed without destroying part of the meaning. This essay is based on my observations as a juror; documents from the police file and the Social Security Administration; conversations with the defense attorney and defendant; criminal records; and various census, tax, and housing documents compiled by Chris Rupe. Special thanks during the research to Alice Goffman, Scott Flander, and Wendell Pritchett; for perceptive and constructive readings to Dan Amsterdam, Michael Frisch, and Viviana Zelizer; and for sharing his editorial wisdom, Mike Rose.

tall, 170 pounds, he stands slightly stooped; his close-cropped hair is a grizzled gray; his lips protrude on one side of his face, almost as though he had experienced a stroke. Round, dark-framed glasses give him a quizzical look. For his trial, he wore an open-necked, long-sleeved, light gray shirt, blue trousers buttoned at the top with no belt, and light tan workmen's boots.

SHORTY REMAINS more mysterious. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, birth and death certificates are closed to all but relatives and their attorneys. As one of the jurors who had acquitted their brother's killer, I could not just show up on his brother's or sister's doorstep asking for biographical information. Nor would it be safe for me to roam his neighborhood in search of acquaintances to interview. A friend offered to help by contacting two people with local networks. But the unpredictability that tears down lives on the city's mean streets intervened. One man was arrested and jailed before he could cooperate. Another potential informant was shot in the head and killed on a violent Saturday night.

This much is known. Robert "Shorty" Monroe was born on August 26, 1964, in Neptune, N.J., where he lived until at least age ten. His brother and sister still live there. Like Manes with his cab, Monroe was part of the informal economy found everywhere in America's inner cities. He worked on the street as a freelance mechanic. In Philadelphia, many street mechanics work near auto supply stores. Customers purchase parts in the stores and bring them to the mechanics. The activity violates a city ordinance, but no one seems to care. Although only 5' 2" and 147 pounds, Monroe was expert in martial arts. Manes described Monroe's strength and powerful build; he was, said Manes, impossible to fight in any straightforward way.

Monroe was well known to the police. Between July 23, 2001, and January 29, 2003, he was charged with offenses ten times. His alleged crimes ranged from unauthorized use of an automobile to theft by receiving stolen property, criminal trespass, burglary, retail theft, and drug-related offenses. Remarkably, each charge was either withdrawn or dismissed. Despite his

record, police sergeant Troy Lovell, who patrolled the area, described him as pleasant, friendly, and "respectful." At the time of his death, Monroe's blood alcohol level was just shy of legal intoxication; tests showed that he had recently ingested a substantial amount of cocaine, which had mixed with the alcohol to form a potent compound. Whether he was an addict or not is unknown. Monroe lived near the scene of his death on a desolate street of rundown row houses that angled up alongside railroad tracks.

West Oakland Street, where Manes lived and Monroe died, is a narrow, one-way street of small, poorly kept row houses, perhaps a slight step up from where Monroe lived. Everyone acknowledged the neighborhood to be dangerous. It embodied the decline, decay, and abandonment that scar the history of much of North Philadelphia.

Manes's row house was owned by the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation, which had purchased it for \$1; its certified market value for 2007 was \$8,300. Of the 6,947 people who lived in the census tract in which West Oakland Street was located, only 45 were white; the rest were largely African American; only 118 had been born outside the United States (compared to 9 percent of the city's population) and more than three of four had been born in Pennsylvania. Women with no husband present made up 40 percent of the households. Nearly a third of the householders were over age sixty-five, women and men living by themselves.

Just 60 percent of households had incomes from earnings, and these averaged only \$24,859 per year in 1999; a third had income from Social Security; 11 percent from Supplemental Security Income; 19 percent from public assistance; and 17 percent from pensions. Median household income was \$16,367; 41 percent of families fell below the poverty line. It was a neighborhood that had seen better days. Although in 1936 the Home Owners Loan Corporation slammed it for its "Negro concentration," until the 1950s the neighborhood remained more than half white, with roughly half of families owning their own homes. Clothing and furniture factories, long since closed, were nearby, as were railroad

yards and other businesses. A nearby subway connected the neighborhood easily with the rest of the city. Even mansions lined a nearby major street. Today, abandoned houses and vacant lots appear to outnumber the mostly small businesses—fast food restaurants, an auto supply dealer—that remain.

