

TWO

The Art of Running

A young man concerned that the police will take him into custody comes to see danger and risk in the mundane doings of everyday life. To survive outside prison, he learns to hesitate when others walk casually forward, to see what others fail to notice, to fear what others trust or take for granted.

One of the first things that such a man develops is a heightened awareness of police officers—what they look like, how they move, where and when they are likely to appear. He learns the models of their undercover cars, the ways they hold their bodies and the cut of their hair, the timing and location of their typical routes. His awareness of the police never seems to leave him; he sees them sitting in plain clothes at the mall food court with their children; he spots them in his rearview mirror coming up behind him on the highway, from ten cars and three lanes away. Sometimes he finds that his body anticipates their arrival with sweat and a quickened heartbeat before his mind consciously registers any sign of their appearance.

When I first met Mike, I thought his awareness of the police was a special gift, unique to him. Then I realized Chuck also seemed to know when the police were coming. So did Alex. When they sensed the police were near, they did what other young men in the neighborhood did: they ran and hid.

Chuck put the strategy concisely to his twelve-year-old brother, Tim:

If you hear the law coming, you merk on [run away from] them niggas. You don't be having time to think okay, what do I got on me, what they going to

want from me. No, you hear them coming, that's it, you gone. Period. 'Cause whoever they looking for, even if it's not you, nine times out of ten they'll probably book you.

Tim was still learning how to run from the police, and his beginner missteps furnished a good deal of amusement for his older brothers and their friends.

Late one night, a white friend of mine from school dropped off Reggie and a friend of his at my apartment. Chuck and Mike phoned me to announce that Tim, who was eleven at the time, had spotted my friend's car and taken off down the street, yelling, "It's a undercover! It's a undercover!"

"Nigga, that's Alice's girlfriend." Mike laughed. "She was drinking with us last night."

If a successful escape means learning how to identify the police, it also requires learning how to run. Chuck, Mike, and their friends spent many evenings honing this skill by running after each other and chasing each other in cars. The stated reason would be that one had taken something from the other: a CD, a five-dollar bill from a pocket, a small bag of weed. Reggie and his friends also ran away from their girlfriends on foot or by car.

One night, I was standing outside Ronny's house with Reggie and Reggie's friend, an eighteen-year-old young man who lived across the street. In the middle of the conversation, Reggie's friend jumped in his car and took off. Reggie explained that he was on the run from his girlfriend, who we then saw getting into another car after him. Reggie explained that she wanted him to be in the house with her, but that he was refusing, wanting instead to go out to the bar. This pursuit lasted the entire evening, with the man's girlfriend enlisting her friends and relatives to provide information about his whereabouts, and the man doing the same. Around one in the morning, I heard that she'd caught him going into the beer store and dragged him back home.

It wasn't always clear to me whether these chases were games or more serious pursuits, and some appeared more serious than others. Regardless of the meaning that people ascribed to them at the time or afterward, these chases improved young men's skill and speed at get-

ting away. In running from each other, from their girlfriends, and in a few cases their mothers, Reggie and his friends learned how to navigate the alleyways, weave through traffic, and identify local residents willing to hide them for a little while.¹

During the first year and a half I spent on 6th Street, I watched young men running and hiding from the police on 111 occasions, an average of more than once every five days.²

Those who interact rarely with the police may assume that running away after a police stop is futile. Worse, it could lead to increased charges or to violence. While the second part is true, the first is not. In my first eighteen months on 6th Street, I observed a young man running after he had been stopped on 41 different occasions. Of these, 8 involved men fleeing their houses during raids; 23 involved men running after being stopped while on foot (including running after the police had approached a group of people of whom the man was a part); 6 involved car chases; and 2 involved a combination of car and foot chases, where the chase began by car and continued with the man getting out and running.

In 24 of these cases, the man got away. In 17 of the 24, the police didn't appear to know who the man was and couldn't bring any charges against him after he had fled. Even in cases where the police subsequently charged him with fleeing or other crimes, the successful get-away allowed the man to stay out of jail longer than he might have if he'd simply permitted the police to cuff him and take him in.³

A successful escape can be a solitary act, but oftentimes it is a collective accomplishment. A young man relies on his friends, relatives, and neighbors to alert him when they see the police coming, and to pass along information about where the police have been or where and when they might appear next. When the police make inquiries, these friends and neighbors feign ignorance or feed the police misinformation. They may also help to conceal incriminating objects and provide safe houses where a young man can hide. From fieldnotes taken in September 2006:

Around 11 a.m., I walked up the alleyway to the back of Chuck's house. Before I reached the porch, Chuck came running down the iron stairs, shout-

ing something to a neighbor. Reggie followed him, also shouting. Their mother, Miss Linda, came to the top of the second-floor balcony and told me the law was on the way, and to make sure that Reggie in particular did not come back until she gave the green light. I recalled that Reggie had a warrant out for failure to pay court fees, and would doubtless be taken in if the cops ran his name.

I watched Chuck and Reggie proceed up the alleyway, and then Chuck turned and yelled at me to come on. We ran for about three blocks, going through two backyards and over a small divider. Dogs barked as we went by. I was half a block behind and lost sight of Chuck and Reggie. Panting, I slowed to a walk, looking back to see if the police were coming. Then I heard "psst" and looked up to see Chuck leaning out the second-floor window of a two-story house. A woman in her fifties, who I immediately guessed to be a churchgoer, opened the door for me as I approached, saying only, "Upstairs."

Chuck and Reggie were in her dressing room. This quite conservative-looking woman had converted what is usually the spare upstairs bedroom into a giant walk-in closet, with shoes, purses, and clothing arranged by color on the kind of white metal shelves that you buy and install yourself.

Our getaway had produced a mild euphoria. Reggie brushed past Chuck to examine the shoe collection, and Chuck wiped his arm off dramatically, teasing his younger brother about how sweaty he was.

"Look at yourself, nigga! You don't run for shit now with that little bit of shell in your shoulder," Reggie responded, referring to the partial bullet that had lodged just below the back of Chuck's neck when he was shot the month before.

Chuck laughed. "I'm in the best shape of my life." He explained that his shoulder hurt only when he played basketball.

Reggie sat on a small leopard-print stool and said, "Name a fat motherfucker who runs faster than me. Not just in the 'hood but anywhere in Philly."

"Oh, here you go," Chuck complained.

Chuck joked about the extensive shoe collection, saying you'd never know Miss Toya was like that. Reggie pulled out a pair of suede high heels and attempted to get one onto his foot, asking me to do up the straps. He got on her computer and started browsing pit bull websites, then

YouTube videos of street fights. Chuck cringed and exclaimed loudly as Kimbo, a well-known street fighter, hit his opponent repeatedly in the eye, revealing bloody and battered tissue that Chuck called "spaghetti and meatballs."

I asked Chuck why he made me run, and consequently dirty my sneakers, when I'm not even wanted.

"It's good practice."

Reggie grinned and said, "You be taking your fucking time, A."

"You're no track star," I replied.

"What!? I was haul-assing."

Chuck got on the phone with his mother and then a neighbor to find out how many police were on his block and for whom they had come. Apparently they were looking for a man who had fled on foot after being stopped on an off-road motorbike. They didn't find this man, but did take two others from the house next door: one had a bench warrant for failure to appear, and the other had a small amount of crack in his pocket. Into the phone Chuck was saying, "Damn. They got Sean? Damn."

About an hour later, his mother called to tell Chuck that the police had gone. We waited another ten minutes, then left for Pappi's, the corner store. Chuck ordered Miss Toya a turkey hoagie and BBQ chips and brought them to her as thanks. We then walked back to the block with Dutch cigars and sodas.

Running wasn't always the smartest thing to do when the cops came, but the urge to run was so ingrained that sometimes it was hard to stand still.

When the police came for Reggie, they blocked off the alleyway on both ends simultaneously, using at least five cars that I could count from where I was standing, and then ran into Reggie's mother's house. Chuck, Anthony, and two other guys were outside, trapped. Chuck and these two young men were clean, but Anthony had the warrant for failure to appear. As the police dragged Reggie out of his house, laid him on the ground, and searched him, one guy whispered to Anthony to be calm and stay still. Anthony kept quiet as Reggie was cuffed and placed in the squad car, but then he started whispering that he thought Reggie was looking at him funny, and might say something to the police.

Anthony started sweating and twitching his hands; the two young men and I whispered again to him to chill. One said, "Be easy. He's not looking at you."

We stood there, and time dragged on. When the police started searching the ground for whatever Reggie may have tossed before getting into the squad car, Anthony couldn't seem to take it anymore. He started mumbling his concerns, and then he took off up the alley. One of the officers went after him, causing the other young man standing next to him to shake his head in frustrated disappointment.

Anthony's running caused the other officer to put the two young men still standing there up against the car, search them, and run their names; luckily, they came back clean. Then two more cop cars came up the alley, sirens on. About five minutes after they finished searching the young men, one of the guys got a text from a friend up the street. He silently handed me the phone so I could read it:

Anthony just got booked. They beat the shit out of him.

At the time of this incident, Chuck had recently begun allowing Anthony to sleep in the basement of his mother's house, on the floor next to his bed. So it was Chuck's house that Anthony phoned first from the police station. Miss Linda picked up and began yelling at him immediately.

"You fucking stupid, Anthony! Nobody bothering you, nobody looking at you. What the fuck did you run for? You a nut. You a fucking nut. You deserve to get locked up. Dumb-ass nigga. Call your sister, don't call my phone. And when you come home, you can find somewhere else to stay."

* * *

When the techniques young men deploy to avoid the police fail, and they find themselves cuffed against a wall or cornered in an alleyway, all is not lost: once caught, sometimes they practice concerted silence, create a distraction, advocate for their rights, or threaten to sue the police or go to the newspapers. I occasionally saw each of these measures dissuade the police from continuing to search a man or question a man on the street. When young men are taken in, they sometimes use the grate in the holding cell at the police station to scrape their fingertips down past the first few layers of skin, so that the police can't obtain

the prints necessary to identify them and attach them to their already pending legal matters. On four separate occasions I saw men from 6th Street released with bloody fingertips.

