Eric Schneider, an eminent chronicler of what he only semifacetiously referred to as “the dark side of urban life,” died March 22, 2017, of a virulent form of cancer. Knowing his illness was terminal, Schneider remained determined nonetheless to finish the book he was working on examining the phenomenon of murder in Philadelphia. For some months he believed he had enough time to complete his draft, but well before he intended to retire from his position at the University of Pennsylvania in December, he took a sudden turn for the worse. At the time of his death, one chapter remained incomplete and further revisions were anticipated in response to comments he had received from a handful of colleagues. At the request of Eric’s wife, Janet Golden, I agreed to pick up where Eric left off, not attempting to complete the book as originally anticipated so much as to ensure that the six chapters he had produced were ready for publication and that their collective intent might be further contextualized.

At the heart of the surviving manuscript, Schneider effectively tracked the history of murder in the Quaker City during a critical period from World War II until the early 1980s. Representing both a response to prevailing theory and to contemporary events, in Philadelphia and in other postindustrial centers where tensions between black inner-city residents and police had flared in recent years, the manuscript assumed special power through Schneider’s ability to tap the voices of those charged with murder by mining the transcripts of their trials. Looking primarily at the periods leading up to and immediately following the 1966 Miranda Supreme Court decision and the shift at about the same time to easy access to guns and the spike of violence that followed, Schneider clearly wanted to provide the
historical context that is so often missing in contemporary views of urban violence. Although his chapters do not follow a strict chronology, they nonetheless offer a progression that allows readers to recognize the ways in which the classic urban ghetto became ever more dangerous for those who lived there as the combined effects of concentrated poverty and disinvestment accumulated to sustain and deepen what Schneider calls an ecology of violence.

Not incidentally, as he worked at the University of Pennsylvania, Schneider followed the path of the previous generation’s most eminent criminologist, Marvin Wolfgang, whose 1958 study of 550 victims of homicide in Philadelphia formed the foundation for much subsequent research on the prime question he posed about the phenomenon of intraracial homicide: “Why should a quantitatively unknown but presumed greater amount of frustration in the environment of the Negro . . . find aggressive outlet specifically in a high incidence of homicide?” Wolfgang’s theory about black-on-black homicide was that it emanated from a subculture of violence, one he shared with the most eminent successor to his study of crime in Philadelphia, Roger Lane.1 Schneider rejects that proposition in favor of the judgment he made in his earlier book on heroin: “A geography of inequality produced both heroin use and crime. Certain urban neighborhoods concentrated the effects of poverty and racial discrimination and hosted large numbers of the demographic group most prone to both heroin use and street crime: marginalized and isolated young men. These neighborhoods were the by-products of economic development, left over as productive activity moved elsewhere.”2 In this, his work aligned with that of modern sociologists, notably William Julius Wilson and Robert J. Sampson, who argue that such patterns draw most centrally from disparities in community structure as they have been compounded by economic and social inequality. If there are distinct cultural differences between black and white poor, they are largely performative in response to distinct social and institutional conditions, most prominently from police practices intended to maintain order.3

When I last met with Eric, about three weeks before his death, our conversation veered between his historical account and the contemporary crisis prompted by police shootings of so many black men. To my comment that we needed more civilian review—a feature notably absent in nearby
Camden, New Jersey, where the police force had been recently reorganized to mixed reviews—Eric had a ready answer: “It didn’t work in Philadelphia.” Clearly, he had come to believe through years of research on crime that institutional responses, no matter how well meaning, had their limits. The Philadelphia police review board he examines here clearly owed its existence to the ascent of the liberal reformer Richardson Dilworth in the 1950s, and like other historians before him, Schneider describes the limits of mid-twentieth-century liberalism. More hopeful, he thought, were the effects of locally based organizations of the kind he describes in Chapter 5, a phenomenon that sociologist Patrick Sharkey has since brought to national attention. Whatever the solution, Eric’s focus remained on experience itself. Eschewing the statistical emphasis of much of the work in the ecological—that is, place-based—study of crime, he manages to bring to life the collective experiences of those charged with murder. The result is a humanizing treatment of murder that may not overturn contemporary theory but will challenge both specialists and the public to recognize and deal with the distinct conditions on the ground that lie at the heart of these tragedies.