MANES'S FATAL encounter with Monroe began sometime during the evening of August 3. Manes, hungry and broke, borrowed five dollars from Monroe, promising to pay him back that night or the next day. He was expecting a government check. With the money, he says, he went to a local restaurant to buy some chicken. Later, still hungry and without money, Manes went to a friend's house, where he unsuccessfully tried to borrow more money. On his way home, he ran into Monroe, who was working on a car on West Oakland Street. Monroe demanded his money on the spot. When Manes told him he did not have any money, Monroe struck him. In the fight that followed, Monroe knocked Manes to the ground and was punching him when two passersby intervened, pulling him off. Monroe immediately went home, where, he claims, fearful for his safety, he retreated to the second floor. Monroe appeared in front of his house with a pipe three feet, seven inches long. He started knocking out windows, yelling, “I want my money.”

Henry Fairlee, who lived on the second floor of Manes's house, entered the unlocked front door—unlocked because the lock always was broken—and told Manes to talk with Monroe so that he would stop breaking windows. This is Manes's version. Fairlee tells a different story. He claims to have been one of the people originally pulling Monroe off Manes. He claims, too, that Manes came tearing out of the house, knife in hand, lunging at Monroe, who had not yet picked up the pipe. At this point, according to Fairlee, Manes stabbed Monroe, who then went to his toolbox for a pipe before returning to the house into which Manes had retreated.

Fairlee was the only civilian witness for the prosecution, and he lacked credibility. He was in custody for two parole violations. He had a record of felonies—breaking and entering, bur-

glary, receiving stolen goods. On the witness stand, he had trouble staying awake, his head periodically lolling against the side of the dais. Contradictions riddled his testimony; he even contradicted his testimony at the preliminary hearing.

Manes tells a story very different from Fairlee's. He denies, first of all, that Fairlee was one of the people who pulled Monroe off him at their first encounter. Manes said he wanted to go to his brother's to borrow some money but was frightened. He could not exit the back door because the yard was so full of debris that it was impassable, and he did not have a telephone with which to call the police. Because the neighborhood was so dangerous and because he feared intruders, Manes kept a knife—an ordinary kitchen knife with a six-inch blade—above his doorway. He pocketed the knife and went outside onto the stoop. Monroe immediately knocked him down, whether with a blow from the pipe or by leaping and kicking, is not clear. Manes ended up on the ground, underneath Monroe. Manes pulled the knife from his pocket and stabbed him. On the witness stand, Manes often appeared confused; he tried to answer the questions put to him, but he seemed not always to understand them. Yet, when his attorney asked, “Did you intend to kill Monroe?” Manes responded forcefully, “As God is my witness, I did not.”

When Lovell, a twenty-year veteran of the force and, like Manes, Monroe, and Fairlee, African American, arrived, he saw Manes sitting on his stoop drenched in blood. Manes complained of his cut hand and pain in his ribs. As Lovell tended to him, Fairlee came up behind him and told him an injured man was lying on the ground across the street. Lovell moved to Monroe and asked what had happened; all that Monroe could manage was to point at Manes. Assessing Monroe's condition as grave, Lovell instructed two officers to take him to Temple Hospital, a trip of perhaps a minute and a half, where he was soon pronounced dead.

Lovell allowed Manes to go into his house to clean up a bit. Then he placed him under arrest, had him taken to Temple Hospital, where his hand was stitched, and then to po-

lice headquarters at Eighth and Race, where detectives questioned him. He was, Manes stressed, trying to protect himself. Several people witnessed the events on West Oakland, but only Fairlee, and later one other witness, agreed to speak with the police. Fairlee also went to the police station, where he told police his version of the story, casting Manes as the aggressor. Manes was charged with murder and incarcerated.

The crime scene investigating unit found no fingerprints on the knife or pipe. At the trial, the police were unable to produce either one of the weapons. They had, apparently, been "lost." It appears doubtful that detectives returned to West Oakland to try to persuade other witnesses to speak with them. After all, the case was about two poor black men arguing over five dollars, and they had closed it.

Why was Manes charged with Murder One when the evidence for murder was virtually non-existent? Why was he incarcerated for so long? Why did the district attorney's office go to trial with so little evidence and one witness, who lacked credibility? Why was the police work so inadequate? Was Manes's real offense being a poor, uneducated black man living in Philadelphia's Badlands? If Manes had been a middle-class white man, I thought, he would not have spent the last ten months in jail or been tried for first degree murder. Still, looked at another way, for Manes the American judicial system worked. He had an excellent attorney, a fair-minded jury, and an exemplary judge. Was his situation unusual? These questions lingered in my mind after the trial was over. We had found Manes not guilty, but by no means did we know or understand all that had happened.