AVOIDING THE POLICE AND THE COURTS WHEN SETTling DISPUTES

It's not enough to run and hide when the police approach. A man intent on staying out of jail cannot call the police when harmed, or make use of the courts to settle disputes. He must forego the use of the police and the courts when he is threatened or in danger and find alternative ways to protect himself. When Mike returned from a year upstate, he was rusty in these sensibilities, having been living most recently as an inmate rather than as a fugitive. His friends wasted no time in reacquainting him with the precariousness of life on the outside.

Mike had been released on parole to a halfway house, which he had to return to every day before curfew. When his mother went on vacation, he invited a man he had befriended in prison to her house to play video games. The next day, Mike, Chuck, and I went back to the house and found Mike's mother's stereo, DVD player, and two TVs gone. Later, a neighbor told Mike that he had seen the man taking these things from the house in the early morning.

Once the neighbor identified the thief, Mike debated whether to call the police. He didn't want to let the robbery go, but he also didn't want to take matters into his own hands and risk violating his parole. Finally, he called the police and gave them a description of the man. When we returned to the block, Reggie and another friend admonished Mike about the risks he had taken:

REGGIE: And you on parole! You done got home like a day ago! Why the fuck you calling the law for? You lucky they ain't just grab [arrest] both of you.

FRIEND: Put it this way: they ain't come grab you like you ain't violate shit, they ain't find no other jawns [warrants] in the computer. Dude ain't pop no fly shit [accused Mike of some crime in an attempt to reduce his own charges], but simple fact is you filed a statement, you know what I'm saying, gave them niggas your government [real name]. Now they

got your mom's address in the file as your last known [address]. The next time they come looking for you, they not just going to your uncle's, they definitely going to be through there [his mother's house].

In this case, their counsel proved correct. Mike returned to the half-way house a few days later and discovered that the guards there were conducting alcohol tests. He left before they could test him, assuming he would test positive and spend another year upstate for the violation. He planned to live on the run for some time, but three days later the police found him at his mother's house and took him into custody. We had been playing video games, and he had gone across the street to change his clothes at the Laundromat. Two unmarked cars pulled up, and three officers got out and started chasing him. He ran for two blocks before they threw him down on the pavement. Later, he mentioned that their knowledge of his mother's new address must have come from the time he reported the robbery, and he bemoaned his thoughtlessness in calling them.

Young men also learn to see the courts as dangerous. A year after Chuck came home from the assault case, he enrolled in a job training program for young men who have not completed high school, hoping to earn his high school diploma and gain a certificate in construction. He proudly graduated at twenty-two and found a job apprenticing on a construction crew. Around this time he had been arguing with his baby-mom, and she stopped allowing him to see their two daughters, ages one and a half and six months. After considerable hesitation, Chuck took her to family court to file for partial custody. He said it tore at him to let a white man into his family affairs, but what could he do? He needed to see his kids. At the time, Chuck was also sending thirty-five dollars per month to the city toward payment on tickets he had received for driving without a license or registration; he hoped to get into good standing and become qualified to apply for a driver's license. The judge said that if Chuck did not meet his payments on time every month, he would issue a bench warrant for his arrest.⁴ Then Chuck could work off the traffic tickets he owed in county jail (fines and fees can be deducted for every day spent in custody).

Five months into his case for partial custody in family court, Chuck lost his construction job and stopped making the payments to the city

for the traffic tickets. He said he wasn't sure if he had actually been issued a warrant, and unsuccessfully attempted to discover this. He went to court for the child custody case anyway the next month, and when his baby-mom mentioned that he was a drug dealer and unfit to get partial custody of their children, the judge immediately ran his name in the database to see if any warrants came up. They did not. As we walked out of the courthouse, Chuck said to me and to his mother:

I wanted to run [when the clerk ran his name], but it was no way I was getting out of there—it was too many cops and guards. But my shit came back clean, so I guess if they're going to give me a warrant for the tickets, they ain't get around to it yet.

The judge ruled in Chuck's favor and granted him visitation on Sundays at a court-supervised day-care site. These visits, Chuck said, made him anxious: "Every time I walk in the door I wonder, like, is it today? Are they going to come grab me, like, right out of the day care? I can just see [my daughter's] face, like, 'Daddy, where you going?'"

After a month, the conditions of his custody allowed Chuck to go to his baby-mom's house on the weekends to pick up his daughters. He appeared thrilled with these visits, because he could see his children without having to interact with the courts and risk any warrant that might come up.

* * *

If, in the past, residents of poor Black communities could not turn to the police to protect themselves or settle disputes because the police were so often absent and uninterested, now it seems that residents face an additional barrier: they cannot turn to the police because their legal entanglements prevent them from doing so. The police are everywhere, but as guarantors of public safety, they are still out of reach.

The hesitancy of legally precarious men to turn to the authorities has some important implications. First, steering clear of the police and the courts means that young men tend not to use the ordinary resources of the law to protect themselves from crimes committed against them.⁵ While those on probation or parole may make tentative use of these resources (and sometimes regret it later, when the police arrest them us-

ing new information they provided), men with warrants typically stay away. During my first year and a half on 6th Street, I noted twenty-four instances of men contacting the police when they were injured, robbed, or threatened. These men were either in good standing with the courts or had no pending legal constraints. I did not observe any person with a warrant call the police or voluntarily make use of the courts during the six years of the study. Indeed, these young men seemed to view the authorities only as a threat to their safety.

Ned, age forty-three, and his longtime girlfriend Jean, age forty-six, lived on Mike's block. Jean smoked crack pretty heavily, although Chuck noted that she could handle her drugs, meaning she was able to maintain both a household and her addiction. Ned was unemployed and for extra money occasionally hosted dollar parties—house parties with a dollar entrance fee offering drinks, food, and games for a dollar each. He also engaged in petty fraud, such as intercepting checks in the mail and stealing credit cards. The couple's primary income came from taking in foster children. When Ned and Jean discovered they might be kicked out of their house because they owed property taxes to the city, Jean called Reggie's cousin, telling him to come to the house because she had some gossip concerning his longtime love interest. When he arrived, a man in a hoodie robbed him at gunpoint. Reggie later remarked that his cousin should have known better than to go to Ned and Jean's house: as the only man on the block with a warrant out for his arrest at the time, he was an easy target for a couple under financial strain.

If young men known to have a warrant become the target of those looking for someone to exploit or even to rob, they may resort to violence themselves, for protection or for revenge.

One winter morning, Chuck, Mike, and I were at a diner having breakfast to celebrate that the authorities hadn't taken Mike into custody after his court appearance earlier that day. Chuck's mother called to tell him that his car had been firebombed outside her house, and that firefighters were putting out the blaze. According to Chuck, the man who set fire to his car had given him drugs to sell on credit, under the arrangement that Chuck would pay him once he sold the drugs. Chuck hadn't been able to pay, however, because the police had taken the money from his pockets when they searched him earlier that week.

This was the first car that Chuck had ever purchased legally, a 1994 Bonneville he had bought the week before for four hundred dollars from a used-car lot in Northeast Philadelphia. He didn't speak for the rest of the meal. Then, as we walked to Mike's car, he said:

This shit is nutty, man. What the fuck I'm supposed to do, go to the cops? "Um, excuse me, officer, I think boy done blown up my whip [car]." He going to run my name and shit, now he see I got a warrant on me; next thing you know, my Black ass locked the fuck up, you feel me? I'm locked up because a nigga firebombed my whip. What the fuck, I'm supposed to let niggas take advantage?

Chuck and Mike discussed whether Chuck should take matters into his own hands or do nothing. Doing nothing had the benefit of not placing him in more legal trouble, but as they both noted, doing nothing set them up to be taken advantage of by people who understood them to be "sweet."

A few days later, Chuck drove over to 8th Street with Mike and another friend and shot off a few rounds at the home of the man who he believed was responsible for blowing up his car. Although no one was injured, a neighbor reported the incident, and the police put out a body warrant for Chuck's arrest for attempted murder.

Hesitant to go to the police or to make use of the courts, young men around 6th Street are vulnerable to theft or violence by those who know they won't press charges. With the police out of reach, they sometimes resort to more violence as a strategy to settle disputes or defend themselves.⁶

THE NET OF ENTRAPMENT

It isn't difficult to imagine that a young man worried that the police will take him into custody learns to avoid both the cops and the courts. But young men around 6th Street learn to fear far more than just the legal authorities. The reach of the police extends outward like a net around them—to public places in the city, to the activities they usually

involve themselves in, and to the neighborhood spots where they can usually be found.

Three hospitals serve the mixed-income Black section of the city within which 6th Street is located. Police officers crowd into their waiting rooms and hallways, especially in the evenings and on the weekends. Squad cars and paddy wagons park outside the hospital, officers in uniform or in plain clothes stand near the ambulances, and more officers walk around or wait in the ER. Some police come to the hospitals to investigate shootings and to question the witnesses who arrive there; others come because the men they have beaten while arresting them require medical care before they can be taken to the precinct or the county jail. Sitting in the ER waiting room, I often watched police officers walk Black young men out the glass double doors in handcuffs.

According to the officers I interviewed, it is standard practice in the hospitals serving the Black community for police to run the names of visitors or patients while they are waiting around, and to take into custody those with warrants, or those whose injuries or presence there constitutes grounds for a new arrest or a violation of probation or parole.

Alex experienced this firsthand when he was twenty-two years old and his girlfriend, Donna, was pregnant with their first child. He accompanied her to the hospital for the birth and stayed with her during fourteen long hours of labor. I got there a few hours after the baby was born, in time to see two police officers come into Donna's room to place Alex in handcuffs. As he stood with his hands behind him, Donna screamed and cried, and as they walked him away, she got out of the bed and grabbed hold of him, moaning, "Please don't take him away. Please, I'll take him down there myself tomorrow, I swear—just let him stay with me tonight." The officers told me they had come to the hospital with a shooting victim who was in custody, and as was their custom, they ran the names of the men on the visitors' list. Alex came up as having a warrant out for a parole violation, so they arrested him along with two other men on the delivery room floor.