Eric knew Philadelphia personally. For some years he lived near the site where graduate student In-Ho Oh was murdered at the edge of the Penn campus in 1958. As a teacher and administrator, Eric followed with interest efforts his university made to secure its own borders while simultaneously trying to act as a good neighbor, a goal it began to achieve only after precipitating the destruction of a nearby vibrant black community through urban renewal, the subject of Chapter 3. Ironically, Oh’s cousin, Philadelphia city councilman David Oh, sustained a similar attack outside his Southwest Philadelphia home several months after Eric’s death. Fortunate to have survived multiple stab wounds, Councilman Oh acknowledged in subsequent news reports that he had long displayed a portrait of his late cousin in his home, remarking, “As long as I can remember, there was In-Ho Oh.” Shortly afterward, another attack—this one fatal—made the news when a white community leader was murdered in the gentrifying Francisville section of the city where, Eric writes, the Moroccos had once defended their territory in the gang wars that escalated in the 1960s. In these, as in so many other ways, the legacy of spatialized violence continued to haunt the city. As progress advanced along with poverty, and as the city’s police force
maintained a troubled relationship with Philadelphia’s more destitute neighborhoods, tensions, even violence, continued to flare.

Eric witnessed the many changes toward the end of his life that signaled Philadelphia’s recovery from a long period of decline brought about by the loss of human and monetary capital in the years after World War II when his story begins. He had to be aware especially of the stunning physical changes in the immediate vicinity of Penn as well as other parts of the city, as new investment brought an expanding skyline, an influx of talented young workers, and signs of gentrification, even in unlikely places. He might have acknowledged Philadelphia’s case for recruiting Amazon’s second national headquarters, and yet he was just as acutely aware of the disparities that left Philadelphia, even on the upswing, with the highest poverty rate among the nation’s largest cities. Even as crime inched up nationally, Eric’s supposition of the importance of place was confirmed in a September 2017 column in the New York Times by criminologist Thomas Abt contending that “to control violence, one must account for it directly by focusing on the small numbers of places, people and behaviors that disproportionately drive the problem.” Because that poverty remained concentrated in minority neighborhoods and because the police, despite reforms over the years, still experienced uneasy relations with residents there, Philadelphia’s crime problem in the twenty-first century remained problematic at best. Most particularly, the evidence Schneider uncovered affirms the judgment journalist Jill Leovy arrives at in her powerful indictment of the contemporary criminal justice system as “at once oppressive and inadequate.” Or, as she puts it, quoting the late scholar William J. Stuntz, “Poor black neighborhoods see too little of the kinds of policing and criminal punishment that do the most good, and too much of the kinds that do the most harm.” Eric offers no singular solution here, but as he did in so much of his other work, he forces us to confront the materiality of violence and its distinct manifestation in neighborhoods shaped by a long history of deprivation. Although his writing approach and outlook differed significantly from that of Wolfgang’s, it could well be said of Schneider what a colleague attributed to Wolfgang: “Perhaps because Marvin had studied society so thoroughly, including its worst element, he was able to understand human behavior. Instead of producing anger and
despair, this understanding of his fellow human beings engendered toler-
ance, compassion and hope.”

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In retrospect, applying the term *postindustrial* to modern Philadelphia hardly scratches the surface in describing the changes that transformed the city in the years after World War II. Against the background of the shared exuberance of victory and the robust economic growth that followed, the character of the city altered dramatically. Bound to no one portion of the industrial sector, the city’s diversified economy blunted for a while the centrifugal forces that were pulling big plants out of the cities they had once dominated. That changed in the 1960s, when Philadelphia lost some 90,000 jobs, fully 8 percent of its employment base. Seventy percent of jobs lost were in manufacturing. Coupled with the outward pull of the suburbs, where the attractions of a rich consumer economy beckoned, losses in employment were matched by an equally dramatic dip in population: the loss of some 50,000 residents. That pattern only accelerated in the following decade. Not incidentally, the homicide rate escalated. Having hovered at 5.7 per 100,000 persons into the early 1960s, it increased by 300 percent between 1965 and 1974.9