MANES, MONROE, and the trial haunted me. Why was I so interested in this ordinary murder case? Why did the men and the trial matter? At first, these seemed easy questions, but they were not. The best I could do was to try to reconstruct the trial through my own eyes and then to probe my reactions.

The jury selection had been weird. Both the district attorney and defense attorney were interested in my background. The DA wanted to

know my children's education, where I was educated, and whether I taught undergraduates. My degrees from Harvard seemed to make her ill at ease. The defense attorney, a seventy-nine-year-old white man with, as I learned later, much experience defending indigent clients, asked the subject of my doctoral dissertation (early school reform in Massachusetts). I thought it a peculiar question but answered politely. After the trial, when we met (he took a shine to me and actually invited me to lunch), he explained that if I had answered the question in a surly or impatient manner, he would have removed me. He could not understand why the DA let me on the jury. The defendant was of course present during the questioning, so I had my first look at him. He looked so old, sad, and beaten-down that my sympathies were on his side, and I had to tell myself to contain my emotional reaction.

Jury selection seemed to drag on for hours. It was the first taste of one of the two responses that dominated the next few days—boredom. We spent hours just sitting in the jury room. We were given a time to be present, and we were prompt, but for reasons rarely explained to us, we had to wait. The whole process could have been completed in one solid working day.

The other response was a sense of responsibility. I could not escape the weight of a decision that would determine the rest of a man's life. As a result, I found myself able to focus intensely on the proceedings. I don't have a particularly sharp memory, but my ability to remember details was far better than I expected or than usual, undoubtedly a sign of motivation.

The jurors were a cross-section of Philadelphia. I was the only one with a post-graduate degree. One man was a translator who also did some adjunct teaching. None of the others had professional jobs. Two were nineteen years old, one of them unable to stop babbling about his life. (When we went into deliberations, he said almost nothing.) One woman may have been older than I; gray, quiet, withdrawn, she said almost nothing and gave the impression of not wanting to be there. The most interesting and impressive juror was a large, burly man, a mechanic, with a two-day growth of red stubble, who wore shorts, spoke with a tough Philly ac-

cent, and had served jail time for contempt in his divorce trial. When we were deliberating, he said, "I'm not smart, but I'm street smart." In fact, he was smart, period. He picked up important details that the rest of us missed, and, from tending bar in the projects, he knew about street life in a way the rest of us did not. The woman who volunteered to serve as foreperson was in her thirties, a paralegal, a single mother who lived with her own mother—bright, quick, and appealing. I was quiet in the jury room, revealing nothing about myself. I did not want them to know I was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. I did not want to intimidate them or have them react to me as other than someone ordinary. My cover was blown at the end when the judge, in delivering his instructions to the jury, mentioned that there was a professor on the jury.

The jury was serious. We were instructed not to discuss the case among ourselves while the trial was ongoing. And few jurors made any remarks about it. I sensed that they were following it intently, an assumption supported by their recall and comments in our deliberations. But as the case unfolded, I had little idea how they were reacting. After the first day, I knew that I could not find the defendant guilty on the evidence presented and would not be swayed. So I feared we might be in for a long session in our little room.

Judge Gerard Lockwood introduced the case well. He's a firm white man in his early sixties who radiates fairness. I thought his conduct of the trial exemplary and his rulings correct. The DA, a slim, intense Hispanic woman named Carmen Ruiz, told us that it was a simple case and not to expect it to be like murder trials on television. She was wrong. It was, in fact, rather like television, except that the police work did not seem as thorough and the one civilian witness wouldn't have made the cut. I think she meant that the real-life case was a lot messier and that we would have to reach a decision with less conclusive evidence. The other jurors did not like her. They thought she was smart, but several said she frightened them. They found her cold and hard. When she had to deliver her closing statement, she dressed in black, which seemed like overkill. I learned much later that she erupted after the

jury had left the courtroom, calling Manes a killer and a liar, berating the defense attorney, and shouting angrily at Monroe's relatives, who had criticized her handling of the case.

The defense attorney, William Gray, was, as I noted, nearly eighty. He had turned to defending indigent criminals for personal reasons partway through a successful career as a business attorney. He likes to talk. His verbosity irritated the jurors, but they thought he was good. He uses literary allusions, and his language can be flowery. Early in the trial, he made an allusion to Abraham Lincoln, and he began his closing argument with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson. But he had prepared carefully and had a clear, effective strategy, the heart of which was his daring decision to put Manes on the stand, a move few lawyers are willing to risk.