I asked Alex's partner about the warrant, and she reminded me that the offense dated from Christmas, when the police had stopped Alex as he pulled up to a gas station. Since his driver's license had been revoked, driving constituted a violation of his parole.

After the police took Alex into custody at the maternity ward, it became increasingly clear to his friends on 6th Street that the hospital was a place to be avoided at all costs. Soon after Chuck turned twenty-one, his twenty-two-year-old girlfriend was due with their second child. Chuck told her that he would be at the hospital, even though he had a detainer out for a probation violation for breaking curfew. He stayed with her up until the point that she was getting in her aunt's car to go to the hospital. Then at the final moment, he said she should go ahead without him, and that he would come soon.

Later, Chuck sat with me on the steps and discussed the situation. "I told her I was on my way," he said. "She mad as shit I ain't there. I can hear her right now. She going to be like, 'You broke your promise.' I'm not trying to go out like Alex [get arrested], though. You feel me?"

As we spoke, his girlfriend called his cell phone repeatedly, and he would mute the sound after one ring and stare at her picture as it came up on the screen.

Just as a man worried the police will pick him up avoids the hospital when his child is born and refuses to seek formal medical care when he is badly beaten, so he won't visit his friends and relatives in prison or jail. Some prisons make it a general practice to run the names of visitors; others employ random canine searches of visitors' cars, and run the plates and names from the parking lot.

Funerals also become risky for men worried that the police may take them. Each of the nine funerals I attended for young men who had been killed in the area featured police officers stationed outside with a tripod camera to film the mourners as they filed in. More officers stood across the street and parked on the adjacent blocks. When I asked an officer of the Warrant Unit about funerals, he replied that they were a great place to round up people for arrest. "But we try to stay a block or two away, so we don't get our picture in the paper."

Like hospitals and funerals, places of employment become dangerous for people with a warrant. Soon after Mike got released on parole to a halfway house, he found a job through an old friend who managed a Taco Bell. After two weeks, Mike, twenty-four at the time, refused to return to the house in time for curfew, saying he couldn't spend another night cooped up with a bunch of men like he was still in jail. He slept at his girlfriend's house, and in the morning found that he had been

issued a violation and would likely be sent back to prison, pending the judge's decision. Mike said he wasn't going back, and they were going to have to catch him. Two parole officers arrested him the next day as he was leaving the Taco Bell, where he had gone to pick up his paycheck. He spent a year back upstate for this violation.

When Mike got booked at the Taco Bell, Chuck chewed him out thoroughly. Didn't he remember the time Chuck got taken?

Chuck started working at the local McDonald's when he was nineteen. Later that year he caught a probation violation for driving a car, his driving privileges having been revoked as part of his probation sentence. Though he had a warrant, Chuck kept working, saying that if the police came he would simply run out the back door.

A couple of weeks later, a former employee got into a fight with three other workers, and the police shut the McDonald's down while they questioned witnesses and looked for the women involved. When the fight began, Chuck had been in the storeroom, talking on the phone to his girlfriend. He came out, he said, and saw six police officers staring at him. At this point he phoned me to come pick up his house keys, fairly certain he would be taken into custody. When I got there, it was too late—Chuck was leaving in the back of a squad car.

A man worried that the police are hunting him—or at least may take him into custody should they come upon him—also comes to see friends, neighbors, and even family members as dangerous. First, he must avoid people who are "hot." After Reggie robbed a convenience store and the security camera footage appeared on the nightly news, the cops came looking for him with much more determination than when he only had a warrant out for a probation violation. He became so hot that other men on the block didn't want to be seen with him, worried that he'd bring heat on them. Mike gave me this advice:

I'll only tell you this one time, A. Do not be around Reggie. He's hot right now, he's on the run. Don't get caught up in it. They're going to come for that nigga, and I don't want you nowhere around there. Don't let him get in your car, don't even talk on the phone. If he calls you, bang on [hang up on] that nigga. They probably tracing the calls, and you could fuck around and catch a ya'mean [be arrested on conspiracy charges, for harboring a fugitive, etc.] or something. Don't come through the block, don't even wave

at the dude. I already told that nigga don't call your phone no more, but just in case.

Young men's distrust extends beyond those who are particular targets of the police. Cops may exert significant pressure on a man's relatives or partner to provide information about him. Out of frustration and anger at his failures as a father, spouse, brother, or son, his partner or family members may freely call the police on him, taking advantage of his wanted status to get back at him or punish him.

Whether a man's friends, relatives, or girlfriend bring him to the attention of the authorities because the police pressure them to do so or because they leverage his wanted status to control or punish him, he comes to regard those closest to him as potential informants. Like going to the hospital or calling the police, spending time with friends, family, or romantic partners places men at risk.

CULTIVATING AN UNPREDICTABLE ROUTINE

Mike, Chuck, and their friends came to see danger and risk in the routine doings of everyday life. They learned to fear the police, and to regard the courts, the hospitals, their workplaces, their residences, and even their own family members as potential paths to confinement. To limit the risks that mundane places, relations, and people posed, they learned to practice concerted avoidance: to run and hide from the police, steer clear of hospitals, skip work, and hang back from their families and close friends.

Another strategy that young men on 6th Street adopt is to cultivate a secretive and unpredictable routine. I first noticed this strategy when Ronny was shot in the leg when he was fifteen. Six police officers were occupying the ER lobby when he arrived; two of them quickly handcuffed the young man who had brought him in.

Ronny's grandmother, aunt, cousin, and sister sat in the lobby and waited for news. Some of the young men from 6th Street who had warrants at the time didn't show up at all, explaining to others that they couldn't take the chance, even though they "loved that lil' nigga" and wanted to be there. The men who did come, including Mike, stayed

outside the hospital, hovering at the edge of the parking lot. They discussed which local police officers were inside, and what their chances were of going in to see Ronny without being spotted. One of Ronny's friends waited for a few minutes some yards away from the emergency room doors, heard the status report, and left. He returned periodically throughout the night, motioning through the doors for someone in the waiting room to come out and give him an update. Mike asked me to stay and keep in touch with him via cell phone:

MIKE: Yo, just stay here till you hear something. I'm about to leave out.

ALICE: Okay.

MIKE: I'm not trying to get locked up off of Ronny and then they run my record and I got, like, three warrants out for me, you feel me?

When Ronny's cousin was shot and killed later that year, the men from 6th Street attended his funeral in the same fashion that they had gone to the hospital—quickly and quietly, ducking in and out:

REGGIE: We couldn't really stay, you know, at the funeral or whatever, you know they're on my ass [the cops are looking for him]. But we ducked in and out and saw the body and everything. We ain't go to the gravesite though, but we saw his [the dead man's] grandmom, and she saved us a plate [of food] from after [the get-together at her house]. Lucky it was so many people at the church, because the cops was definitely out, boy.⁷

Cultivating unpredictability not only helps with evading the police; it also helps to reduce the risk of friends and family informing. Simply put, a man's neighbor, girlfriend, or mother cannot call the police on him if she doesn't know where he is.

Chuck, twenty at the time, explained the dipping and dodging sensibility to his thirteen-year-old cousin:

The night is really, like, the best time to do whatever you got to do. If I want to go see my moms [mother], see my girl, come through the block and holla at my boys, I can't be out in broad day. I got to move like a shadow, you know, duck in and out, you thought you saw me, then *bam*, I'm out before you even could see what I was wearing or where I was going.

Young men are so wary that their relatives, girlfriend, or neighbors may set them up that they may take any request from those close to them to show up or stop by as a potential threat. Mike noted:

Nine times out of ten, you getting locked up because somebody called the cops, somebody snitching. That's why, like, if you get a call from your girl, like, "Yo, where you at, can you come through the block at a certain time," that's a red flag, you feel me? That's when you start to think, like, "Okay, what do she got waiting for me?"

When Chuck's nineteen-year-old neighbor had a bench warrant out for failure to appear in court, he was determined, he said, never to go back to jail. He slept in a number of houses, staying no more than a few nights in any one place. On the phone, he would lie to his family members, girlfriend, and fellow block members about where he was staying and where he planned to go next. If he got a ride to where he was staying, he requested to be dropped off a few blocks away, and then waited until the car was out of sight before walking inside. For six months, nobody on the block seemed to know where he was sleeping.

Young men looking over their shoulder for the police find that a public and stable daily routine becomes a path to confinement. A stable routine makes it easier for the police to locate a man directly, and makes it easier for his friends and family to call the police on him. Keeping a secret and unpredictable schedule—sleeping in different beds, working irregular hours, deceiving others about one's whereabouts, and refusing to commit to advance plans—serves as a generalized technique of evasion, helping young men avoid getting taken into custody through many of the paths discussed here.

PAYING TO PASS UNDETECTED

When Mike and Chuck and their friends had a little money, they spent some of it securing an array of underground goods and services that would help protect them from the authorities or postpone their admission to jail and prison.

One major item they sought was a clean ID.

Many readers may not be aware of how often they are asked to present some form of ID, or to hand over a credit card or proof of address, throughout the course of a day. Those who have these things, and who are free from the threat of the police, tend not to think about it when these documents are required of them. For young men around 6th Street concerned that the police are tracking them or will take them into custody on the spot, legitimate identification is the source of considerable concern.

On the one hand, Mike and Chuck and their friends feared discovery and didn't want their identity known. They hesitated to carry ID, to tell people their real name, or to write that name down. Around 6th Street, it is considered improper for even close friends to ask each other their last names, and young men routinely give fake names to people they meet, just to be on the safe side. Close male friends sometimes go years without knowing each other's last names. Yet at the same time that young men wish to conceal their identity, and fear using it, they need proof of it for all kinds of life's necessities, but can't get it. The formal documents needed to apply for a job, enter a building with a guard in the lobby, buy a cell phone, or put a car in the shop elude them through a complex combination of their poverty, residential instability, and legal entanglements and fears.