Such changes were masked for a time by the excitement over yet another alteration in known experience: the overturning of a Republican political machine that had dominated the city even through the New Deal and war years when other industrial centers had long since fallen under Democratic control. Seeking to modernize the city and keep it economically competitive, a coalition of lawyers, bankers, business representatives, and civic organizations strove to improve efficiency in government, root out corruption, and improve professionalism in city departments, a campaign that cumulated in adoption of a new city charter in 1951. The election of one of their members as mayor, Joseph Clark, the same year ushered in not just Democratic control of the city that has lasted ever since, but also a wave of additional reform measures in a city still bearing the reputation so
properly solidified by journalist Lincoln Steffens at the outset of the century as “corrupt and contented.” In addition to introducing civilian review of the police, the new regime embraced an ambitious program of physical rehabilitation aimed not just at renewing venerable city neighborhoods but also at reversing the forces that were encouraging the abandonment of city homes and businesses.

The years after the war should have offered the city’s black residents, their population swollen from 385,000 in 1950 to 600,000 in 1980, a boost. Long restricted to only a few residential enclaves, primarily in the area south of the central city the distinguished scholar W. E. B. DuBois had brought to light in his landmark 1899 study *The Philadelphia Negro*, African Americans now had additional residential choices as whites abandoned the city in ever greater numbers. Supported in their expectations that triumphing over the enemy would be a double victory, for securing rights at home as well as defeating the enemy abroad, they could count the advent of a human relations commission and the subsequent formation of a fair housing commission, among other nascent civil rights measures, as proof of their confidence.

Such victories proved limited, however. Despite the good intentions behind city measures aimed at fair treatment, in practice they lacked either sufficient will or enforcement power to make a difference. Although industrial employment had opened to some degree during the war under federal pressures to practice nondiscrimination, they had been blunted by Republican control of the city during the war and by company decisions to dismiss black workers once peace had been secured. While it was true that new housing opportunities were opening up, they were anything but random. While white workers of modest means held fast to their own neighborhoods, despite the first blows from disinvestment in once-thriving industrial areas such as Kensington, African Americans were likely to find solutions to the overcrowding they had experienced in the war years largely in transitional areas. A prime destination was the area on the north side of the central city where a once-thriving vice district known as the Tenderloin had been cleaned up by an earlier generation of reformers. Although North Philadelphia’s black population had grown to nearly 100,000 before the war, it attracted close to another 70,000 during the 1940s and exceeded 200,000 by 1960.
This, then, was a new kind of ghetto analyzed most graphically by sociologist William Julius Wilson in his 1987 book *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Unlike the community DuBois described encompassing the full range of professional and working-class African Americans, North Philadelphia became home primarily to the poorest among the city’s black residents. As both their numbers and their marginality to the mainstream economy deepened, the area’s reputation—and by proxy that of its residents—deteriorated. By the early 1960s, North Philadelphia had the city’s highest poverty and unemployment rates and fraught relations with the police. On August 28, 1964, those relations reached a low point as a scuffle with police at a busy intersection at the heart of a portion of North Philadelphia frequently referred to by public authorities and the press as “the Jungle” escalated into three days of civil disorder. By the time peace had been restored, hundreds had been arrested and injured, two killed, and widespread damage inflicted on commercial properties.

Leaving no doubt about the association between crime and an area marked by physical deprivation, a contemporary assessment of the rioting commissioned by the American Jewish Committee asserted, “Crimes of a violent and emotional nature are associated with its residents, and nearly one-half of all major offenses in the city in 1963 were committed within its precincts.” Pointing to an unemployment rate double that of the city’s, at 13 percent, high dropout rates, and as many as thirty-three gangs rumbling on North Philadelphia’s turf, author Lenora Berson cited police reports that 90 percent of those indicted for looting or violation of the mayor’s curfew during the riot had a previous arrest record. Such conditions, she argued, served as fodder for confrontation. “Unlike white, middle-class children,” she wrote, “Negro youngsters do not grow up thinking of the policeman on the corner as their friend. Most Negroes look upon the policeman as the brutal enforcer of the white man’s laws—laws that have been used for three centuries to keep the black man down.”