LISTENING TO the evidence . . . well, the evidence was just not there. In fact, the witnesses, all for the prosecution, introduced more and more ambiguity and doubt. Watching Fairlee's head loll and his eyes droop, hearing his contradictions, I thought him the least credible witness imaginable.

When the jurors were finally alone, we went quickly around the room to gauge opinion. Not one juror hesitated to dismiss the charge of Murder One. No one found any of the evidence credible.

The next question was manslaughter. After a brief discussion, we agreed that there was no way Manes could have avoided the confrontation. He could not have left his house through the back door; we assumed he did not have a telephone (the defense attorney probably should have brought this out); we did not believe that he had used the borrowed money for food, but that was immaterial. We also thought that if he had a serious criminal record, the DA would have highlighted it at the trial. Only one juror, the sharper of the nineteen-year-olds, wanted to discuss the manslaughter possibility. But he quickly agreed that no evidence supported it. We all thought it most likely that Manes had acted in self-defense, not intending to kill Monroe. The discussion took less than an hour and a half. Watching Manes's face relax, seeing him embrace his lawyer as

the decision was read moved me deeply. After we returned to the jury room, Lockwood came in to thank us. He praised our attentiveness and said we had acted correctly.

I found the trial experience frustrating. I wanted to interrupt, ask questions, bring up something the attorneys had missed. As someone who teaches seminars, this is what I expect to do. Obviously, I could not. I was also frustrated by what we did not know about Manes and Monroe. Who were these men, only a piece of whose lives were laid in front of us? What had brought them to the streets of North Philadelphia? Why were two grown men willing to kill each other over \$5? What had made West Oakland Street a place where aging men lived in rooms with knives stashed over the door and most residents refused to bear witness to the killing of a likable and familiar figure?

I suppose that the law would say these questions are irrelevant, immaterial to what happened, and the only intent that counted was what lay in Manes's mind at the moment his knife penetrated Monroe's chest. The only geography that mattered was the detail necessary to choreograph the two men's movements. But that was not enough. I wanted to understand the situation and the men about whose life and death the state required me to decide.

For decades I have tried to write about poverty, its contexts, and the ideas and policies used to explain or ameliorate it. I also have written, read, and thought a great deal about cities, especially about the transformations that have produced the North Philadelphias of America. (North Philadelphia is a complex and varied place that belies its reputation for blight and social disorganization, just as West Philadelphia, beyond Fortieth Street, belies the image of a dangerous urban frontier so prominent in the minds of a great many Penn students and maddening to its residents.) But there is an abstraction in most of the literature and in most of what I have written.

There is, of course, a long history of social scientists and observers who have tried to reveal the lives beyond the abstractions. Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth in England come immediately to mind. In the United States, Jacob Riis's *How The Other Half Lives* remains

an iconic text not matched for popular impact until Michael Harrington's *The Other America* in the 1960s. In the social sciences, anthropologists like Eliot Liebow in *Tally's Corner* opened windows on lives never seen before by most Americans. Even in the best ethnographies, however, a layer of experience separates me from the day-to-day reality of lives spent on West Oakland Street. This is so even though I have lived for nearly thirty years in West Philadelphia, where diversity is the only thread uniting the inhabitants. I have tried to enter the lives of extremely poor people in the past, reconstructing histories of the poorest New Yorkers early in the twentieth century from charity records and complementary sources. Piecing together these life stories, I unraveled the complexity and strength, as well as the pathos and disorganization, in the lives of desperately poor women. But I have never done the same for their modern-day counterparts.

This persistent mystery was one of the factors influencing me to take on the directorship of the undergraduate Urban Studies Program at Penn shortly afterward and to create a course that would look holistically at modern American cities. Over more than twenty years, I have taught the course many times, understanding more at each iteration, but never, really, the whole story.

MANES'S TRIAL encapsulated what I had been struggling to understand and write about. Converging on the histories of Manes and Monroe were deindustrialization, white flight, racial segregation and concentrated poverty, the failures of urban education, a job market that excluded an extraordinary share of black men, the ravages of drugs, the importance of the informal economy, and a criminal justice system that in practice values their lives less than mine or those of my family and friends. If I could gather more details, I thought, perhaps I could make the subjects of my research more concrete.