For the eleven years that I have known Reggie, he has been sitting in jail or prison, dealing with a pending court case, a warrant, or a probation or parole sentence, or working through some combination of the three. During a rare month that he was newly paroled from prison and had no pending court cases or warrants, he asked me to help him obtain a state-issued ID. Not a driver's license, which seemed an almost unattainable goal, but a non-driver's state-issued identification card. In addition to allowing him to apply for jobs, visit family and friends in jail, and check into hotel rooms, this ID would mean that when Reggie got stopped by the police, they could run his name immediately and verify that he had no pending warrants.

We first needed to apply for his birth certificate, which his mother had only a vague memory of possessing before she left the homeless shelter in which the family had spent the first few years of Reggie's life. Obtaining this document required many trips to the government

offices downtown and other proofs of identity: a social security card and two pieces of mail (not letters but something more formal, such as a bill). After three weeks of collecting these items and two long days spent in fruitless trips to the Division of Vital Records downtown, Reggie shook his head, noting that ID is basically for rich people. "Because you have to have ID to get ID," he said. "Just like money."

Having gotten nowhere, we found a man in the 6th Street neighborhood who specialized in applications for birth certificates and other ID. People showed him their proofs of identity and he sent away for their birth certificates from the downtown office, taking forty dollars for this service. Ultimately, this man wasn't satisfied with any of the documents Reggie could come up with to apply for the birth certificate, and finally suggested we use a close relative's death certificate to prove his identity and residence. His mother at first refused to allow Reggie to take the death certificate out of the house, so we were stalled once again.

After six weeks of hard effort and considerable expense, Reggie had a birth certificate, two pieces of mail that would count for his proof of address, and a social security card. With these precious documents in hand, we drove to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

As we approached the parking lot adjacent to the building, Reggie began to move around in his seat, fidgeting and adjusting his clothing. Once I'd parked the car, he made no move to get out. I turned to him and asked if he wanted me to go in first and get a ticket for the line. He sat silently for a while and then began to explain his concerns. Showing up and applying for this ID would lead employees to run his name and bring up some outstanding ticket or warrant. He eyed the security guards warily, saying that undercovers probably hung out at the Department of Transportation as well. "It's like, I'm home now, you feel me? I don't want to be back in there tomorrow . . ."

We sat in the DMV parking lot for over ten minutes while Reggie attempted to get up the courage to walk through the door. In the end, he couldn't go through with it, so we drove back to the block.

Like Reggie, a great many people living in the 6th Street neighborhood don't have government-issued ID, fear using their ID if they do have one, or have ID but can't do much with it because of their unpaid tickets, outstanding warrants, or the restrictions of their probation or

parole. Local entrepreneurs recognize this core problem of poor and legally compromised people, and attempt to solve it in two ways: first by selling fake IDs and documents, and second by supplying the goods and services that typically require ID as part of the sales transaction, with no questions asked.

In the early 2000s, Mike and his friends bought fake licenses, social security cards, car insurance and vehicle registrations, and birth certificates. Merchants around 6th Street offered these goods under the table, if customers made the request appropriately. Salesmen on foot also offered these items as they made their rounds at bars, barbershops, and corner stores.

Mike used fake registration and car insurance documents when he got stopped in the early 2000s. The police didn't run his real name and so didn't discover that he had no license or registration for the car. Nor did they find out that he was on probation and prohibited from driving a car in the first place. Chuck was once able to get through an entire court case using a fake name and identification he had purchased from a man operating a stand outside a sneaker store. This fake identity allowed him to be tried for the case at hand without his previous cases coming into play.

Improved law enforcement technology has made it more and more difficult to use a fake identity to get through police stops. Indeed, giving a false name to the police has become all but impossible: beginning in the mid-2000s, squad cars were equipped with computers for running IDs. Philadelphia police around 6th Street now refuse to accept a driver's license or non-driver's state ID, asking instead for the man's photo number. This number is issued at a person's first arrest, and as one officer told me, "Any guy who says he doesn't have one is lying." Through the photo ID number, the officer can pull up an extensive description of the man, along with pictures of his face and body, from the computer in the police car. Some police cars in Philadelphia are now also equipped with finger print machines, so that a man's prints can be run quickly and on the spot without the trouble of taking him down to the police station.

As another strategy for passing under the radar, young men around 6th Street pay those with legitimate identities to put things in their name, such as apartment leases, utility bills, even accident claims. This

makes it significantly harder for the police to track them. Before Mike was sentenced to a year and half in prison, he was doing very well financially. He had two used cars in two different women's names, lived in an apartment in a friend's name, had a gun registered to a friend of his uncle, had a cell phone in his children's mother's name, owned a dirt bike in the name of the previous owner, and rented furniture in his mother's name. In exchange for borrowing their identities, he gave these relatives and neighbors cash, food, drugs, and DVDs. Some also had occasional use of the items.

Five times over the six years I spent in the neighborhood, I observed people stopped by the police successfully use the name of another person they knew to be "clean." Once Mike gave a friend's name to get through a traffic stop and then went to court to pay the tickets for the moving violation, still using the man's identity. As compensation, Mike lent this man his leather Eagles jacket for a season.

A number of neighborhood businesses allow people to make purchases with no questions asked. Wanted people seek places to shop that don't require any documentation, because getting an ID in the first place could lead to an arrest; buying things using an ID would make it easier for the police to track them; and their dealings with the criminal justice system have rendered unusable the identification they have (for example, their licenses are suspended). These places where items ordinarily requiring identification may be bought without showing ID, signing one's name, or showing proof of insurance are known as ducky spots.

A man concerned that he may be taken into custody also fears using the hospitals, and so purchases a variety of medical goods and services from people in the neighborhood who work in health care and who supply drugs, medical supplies, and their general expertise to legally precarious community members. Chuck paid a neighbor working as a custodian at the local hospital around forty dollars for antibiotics when his foot got infected after he ran through some debris during a police chase. After two weeks of severe tooth pain, Chuck's neighbor, a twenty-year-old man, pulled his own molar with a pair of pliers and paid his cousin, who worked at a doctor's office, eighty dollars for a course of antibiotics. Reggie broke his arm when he tripped over the curb while running from a man trying to stab him. His neighbor brought over ma-

terial for a cast from his job at the VA hospital, heated it in a pan of water on the stove, and made a hard splint that Reggie wore for five weeks. Reggie gave him a large bag of marijuana as compensation.

Mike and Chuck and their friends around 6th Street also paid friends and neighbors for their silence and cooperation, and for news about the police. In a community filled with suspects and fugitives, every resident is a potential conduit of information, either for the police or for the men they're after. Mike and his friends tried to ensure that neighbors who could alert the authorities to their whereabouts or activities were instead helping them hide.

In the same way that payments for sex can be placed on a continuum from prostitution to marriage, the money that legally entangled people pay others in the neighborhood to help protect them from the authorities ranges from explicit, short-term, quid pro quo exchanges, in which a set fee is paid for a single piece of information or a single refusal to talk to the police or testify as a witness, to longer-term relationships, in which the arrangement is largely tacit, and the legally precarious party provides extended financial support in exchange for silence, watchfulness, and general help in evading the authorities.⁸

The most extended relationship of this kind that I observed on 6th Street involved two brothers who sold marijuana in the area. The pair had grown up in the neighborhood but had long since moved away. They didn't mention their business or anybody else's illicit doings over the phone, they came and went quickly, and to my knowledge, no person on 6th Street had ever been to their house—or even knew where it was.

When the two brothers came around in their dark SUV to drop off drugs or pick up payments, they gave back to the community. They helped pay for the funerals of three young men who were shot and killed during my time there. They also contributed grocery money to the mothers of the deceased, rent money to their girlfriends, and haircut money for their sons. They gave cash to people who had recently come home from prison: a kind of get-started money. They put money on the books of neighborhood men who were fighting cases in county jail.⁹

As these two brothers coached and mentored younger guys on the block, they often discussed the importance of giving as a core obliga-

tion to those less fortunate. But they also occasionally mentioned that their generosity encouraged others to protect them from the authorities. In particular, they made sure that those neighborhood residents with frequent dealings with the police didn't feel angry or resentful toward them. The older brother explained it like this to a younger boy on the block:

What makes a nigga call the cops? Hate [jealousy]. It's only a matter of time before they see your picture or your name comes up [during a police questioning]. You want them to pass right by [the picture], you want them to choose the other guy, the guy who never did nothing for them.

Mike and Chuck regarded this practice with admiration, acknowledging that it's smart to send money to a man in jail who, if he gives you up, will see his commissary account quickly dry up. But like a marriage, this relationship requires consistent income, and most men in the neighborhood have only sporadic work in either the formal or the informal economy, with quite uneven and low returns.

Mike and Chuck certainly couldn't afford to maintain long-term relationships in which a steady flow of cash or other resources guaranteed the ongoing cooperation of neighborhood residents. But they did occasionally scrape together enough money for one-time payments, mostly to witnesses during trials.

According to Mike, about two years before we met, he had been walking home from a dice game with a large wad of cash when a man put a gun to his head and ordered him to give up his money.¹⁰ Mike told me that he refused, and attempted to draw his own gun when the man shot him. Other accounts have it that Mike attempted to run away and shot himself by accident, whereupon this man took his money and then stripped him of his sneakers and watch. Whatever the details of this encounter, Mike emerged from it with a bullet lodged in his hip. His mother looked after him for five months while he was unable to walk, and then drove him to the outpatient clinic twice a week for months of physical therapy.