As happened in so many other cities, civil disturbances brought new attention, and President Lyndon Johnson’s Model Cities program was directed largely at North Philadelphia in the years immediately following the Columbia Avenue confrontation. But the program never took off and was quickly abandoned. Rather, an aggressive urban renewal program effected during the same period resulted in the loss of 40,000 housing units,
further setting North Philadelphia apart from the center city, where rehabilitation had been preferred to demolition. By the mid-1980s, North Philadelphia had twice the concentration of nonwhites it had in 1950.\textsuperscript{14}

For more than a generation, from the time when the Great Migration brought growing numbers of African Americans to the city, public authorities had largely tolerated minor violations of the law as long as they did not affect the white community. Bearing the burden of being closed out of so many sectors of the economy, either by overt prejudice or by customs that maintained white control over whole occupation sectors through the hiring of friends and relatives, African Americans in great numbers gravitated to an underground economy. Labeled “business under a cloud” in St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton’s landmark study of Chicago’s black belt, organized vice, whether gambling, prostitution, or some form of bartering, survived with public sanction to the extent that police officers looked the other way as long as they were paid off. No African American was too proper to escape such treatment, it appears. Michael Nutter, who served as Philadelphia mayor from 2008 until 2016, recalled that as a Catholic school–educated teenager, he was pulled out of a car while parked with a date in Fairmount Park and told his problem had gone away once he had passed along a five-dollar bill.\textsuperscript{15} That such systemic corruption survived the “reform years” associated with Clark and his chosen successor as mayor, Richardson Dilworth, was revealed in a detailed and devastating state report issued in 1974. Rejecting the defense that police violations constituted the marginal actions of “a few bad apples,” the introduction to the nearly nine-hundred-page report identified the single biggest roadblock to institutional reforms as “the repeated failure of the Department leadership and the City Administration to admit that corruption exists on a widespread, systematic basis.”\textsuperscript{16}

Police payouts may have exempted some African Americans from prosecution, but they did not ensure the kind of protection of property or person that was routinely afforded white neighborhoods. Indeed, earlier in the century, efforts African Americans made to draw attention to the need for uniform measures of public safety in their communities had the unintended effect of furthering the association of crime with a black presence. Even as black critics in Philadelphia directed attention to the racist practices that fostered social instability, including crime, crime statistics continued
to be cited as evidence of bad behavior in need of suppression. The contemporary realization that African Americans endure a double bind of unwanted police attention to a black presence—through such invasive tactics as search and frisk and racial profiling—without the kind of uniform commitment to public safety extended to white neighborhoods has informed Philadelphia for generations. It informs Schneider’s study and confirms the importance African Americans living in such geographically confined areas as North Philadelphia attached to the practice of arming themselves.

In the transitional period Schneider writes about, the pervasiveness of gun violence had yet to materialize, hence the widespread presence of knives as weapons. Urban renewal was still seen as part of a reform agenda, making over areas in decline so other uses could flourish. The impact on the expansion of the University of Pennsylvania, as one example, had not yet been recognized as destroying established patterns of black settlement and the devastating effects that followed from displacement in other parts of the city. Schneider had every intent of writing one additional chapter, on the ways African Americans moved into organized crime, a phenomenon closely tied to the business of drugs, which he wrote about in his other work. That study will have to come from someone else. What he leaves us is a powerful link, between that moment of promise following World War II and the very mixed assessment of the contemporary city. Philadelphia today is the poorest among the nation’s large cities. A prominent and successful black middle class notwithstanding, much of that poverty can be identified with areas of black residence, neighborhoods where issues of crime and the administration of justice remain uneven and contested. The murder rate—still unacceptably high and still predominantly associated with areas Schneider identifies as characterized by an ecology of violence—challenges every positive association we attribute to a place we like to call the City of Brotherly Love.