But it is more than a matter of reconstructing lived experience. Most research and writing abstracts a thread from the fabric of experience. Historians and social scientists write about the welfare state, unemployment, single-parent families. They focus on particu-

lar problems and polices. But real lives do not divide into neat compartments. Capturing that lived reality is the challenge. I hoped that learning more about the men and trial would bring me closer to an understanding.

Mike Davis, in his book *Planet of Slums*, talks about the dramatic growth of social isolation in cities around the globe, most notably in third world cities but clearly visible in the United States as well. I had been reading Davis's book before the trial. The facts laid before the jury brought powerful confirmation of its thesis. The events took place a few miles from my home; they might as well have taken place in another city. An invisible veil—reinforced in suburbs by gated communities, in cities by security systems, police, and segregation—separates comfortable Americans from what happens on West Oakland Street. They don't know, and they don't really want to know. But they should. That is why the story of this mundane trial matters.

Ignorance results in stereotypes, which in turn, breed contempt and easy dismissal of "the undeserving poor." It reinforces the racial and economic segregation that turn far too many Americans into second-class citizens. It lets us celebrate an alleged renaissance of American cities, conveniently forgetting the vast swatches of empty factories, building sites reverted to fields of weeds, boarded up houses, and lives stunted by poverty in the shadow of the shiny new office towers. The attempt to expand the meaning of Manes's trial and to reconstruct its context is not, therefore, merely a quest for personal understanding. It radiates outward to provoking questions that should trouble all Americans.

I needed to talk to Herbert Manes. I had to know more about at least one of the men cast as leads in this awful story. His attorney kindly contacted him to ask if he would talk with me. He agreed.

I arranged to meet him at his home on a Friday afternoon. I arrived early and drove around the neighborhood to get a sense of it and to locate some places for lunch. A number of vacant lots dotted the neighborhood where houses had been torn down. A small convenience store, doing a brisk trade, stood on a corner. The day was hot, and lots of people were hanging out on stoops and in the street. I

was more than a little nervous after parking the car, realizing I had to get out and walk to Manes's front door with all eyes on me, this strange white guy with a blue, short sleeve button-down shirt and a backpack slung over a shoulder. It felt like walking into a scene from *The Wire*.

A woman, probably in her sixties, answered the bell and asked me in. Manes was in the living room; he had forgotten it was Friday, but remembered I'd called and had put on a shirt. The room was small, cluttered with overstuffed furniture, lived in. When I asked Manes where he would like to eat, he said, "Let's just go for a ride." But once in the car he wanted to head to Fifth and Spring Garden, the neighborhood where he had grown up. He had in mind a diner that had closed some months ago. We ended up at Fifth and Girard, at a small restaurant on the corner. I was pleased when Manes, a professional driver, praised my parallel parking. The restaurant was cool, with a corner booth vacant, quiet, and clean. Manes said he had been eating in it for fifty years, although not recently.

Manes recently ran into trouble with the law in New Jersey. For about twelve years, since retiring, he had been running his informal taxi business. One day before his fatal encounter with Monroe, he drove a woman to New Jersey, thinking she was going for a job interview. She turned out to be a pickpocket and was nabbed by the police. He was also blamed, although he had not left the car. To make matters worse, he made an illegal U-turn and got caught by the police. The N.J. parole authorities confiscated his license and were holding it until he paid his fine of about \$3,000, an immense sum for him. He hoped to have it paid off by the end of the year. In the meantime, he felt bereft, trapped in the house with nothing to do. He paid the landlady \$300 a month for a room, three meals, and laundry. I could not tell if they had a romantic relation or if she just wanted to marry him. He described her as a good woman, extremely devout, who dragged him to church every week. He did not want to incur her wrath by not going. One of his dilemmas was how far to take the relationship. He did not live with her before his trial, even though she wanted him to, because he wasn't

ready to accept her domination and intense religiosity. She suffocates him sometimes, he said, and seems like his mother. But he likes her very much.

MANES REMAINED obsessed with his arrest, imprisonment, and trial. Over and over again he wanted to justify his action. He claimed to have liked Monroe; he never saw him so completely wild. He could not believe Monroe went berserk over \$5 and attributed his actions to drugs. That awful night, Monroe threatened to kill him; Manes began to accept this fate until the thought that this was a ridiculous way to die snapped him out of resignation.