By the time we met, Mike could walk normally, though he said his leg hurt when he ran or stood for long periods, or when the weather changed. He believed this man had left the neighborhood, but about a

month later he thought he spotted him driving around in a Buick. Mike told me that the man looked at him, he looked at the man, the man tensed, and Mike opened fire. Mike said, "I ain't know if he was going to start chopping [shooting], you know, thinking I was going to come at him. Better safe than sorry."

Two days later Mike saw him again, this time while driving with Chuck and another friend. Although I wasn't present, Chuck told me immediately afterward that the men in both cars opened fire, shooting at each other as they drove by in opposite directions. I couldn't confirm the shots that Mike, Chuck, and another friend fired, but the glass in the side and back windows of Mike's car was shattered, and I counted seven bullet holes in the side doors. Mike quickly towed the car to a friend's garage, worried that the police would see it if they hadn't been alerted to the shootout. This was around noon.

That afternoon, Chuck and this friend came to my apartment, took some wet (PCP), and lay on the couch and floor with covers over their heads.¹¹ They didn't eat, drink, or get up for almost twenty-four hours, occasionally murmuring curses at Mike about how close they had come to death.

Two nights later, the police came to Mike's old address, his uncle's house, to arrest him for attempted murder. Mike's uncle phoned his mother to let her know they were coming for him, so Mike left her place and hid out in various houses for the next two weeks, including my apartment for four days. The police raided his mother's house twice, then his grandmother's house, and then his children's mother's house. After two weeks he scraped together what money he could, found a lawyer, and turned himself in. He didn't know who had called the police, but the lawyer showed us the testimony of the man who had robbed him, explaining that this man would be the main witness at the trial.

When Mike made bail, the man got in touch with him through a mutual acquaintance. He explained that he wanted only three hundred dollars, which was what it would cost him to repair the shattered windows in his car. Mike considered this a very low sum to get out of an attempted murder charge and happily paid him. He also paid for a hotel room for this man to stay in on the appointed court dates, in case the police came to his house to escort him to court.¹² This man then failed to show up as a witness for three court dates, and the judge dismissed

the case. To my utter astonishment, Mike and this man now appeared to be "cool." The night after the case ended, we had drinks with the man and played pool together at a local bar.

People in legal jeopardy can pay others *not* to show up as a witness at a trial; they can also pay people in the neighborhood to alert them if the police are coming, or can pay those who know of their whereabouts, activities, or identity not to give this information to the police. With such a large number of wanted people in the neighborhood (as well as people committing illegal acts who are liable to be arrested should those acts be brought to the attention of the authorities), 6th Street engages in a brisk trade in this kind of information and cooperation.

It should be noted that the payments legally precarious people make to the purveyors of false documents, or to those who might inform or testify, are in addition to the money they pay to lawyers and to the state directly in court fees and fines, bail, probation and parole costs, and tickets. These payouts for their continued freedom represent no small portion of their income.

INFORMING

If a young man exhausts the avenues discussed above, he may attempt to avoid confinement by giving the police someone they want more than they want him. In contrast to fleeing, avoidance, cultivating unpredictability, or paying to pass undetected, this strategy carries heavy social judgment. Indeed, informing is understood to be such a lowly way to get out of one's legal problems that men tend not to admit when they have done it. Since young men and women typically inform inside police cars or interrogation rooms, behind closed doors, it was difficult for me to study.

Chuck and Mike were close friends with a young man named Steve, who was about a year older than Chuck and a year younger than Mike. He lived across the street from Chuck with his mother and grandmother, his father having moved down south when he was a small child. Steve's mother worked in administration at Drexel University, so the family was better off than many of the others on the block. With his small build, light skin, and light eyes, Steve looked sneaky, Chuck's

mom said, someone to keep your eye on. He was also notoriously hot-headed, pulling out his gun at inappropriate moments, like birthday parties for Mike's children.

Chuck and Mike hadn't thought that anyone could make Steve give up the bachelor life, but after high school he fell in love with Taja, a young woman who had grown up a few blocks away. Their stormy romance lasted longer than anyone expected—longer than *they* expected, they sometimes laughed. For almost the entire time I knew Steve and Taja, they were trying hard to have a baby, but Taja would miscarry every time Steve got locked up: three times in their six-year relationship.

Steve was a drug user more than a drug seller; when we met he was nineteen, and under house arrest awaiting the completion of a trial for possession of drugs.

In the spring the police stopped Steve while he was carrying a gun, and charged him with possession without a license to carry. He made bail, but then got picked up soon after for drinking while driving, revoking his bail. Steve sat in county jail as the court dates dragged on.

To our great surprise, Steve came home on house arrest three months later, still in the middle of his trial dates. He explained that the court released him for the remainder of the proceedings because the jails were overflowing, and the judge determined that he didn't pose a flight risk.

In confidence, Mike admitted to me that he did not believe Steve, since he'd never heard of a person coming home on house arrest during a trial for a gun case. He suspected that Steve had likely cut a deal to be at home during the lengthy court proceedings, most likely by giving up somebody the police seemed more interested in.

A week later, a local man on trial for murder phoned Reggie and told him that his lawyer had shown him Steve's statement. Apparently, Steve had signed an affidavit that he had been present at the time of the murder. A younger friend of Reggie's was at his house when he got the phone call, and soon began spreading the news that Steve was a snitch.

Faced with the public and personal disgrace of his betrayal, Steve spent three days threatening violence against Reggie's young boy, and then he told him to come to his house so they could discuss it. As the young man entered, Steve began yelling, "Who the fuck told you I was a rat, nigga? Who?"

"You just going to sit here and act like you ain't say shit," the young man said coolly. "They got your statement on file."

Steve said he would kill him, and the young man made a move toward Steve. Mike attempted to pull the two apart, but Steve pulled his gun and pistol-whipped the young man in the face and then in the back of his head.

"You been home less than a week!" Chuck admonished, as the young man covered his bloody face with his hands. "You can't pistol-whip a nigga that calls you a snitch. Plus, that makes you look like you really did do that shit."

"You ain't mature in jail at all," Mike added.

Mike asked the young man if he could go to the hospital, and he replied that he had a couple of open cases, but no warrants. We took him to the ER for stitches. Mike, who had a bench warrant for failure to appear in court, hovered in the parking lot, checking in every half hour or so via cell phone.

To my knowledge, this young man never again mentioned that Steve had snitched. A few days later there was another shootout, and the whole affair took a backseat in the local gossip.

Most of the time, young men don't resort to violence to rebuild their reputations after they snitch. Instead, they attempt to regain the trust and goodwill of the person they wronged.

When he was sixteen, Ronny and a few other young men from 6th Street drove to Montgomery County late one night and tried unsuccessfully to break into a motorcycle store. When they couldn't get in, they returned to their '89 Bonneville, only to find that the car wouldn't start. Ronny called Mike to come get them.

When Mike got the call, he and Chuck and I were watching movies in the apartment. It was around 2:00 a.m. I heard Mike on the phone to Ronny as follows: "Where the fuck is that at? Okay. Gimme like, a hour [to get out there]."

Mike turned to me.

MIKE: This lil' nigga out in the middle of nowhere. Car ain't starting. We still got them cables [jumper cables]?

ALICE: No. Who is he with?

MIKE: The boy Dre, couple other niggas.

ALICE: Why is he out there?

MIKE: I don't fucking know—probably because he trying to steal something. I'ma beat his lil' ass to the ground when I see that nigga. Now I got to get up. *[shakes his head as he puts on his boots]* Fuck it. I'ma just wear my long johns.

ALICE: I'll see you later.

Mike cursed the boys but went out anyway to retrieve them, saying that he couldn't refuse his young boy anything. Chuck and I waited until around four. Mike didn't come back. The next afternoon, I got a call from a cop at a Montgomery County police station, asking if I knew a man named Keshon Jackson. After a beat I realized that this was likely the fake name that Mike had used when he got booked so that any outstanding warrants wouldn't come up.

Apparently, when Mike pulled up, the dealership's silent alarm had already gone off, and the cops were waiting behind a hill for the boys to try to break in again. The cops ran out from behind the hill and chased Mike and Ronny, along with the other boys, across covered pools and sandboxes and through bushes. Two of the boys got away; Ronny, Mike, and another young man were caught and taken into custody.

According to the signed affidavit that Mike's lawyer read to us later, Ronny and his friend, both sixteen, were separately interrogated and agreed to name Mike as the one who had put them up to it. In exchange, the police dropped the charges against the minors and drove Ronny and his friend home. Mike, who was twenty-one at the time, was charged with attempted breaking and entering, vandalism, and trespassing.

When Ronny got back home, he fervently denied that he had informed, claiming he would never betray Mike like the other boys had. But Mike had seen the police report. On the phone to me from jail, he said he was deeply hurt by Ronny's betrayal, since he considered Ronny a younger brother:

Even if they [the police] was telling him like, look, just say it was Mike and we'll let you go home tonight, he should have played his part [remained silent; done the right thing] just on the strength of everything I done been through for that lil' nigga. Almost everything he got on his back was shit

I passed off [gave to him], you feel me? Any time he need a couple dollars, who he coming to? He ain't going to his nut-ass pop, he ain't going to Nanna [his grandmother]. He come straight to me like, "Yo, Mike. Let me hold [borrow] this, let me hold that." I done broke him off, like, so much change. Who he think keeping him fed out here? Nigga, you ain't eating [making money] by yourself! Ain't no other motherfucker out here looking out.

Mike spread the word that Ronny had snitched. It was worse than that, in fact, because Ronny had blamed Mike for a crime that he didn't even commit. For almost two weeks, Ronny didn't come out of his grandmother's house except to go to school. Then he took Mike's gun and robbed a house in Southwest Philadelphia. He sold the TV, stereo, and jewelry, and paid Mike's bail.

Mike came home and still refused to speak to Ronny. He wouldn't allow Ronny to come to the apartment where he was staying, though Ronny came to the door a number of times.

By the time Mike drove out to Montgomery County for the preliminary hearing, he and Ronny appeared to be on better terms. In fact, Ronny accompanied him to all the subsequent court dates to show his support. As we were walking out of the courthouse on one of these occasions, Mike said to me:

I know, you know, he a snitch, but that's my little nigga. I raised that nigga from this tall. Plus, like, he don't have no real family, like, his pops gone, his mom out there in the streets. Nigga had to look out for himself.

The support Ronny gave Mike during his court dates, and the money he risked his life to obtain to pay Mike's bail, seemed to have prompted a reconciliation between them. Though Mike treated Ronny somewhat coldly in the following months, he stopped telling people that Ronny had snitched.

Two years later, Mike was in state prison for a gun case, and Ronny's botched motorcycle theft came up in conversation in the visiting room. Mike and I had a good laugh about how stupid Ronny and his friends had been to try to break into the motorcycle store, and Mike recalled that he had run across a covered pool for the first time in his life. Then

Mike cursed Ronny's friend for snitching on him. He said that if he ever saw the kid again, he'd beat the shit out of him. I didn't mention that Ronny had snitched, too, and Mike didn't, either.

Five years after this initial snitching incident, Mike was back home, and Ronny got into a fight with a young man who, after Ronny had beaten him soundly, began talking about how Ronny had snitched on Mike a while ago, though "a lot of niggas don't know that." Mike handed Ronny his T-shirt to clean himself off and said to the offending young man, "Get your fucking facts straight, nigga. Everybody knows Ronny ain't do that shit."

Ronny's strategy to repair his public persona and his relationship with Mike after he had informed on him was to post Mike's bail, attend his court dates, and slowly regain his trust and forgiveness. He also denied that he had snitched, and after a time Mike denied it along with him, even sticking up for Ronny when others tried to revisit this piece of history.

* * *

For young men around 6th Street who worry that the police will take them into custody, the everyday relations, localities, and activities that others rely on for their basic needs become a net of entrapment. The police and the courts become dangerous to interact with, as does showing up to work or to places like hospitals. Instead of a safe place to sleep, eat, and find acceptance and support, their mother's home is transformed into a last known address, one of the first places the police will look for them. Close relatives, friends, and neighbors become potential informants.

One strategy for coping with the risky nature of everyday life is to avoid dangerous places, people, and interactions entirely. Thus, a young man learns to run and hide when the police are coming. He doesn't show up at the hospital when his child is born, nor does he seek medical help when he is badly beaten. He doesn't seek formal employment. He doesn't attend the funerals of his close friends or visit them in prison. He avoids calling the police when harmed or using the courts to settle disputes. A second strategy is to cultivate unpredictability—to remain secretive and to dip and dodge. Thus, to ensure that those close to him won't inform on him, a young man comes and goes in irregular and

unpredictable ways, remaining elusive and untrusting, sleeping in different beds, and deceiving those close to him about his whereabouts and plans. He steadfastly avoids using his own name. He also lays out a good deal of money to silence potential informants and to purchase fake documents, clean urine, and the like. If a man exhausts these possibilities and does encounter the police, he may flee, hide, or try to bargain for his freedom by informing on the people he knows.

The danger a wanted man comes to see in the mundane aspects of everyday life, and the strategies he uses to avoid or reduce these risks, have some larger implications for the way he sees the world, the way others view him, and consequently the course his life may take. At a minimum, his hesitancy to go to the authorities when harmed leads him to become the target of others who are looking for someone to prey upon. His fear of the hospital means that he doesn't seek medical care when he's badly beaten, turning instead to underground assistance of questionable repute.

More broadly, a man in this position comes to see that the activities, relations, and localities that others rely on to maintain a decent and respectable identity become for him a system that the authorities exploit to arrest and confine him. Such a man finds that as long as he is at risk of confinement, staying out of prison and maintaining family, work, and friend relationships become contradictory goals: engaging in one reduces his chance of achieving the other. Once a man fears that he will be taken by the police, it is precisely a stable and public daily routine of work and family life, with all the paper trail that it entails, that allows the police to locate him. It is precisely his trust in his nearest and dearest that will land him in police custody. A man in legal jeopardy finds that his efforts to stay out of prison are aligned not with upstanding, respectable action but with being a shady and distrustful character.

tive status into an advantage by invoking a warrant as an excuse for a variety of unmet obligations and personal failings.

In these ways, men and women in the neighborhood turn the presence of the police, the courts, and the prisons into a resource they make use of in ways the authorities neither sanction nor anticipate. Taken together, these strategies present an alternative to the view that 6th Street residents are simply the pawns of the authorities, caught in legal entanglements that constrain and oppress them.

FIVE

The Social Life of Criminalized Young People

In the neighborhood of 6th Street and others like it, boys begin in school, but many make the transition to the juvenile courts and detention centers in their preteen or teenage years. By the time many young men in the neighborhood have entered their late teens or early twenties, the penal system has largely replaced the educational system as the key setting of young adulthood. These boys and young men are not freshmen or seniors but defendants and inmates, spending their time in courtrooms instead of classrooms, attending sentencing hearings and probation meetings, not proms or graduations.

As the criminal justice system has come to occupy a central place in their lives and by extension those of their partners and families, it has become a principal base around which they construct a meaningful social world. It is through their dealings with the police, the courts, the parole board, and the prisons that young men and those close to them work out who they are and who they are to each other.

CHILDREN'S LEGAL WOES AS MOTHER'S WORK

When I first met Miss Linda, her eldest son, Chuck, was eighteen, her middle son, Reggie, was fifteen, and her youngest son, Tim, was nine. Chuck and Reggie were already in jail and juvenile detention centers, respectively, but I was around to watch Tim move from middle school to the juvenile courts as he turned twelve and thirteen. At this point

Miss Linda transferred much of her parental energies to this new setting. The following scene is an excerpt from field notes:

We are sitting in small wooden chairs lined up in rows in Room K of the Juvenile Courthouse, located at 18th and Vine in downtown Philadelphia. The room has high, recessed ceilings and paneled walls. It is 9:10 in the morning, and the room begins to fill with boys and their mothers or guardians. Miss Linda's youngest son, Tim, 13 now, is sitting to my left with his elbows resting on his knees, his hands making a cup holding up his head. He checked his cell phone at the entrance and so has little to do now but watch the other people or try to sleep.

Miss Linda sits on his other side and fidgets, moving her legs up and down in quick motion.

Tim asks her if she still has any gum, and she says no, unless you want half of what I got in my mouth. He shakes his head emphatically. She says, "Don't act like you don't be taking the gum out of my mouth just 'cause Alice here."

My stomach is growling, and Tim turns to me and says, "That you?"

I nod. Miss Linda and I had split a 25-cent bag of corn chips this morning as we waited for Tim to shower and iron his clothes, but that was hours ago.

We watch the other boys file in. They look to me to be 10, 11, and 12 years old, a few of them, like Tim, in their early teens. Some of them are walking in with their mothers and are coming from home to attend probation hearings or to be tried for various crimes. Others are accompanied by caseworkers and come from juvenile detention facilities. These boys hope to be released today, so they carry on their shoulders large white cloth bags containing their clothing and other meager possessions. By 9:30 there are about 50 boys in the room and 5 girls. Two of the boys look Latino to me; all the others are Black. A sea of silent Black boys waiting to be tried.

A white uniformed guard moves down the aisle and tells two boys to take off their baseball caps, which they do grudgingly. One of the boys reveals hair that had been braided a couple of months ago and badly needs to be taken out and redone; he tries to smooth it out with the palm of his hand.

The guard tells the woman behind us that she can't eat those crackers in the courthouse. She says, "This isn't the courthouse; this is the waiting

room." He says, "Ma'am, put the crackers away or go outside and eat them." She puts them in her pocket, and when the guard is a few rows behind us she mumbles that she's a diabetic and has to eat at certain times.

Mothers approach a middle-aged white man in khaki pants who sits at a desk in the front of the room. They ask questions which I can't quite hear from the middle row where we are sitting. After a while the man stands and says, "If you have court today, form a line to check in." He holds a thick printout with a long list of names and leafs through it, telling the boys in line which courtroom they will have. He pauses to listen to a mother who has approached him at the desk, who says her son was unable to come to court today. She says something else, and the man replies loudly that he doesn't decide who gets a warrant and has nothing to do with warrants. He looks up her son's name on the sheets of paper and tells her which courtroom to go to. One of the boys in line has a heavy metal leg restraint that causes him to limp as he drags it along the floor. Another is handcuffed in the front with a white plastic band.

We move to a small courtroom now, where we sit on long benches and wait for a judge to appear and begin hearing the cases. In the rows around us sit mothers and their sons, some with their younger children also. A mother in front of us recognizes a woman in our row; they reach over the bench and talk about mutual friends and relations, one mother saying, "Yeah, he passed in May," the other responding, "I'm sorry to hear that."

Two guards stand at the front, and the public defenders and some case managers sit in the first row. A thin white woman, who I assume is a public defender, stands and turns toward us and calls a name; no one replies. She calls another name, and a boy and his mother or guardian approach her and speak in muffled voices. Miss Linda recognizes one of the public defenders as the lawyer who defended her middle son, Reggie, some years back. The judge emerges from a door behind the bench, and the guard asks us to stand and then to be seated.

Tim had caught this case last year when he attempted to leave school in the middle of the day; his teacher pursued him out of the school and into the street. Tim threw rocks at the teacher as he ran away, and though none of these rocks hit the teacher, he pulled a hamstring while in pursuit, and so the school police arrested Tim on charges of aggravated assault.¹

Eventually, Tim's name is called, and he walks with his mother to the front of the desk. The judge asks if a certain person is here; I assume this

is the teacher. The prosecutor says, "No, Your Honor, I do not believe he is here, but I did reach him last night, and he told me he was planning to be here." The public defender, the judge, and the prosecutor all look at their calendars and go back and forth for a while until they find a good date to continue the case. The court clerk passes a paper to Miss Linda, and it is all over. Tim and his mother move toward the door, signaling me to get up.