For Manes, taking action proved a matter of respect as well as survival, even though the arrest, incarceration, and trial were a nightmare. He said he always believed in God, but that his acquittal had intensified his faith. When the verdict was announced, he could have died at peace on the spot. Faith, he asserted, is a central element of his life, and he does not take drugs or drink alcohol. He claims that his only vice is smoking. To save money for his fine, he had cut back to ten cigarettes a day. People in the neighborhood told him he did what he had to do, but remained wary of him. Killing Monroe has given him a helpful reputation. He described the neighborhood as a "jungle," where people concerned only with pursuing money could earn tens of thousands of dollars a day. He wouldn't say exactly what people did to survive, and I did not push him. I asked him if he was safe in the neighborhood. He said yes: because of his reputation, nobody bothered him.

He was happy to talk with me. He had wanted a chance to talk about the events and his feelings for a long time. As useful as the interview was for me, for him it appeared cathartic. He proved more articulate, with a broader vocabulary, than I had anticipated. He asked about my interest, and I explained as best I could. My sense is that he understood perfectly and sympathized. He repeated over and over again that one can't understand what life in the neighborhood is like unless one has lived it. Yet an implicit tension ran through our conversation. Manes did not seem uneasy

or ill at ease, but he was wary, willing to give information about himself, but with limits. I wanted to press him for more details or to expand on what appeared to be contradictions or improbabilities. But I knew that to press too hard would violate his boundaries and end our discussion.

After lunch, we drove around the neighborhood in which Manes had grown up. By now, he had loosened up and, I think, begun to trust me. He enjoyed being the teacher, my shepherd through a Philadelphia I did not know. He pointed out where friends had lived, where local stores and bars had been, and the former location of small manufacturing firms. The area is a mixture of expensive gentrification and unrenovated row houses. Manes claimed that the gentrified houses are mostly occupied by unmarried teachers, principals, and social workers. He said the neighborhood was safe, owing to the presence of police who are responsive to the wealthy new homeowners. We encountered a street mechanic, an obviously strong man and friend, whom Manes described as having worked at the same location for thirty years. Manes, like Sudhir Venkatesh in *Off the Books*, described an informal economy, a world in which people scratched for a living, doing whatever it took to make some money and survive.

Our tour went through the Robert Allen Homes, formerly a high rise public housing project, now an attractive town house development, still public. Manes talked about how awful the projects were when he was growing up. Everyone had to join a gang to survive. Only then there were no guns; all the guys went to gyms to learn to box.

I liked Manes a lot. I enjoyed his sly, deadpan humor. He seemed to find it increasingly easy to talk with me. I was going to give him \$20—it was in an envelope with his name on it in my pocket—but didn't. By the end of our time together it felt inappropriate, as though it would turn what was almost a budding friendship into something else and perhaps violate his sense of self-respect. Manes did not want me to drive him within sighting distance of his street and the crowd on the corner. So I dropped him off some blocks away.

How much could I believe of what Manes

told me? He seemed immensely credible. But, then, he wanted to give me a good impression. Why, I thought, was he hungry and in need of \$5 for food when his lady friend lived a ten minute walk away? Why did he not ask her for the money to repay Monroe? With so many children and grandchildren, why had he remained in prison—was he denied bail? Why was he alone at his trial? Clearly, there is a lot more to his story. But it does not take away

from his charm or the urgency of his need for exculpation.

When we sat across a table from each other, I could not but think, here we are, two sixty-eight-year-old men, residents of the same city, with life histories that could not be more different (well, in one way they weren't different; we both married young and had our first child at age twenty). How, really, to explain why I live a comfortable, rewarding life as a university professor and he scrapes by on Supplemental Security Income in a dangerous block of North Philadelphia? It is not because I had two loving parents and he did not. It is not because he lacks intelligence, because he doesn't. If he is to be believed, it is not because he was unwilling to work hard. To say that he is black and I'm white is not enough, although it is important. I suspect that part of the answer does lie in the barriers facing black men, especially men of his generation and older. But part, too, lies in the history of the city, whose inequalities, indifference, segregation, and economic devastation are traced in the lives of Manes and his contemporaries. As we drove through his old neighborhood, Manes remarked that everyone from his large circle of boyhood friends was gone. "Do you mean that they left?" I asked. "No," he answered. "They're dead."

MICHAEL B. KATZ is Walter H. Annenberg Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania. The University of Pennsylvania Press has recently published an updated edition of his book *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State*, which includes a new chapter on the post-9/11 American welfare state.