We walk quickly out of the room and through the building, past security, as if staying any longer might cause the judge to change his mind or find something in the file indicating that Tim should be detained. When you go to court, there's always a chance that they might take you; we will celebrate Tim's continued freedom when we get home.

As we drive back from the juvenile court building, Miss Linda is smiling and laughing. She calls her boyfriend on my cell phone, and says, "Yup. We on our way home now. I knew he wasn't coming." If Tim's teacher doesn't show up another two times, the case will be thrown out for lack of a witness to the crime. We all know this, and it's a very exciting prospect.

I drive up the back alley and park in the driveway Miss Linda shares with the house connected to hers. Miss Linda and Tim walk up the iron stairs to the balcony over the garage, and then into the house from the back kitchen entrance. The sun has come out, and I sit on the iron steps. From here you can see the backs of the houses from the next block over, which share the alleyway.

Miss Linda comes out with a cup of Irish Rose and smiles. "I'm celebrating!" she says. To a neighbor who has opened his back door she calls out, "You want some?" He nods, and she says he'll have to give her a dollar—a dollar per cup. He laughs, and she tells him that she isn't joking.

She hears the phone ring from inside the house and jumps up, saying it might be Chuck. It isn't, and I can hear her telling whoever it is that she's happy because she'll get to keep her son here with her, at least for the time being. "To keep it real," she says, "one is enough. At least if Chuck and Reggie are locked up, I know they good. When all three of my sons are home, I can't get no sleep. Let them come home when these streets cool down, you feel me?"

The day is getting warmer now, and Miss Linda's cat, named Rat, emerges from the garage and finds a place in the sun next to some empty Hugs bottles and chicken bones and cigarette butts in the alleyway.

Tim comes out of the kitchen and down the back steps with two paper cups and passes me one, saying *hum* to get my attention.

Miss Linda hears the phone ring again—it is inaudible to me—and jumps up to get it. She is rewarded this time, as it is Chuck calling from CFCF (Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility), the county jail. She talks with him for a few minutes and then calls Tim over to speak to his brother. Chuck is waiting to start trial for a case he caught for possession with intent to distribute.

Tim sprints up the stairs. I can hear him laugh, and I assume he's telling Chuck about the good news today in court.

Tim talks to his brother for a few minutes and then calls me over to the phone. I walk up the steps and through the kitchen, which smells of cigarette smoke, cooking oil, and animal urine. In the living room, Miss Linda is lying on the two-seater sofa, sipping her drink and watching court TV. Tim says, "I love you, too" to Chuck before passing me the phone.

With a heavy addiction to crack and alcohol, Miss Linda was by many accounts not an ideal mother. But she took pride in staying abreast of her sons' legal developments. This was no small or finite task, as at least one of her sons was in juvenile detention, jail, or prison at any given time during the six years I spent with the family—save for a two-month period in 2007 when all three sons were at home.

In contrast to Miss Linda, Mike's mother, Miss Regina, worked two jobs and kept an exceptionally clean house. She also spent much of her time dealing with her son's legal affairs. When Mike was in his early twenties, he caught a series of cases for drugs as well as gun possession. In addition to attending Mike's court dates and managing his probation and parole, Miss Regina visited him in jail and prison, arranged for his two children to visit, sent him packages and money regularly, accepted his phone calls, and wrote him letters.² As his sentencing date in the federal courts approached, she also organized Mike's friends, relatives, and past employers to write letters on his behalf, and to attend the trial:

It is the day of Mike's sentencing in federal court. He has been awaiting trial in a federal holding cell for the better part of a year and had been in county jail for another year before that.

This morning, Miss Regina drove his uncle and aunt, and the mother of his children, Marie, to the courthouse downtown. Also, she has arranged for Mike's grandmother to pick up Mike's girlfriend and his girlfriend's mother, who live way out in the greater Northeast. I have come in my own car.

In the weeks before the sentencing, Miss Regina had succeeded in persuading nine family members and friends to send letters on Mike's behalf. She gave us each a stamped envelope and typed up the letters that his grandmother and uncle had written by hand.

Walking into the courthouse, Miss Regina gets a call from Mike's lawyer, who says there has been a last-minute time change—the sentencing will now take place at 3 p.m. Frustrated but resolute, Miss Regina tells the assembled group that we'll be going to her house in North Philly to wait it out. There she makes chicken and rice and salad, and entertains us with pay-per-view. She practices what she'll say if the judge calls on her.

At the sentencing, Mike emerges wearing the suit that Miss Regina sent him. She remarks on how well it fits and how it was right for her to go with a size smaller than he had suggested. He smiles when he sees so many of his family assembled. I haven't seen him in over a year, since only direct relatives were permitted to visit him in the federal holding cell. He looks older, his beard grown out.

The judge, a middle-aged Black man with a stern gaze, asks the parole officer (PO) to stand. He asks if the PO has been in touch with anyone in Mike's family about his upcoming release. Because the time that Mike has sat awaiting trial will be counted toward his federal sentence, he'll serve only eight months in the Federal Detention Center. So, he'll be home within the year. The PO says that Mike's mother phoned him to give all her contact information, and that she kept calling to check in and let him know that she wanted to be "part of the process." Miss Regina nods fervently as he is explaining this.

The judge says that it is clear that Mike is a good person who has done some bad things. He says the letters from Mike's children made the biggest impact on him; he could tell how much his children loved him and that they actually wrote the letters themselves. Then he got out the letter from Mike's ten-year-old son and read it aloud to us. The last line was "So please let my daddy come home, because my mother does not know how to raise a boy, and I need my daddy." Miss Regina mouths the words as the judge reads the letter; she has read it so many times, she knows it by heart.

The judge says that the maximum sentence for Mike's offense is 16 years. Given the two years he has already served awaiting trial and given that he has such support from his family, Mike will receive only six months in prison and six months in a halfway house, followed by three years on federal probation. The judge asks Mike if he has anything to say, and Mike says he is sorry for his actions and that he is glad to be given this chance. Then the judge asks Miss Regina to stand as he tells Mike, "Now turn around, and thank your mother for everything she has done for you." Mike is caught a bit off guard by this, and the judge tells him again to thank his mother.

Mike turns to her, sobbing. She says, "It's okay, baby."

Like Miss Linda and Miss Regina, many women around 6th Street find that their son's legal proceedings structure their days, which are punctuated by court hearings, bail payments, jail visits, and phone calls to public defenders. Their days are also marked by the good or bad news they receive concerning his fate with the courts, the parole board, and the prisons. Staying on top of a son's legal matters and supporting him through the legal process can be a heavy burden, but it can also be a rewarding way for women to spend their time. It is partly through their efforts to keep their sons out of jail and to support them once they have been taken that women fulfill their obligations as mothers.

PENAL TRANSITIONS AS SOCIAL OCCASIONS

A young man's movement through the criminal justice system happens in a series of phases: the police stop him, search him, and run his name in their database; he catches a case, gets taken into custody, gets a bail hearing, attends months or years of court dates, gets sentenced; serves time, pays fees, and comes home on probation or parole. Along the way, he may violate the terms of his supervision, for example by drinking or staying out late, or get accused of a new crime, or fail to pay his court fees and fines, or fail to attend a court date, and be issued a warrant. As he ages, he moves from juvenile detention centers to adult facilities, and from shorter sentences in county jail to longer ones in state or perhaps even federal prison.

Over the course of a young man's passage through these stages, a number of events present themselves: bail hearings, trial dates, and returns home after long stints locked up. These events serve as key social occasions, for which a young man's friends and family dress up and argue over who should pay. People watch carefully to see who is in attendance, who is sitting with whom, who organizes the event or sits in the first row. If the mother of the man's children is missing from the benches of the courtroom, talk begins to circulate that she has indeed left him for a man down the street. If a new woman is sitting next to his mother in the first row, people acknowledge her as his main partner. At these public criminal justice proceedings, the members of a man's social circle deduce where they stand in his life and where he stands in the eyes of those around him.

One of the first significant social occasions that the criminal justice system provides occurs when a young man gets booked. With a young man suddenly taken from his home and placed in confinement, the question arises as to what will happen to the belongings he has left behind. Who will care for these items? Who will take responsibility for them or be allowed to use them? In the first hours or days of a young man's confinement, a tremendous redistribution of his material possessions takes place, and his partner, family, and friends watch to see whom he chooses to manage this movement of goods and to whom they will be given.

* * *

Mike's mother, Miss Regina, usually coordinated his legal matters, organized the attendance of his court cases, and kept the schedule for jail visits, letting those who wished to see him know what his visiting hours were and which dates had already been spoken for by others.³ Often, she also undertook the management of her son's affairs while he was away, and when he was first taken, she typically spent a number of days taking care of what he left behind: cleaning out the apartment he could no longer pay rent on, canceling his cell phone and paying the cancellation fees, taking over his children's school fees, and securing his various possessions—cars, motorbikes, sneakers, speakers, jewelry, CDs—or selling them to pay his bills.

But when Mike went back to prison on a parole violation in 2004,

he appointed his new girlfriend, Tamara, to handle his affairs, mind his possessions, and give some of them to specific people. His mother called me to discuss his decision:

MISS REGINA: I got no problem with Tamara; she's a good person. But he's known her for *two months*, Alice. I've been taking care of his stuff for years. Last time, the only thing I didn't have here was the bike.

ALICE: Yeah, Marie [the mother of his children] had it.

MISS REGINA: And what happened to it?

ALICE: The cops took it.

MISS REGINA: Yup. Because her cousin was riding it around. You can't ride those bikes in town! Those are off-road bikes. Or if you do, you better be faster than the cops!

ALICE: Right!

MISS REGINA: Me and you are the only ones that make sure everything is still here when he comes home.

ALICE: Yep.

MISS REGINA: When he got locked up for that gun case, everything stayed right here. Every shirt was ironed and waiting for him. Sneakers still in the box. But like I said, if he wants Tamara to do it, that's fine. She can pay all his bills and clean out that apartment and find somewhere to put his car that don't even run. Let her tow that car somewhere, that's fine with me. I already told him I don't want anything in that apartment. Anything. And when he comes home and his TV gone and he sees Ant wearing his clothes up and down the street, he better not come complaining to me.

In some communities, the event that makes clear to a young man's family that he's in a serious relationship is a school dance or graduation ceremony to which he takes his new partner. Later, it might be a family wedding out of town, a vacation, or a nephew's christening. But for Mike, the first event indicating to his mother that he had a serious girlfriend came when he got taken into custody and designated Tamara to handle his affairs.

Not only does the distribution of his possessions become a key task for a trusted friend or family member, but the people to whom a newly jailed man bestows his belongings are recognized by loved ones as his

inner circle, the people he trusts and cares for the most. When Mike violated his parole by drinking alcohol and got sent back to prison a few years before, he phoned me shortly after his arrival to explain who should get what:

MIKE: I told Chuck he can hold the AP [apartment] down for me till I get back, so can you give him the key? I know his pops ain't letting him sleep at the crib no more. And he already got the keys to the Bonnie [Pontiac Bonneville]. I told him to just ride out with that.

ALICE: Okay.

MIKE: Can you give my cell phone to Shanda? I told her you were going drop it off to her—you know hers got cut off.

ALICE: Yeah. Probably tomorrow.

MIKE: My moms might want that car, though. If she call you about the car, just tell Chuck I got to give it to her, you know.

ALICE: Okay.

MIKE: Ronny going to come by for my Xbox; I told him to call you before he come to make sure you there.

The events marking a young man's passage through the system thus become times when private relationships are made public; when a young man makes careful decisions about the relative ranking of his social relations. But these occasions are not only times when private relationships are made public, they are also times when a man's general social standing or level of familial and neighborhood support is made manifest. For example, young men on 6th Street took the number in attendance at another man's sentencing as indication of his social standing, a demonstration of how much "love" he has in the streets. From field notes taken in 2009:

There was a big showing in room 405 today for Reggie's Must Be Tried.⁴ I drove his mother, Miss Linda, and their neighbor Anthony, who has two bench warrants and took a real risk showing his support today. Reggie's older brother, Chuck, drove their youngest brother, Tim, who skipped class today at his new school in order to come. Victoria, Reggie's sometime girlfriend, met us there. The judge, a stern-faced Italian man, dropped all the charges—conspiracy, drug possession (when he arrived at the hospital

he had some work [drugs to sell] on him), possession of a weapon—so now it's just attempted murder. On the way back, we heard from Reggie's cousin Keisha, who said she had gone to the neighborhood courthouse instead of the courthouse in Center City. She met us back at the house and brought some weed. All in all, it was quite festive and solidary. Reggie called from jail and discussed the showing with me proudly, comparing it to Rocky's sentencing last month, where none of the people who had promised to attend actually showed up.

PENAL EVENTS AS ROMANTIC SHOWDOWNS

As important social occasions, the events marking a man's movement through the criminal justice system can become public stages for run-ins between women competing for his affections.

When a man is on the outside, he has some chance of keeping the women in his life from finding out about each other. When he gets booked, such a balancing act becomes much more difficult. At his sentencing, his longtime girlfriend comes face to face with his "jump-off"—a woman she didn't know existed. In the first days that he is permitted to have visits in county jail, the mother of his child confronts his new girlfriend, who had arrived fifteen minutes before she did and took up his visiting hour. Women also look through the sign-in book at the visitor's desk to determine whether other women have been there.

These meetings can become dramatic events in which women size each other up, try to determine where they stand in relation to each other, and even demand that the man make a public statement about their respective places. It is in the jail visiting room, the courthouse, and the bail office that women triumph as a man's main partner, or get humiliated and cast aside.

* * *

When Mike was released from prison, he was sentenced to a halfway house in North Philly, and there he met Tamara, a caseworker for the residents. She was in graduate school as well, working on her master's degree. Tamara and Mike started dating, and when Mike later went back to prison on a violation for breaking curfew, Tamara started coming to

visit him. He was careful to ensure that she visited on separate days from his baby-mom, Marie, who came once a week with his two children. But a couple of weeks into his sentence, Tamara came on an off day, ostensibly to visit her younger brother, who was also serving time at Graterford:

There was an important incident at Graterford today. Marie and I drove up there to see Mike, and Tamara is sitting two tables over, playing chess with her brother. So Marie and I are sitting there, and Tamara comes over and says, "What's up, Mike, how you doing?" and he says to Marie, "This is Tamara, she works at the halfway house." To Tamara he says, "This is Marie, my kids' mom." At this Marie stands up and says, "Is that all I am to you? That's all I am? I ain't drive five fucking hours for this shit."

In almost a whisper Mike says, "Shut up and sit down before they cancel this visit."

"Who is she?"

"Nobody, just a friend."

"You fucked her, didn't you."

"Oh, here you go. Why you always assume that?"

"Because I know you. I know you."

"We don't mess with each other, we just cool."⁵

The rest of the visit, Marie is touching Mike and playing with his hair. Tamara starts talking loudly to her brother so that we can hear, telling him that she really likes Mike and hopes he isn't still messing with his baby-mom. Mike starts talking louder so that Marie can't hear what Tamara is saying, and looks at me pleadingly to do something about the situation.

When the guard indicates that the time is up, Marie stands and holds on to Mike's waist, looking up at him and leaning in for a kiss. Mike hesitates and grins sheepishly, and then hugs her back and kisses her.

By the time we are waiting in the holding cell outside the visiting room to be released, tears are streaming down Tamara's cheeks.

A similar public reckoning took place when Aisha attended her boyfriend Trey's sentencing in the federal courts in 2009. In this case, she clearly lost to Trey's baby-mom:

Aisha called me today, sobbing loudly. I left class and came over right away. Second time I've seen Aisha cry in seven years, the first time being

at the funeral of her sister's boyfriend, whom the police strangled to death in front of us. Trey's sentencing was today, and to the heavy news of his 15-year bid in federal prison was added the injury of his baby-mom showing up and sitting with Trey's mother. When Aisha got there, his BM was already there in the second row, talking quietly with his mom and aunt. Aisha said his mom didn't even greet her, acted as if she didn't know her, like they hadn't been talking every day this whole year he's been away.

Given her anger and hurt, I am surprised by how sensitive Aisha is to Trey's mother's position. She said that his mother probably just didn't know what to do with the two of them in the same room.

Aisha said she wasn't sure if she should leave, but in the end she decided to stay, sitting in the back row. His BM ignored her the whole time he was up there, making all the sounds and gestures when he came out that women make to indicate that it is their man standing up there. Then his BM spoke to her as they took the stairs down.

"She asked me right to my face if I was a dyke," Aisha told me.

"Why would she think that?"

"Because that's what Trey told her. He said we was just cool, I just be sending him money and stuff."

"What did you say?"

"I told her: I'm not a dyke; he told me he don't mess with you anymore."

Aisha said that the woman responded by showing Aisha her ring, saying, "We are getting married as soon as he comes home." Aisha looked at Trey's mother for confirmation, and Trey's mother refused to meet her eyes, as if she were trying to be careful getting down the steps.

To Trey's BM Aisha replied, "Well, better you than me, because I am not waiting no 15 fucking years for him."

Today, Trey has called twice and is trying to tell Aisha that he didn't even know that his BM would be there, and that he keeps telling her not to come. He will take her off his visitor's list wherever they take him. But Aisha isn't listening anymore. She tells Trey that she knows he is lying and that he never would have told his baby-mom that she was a lesbian unless he wanted to preserve his relationship with her. If he was really done with her, he would have openly acknowledged that Aisha was his girlfriend. In addition, there was the indisputable evidence of the seating arrangements in the courtroom. If Aisha had been his girlfriend, then his mother would have sat with her in the first row, and the mother of his children would

have been sitting in the back, not the other way around. "Your mom was sitting with her," she says to him on the phone. "You can't tell me they didn't come together."

"All the months I wrote him and visited him and put money on his books, and took his collect calls," Aisha says to me. "I'm done."

By way of neutralizing Aisha's threat to the mother of his children, Trey had told this woman that Aisha was a lesbian and hence they were "just friends." Meanwhile, he had been telling Aisha that things were over between him and his baby-mom, and he simply saw her because she had been bringing the kids to visit. When Aisha and Trey's baby-mom ran into each other at his sentencing, these separate narratives collided: his baby-mom found out that Aisha was a genuine competitor, while Aisha discovered that Trey and his baby-mom were still very much romantically involved.

* * *

To say that the events accompanying a man's movement through the criminal justice system have become key social occasions isn't to say that the community has no other ways of going public with a new relationship, sizing up rivals, or coming together. Cookouts and block parties continue, as do funerals and christenings. Many young women and a much smaller number of young men still graduate from high school. But court sentences, bail hearings, and homecomings from a long sentence have become frequent enough, and for enough people, that they now exist alongside these older occasions, serving as significant social events not just for young men and their immediate families but sometimes for their larger networks of family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances.

LEGAL WOES AS THE BASIS OF PERSONAL HONOR

Just as the criminal justice system now furnishes the social events around which young people work out their relationships to one another, it has provided the social material with which young people construct themselves as brave and honorable. Contact with the criminal justice

system is almost universally understood as something to be avoided. The institution is, generally speaking, one that grants dishonor and shame rather than pride or standing to those who pass through it. Even so, the looming threat of prison, the movement of young men through the courts and the jails, the assignment of a diminished and precarious legal status to these young men, and the pressure on their loved ones to provide information about them, all provide some opportunity for bravery and honor.

* * *

In these field notes from the spring of 2007, Chuck's friend Anthony describes a number of his legal entanglements and brushes with law, taking considerable pride in his own conduct:

Around 1 in the morning last night, Chuck and Anthony are sitting on Chuck's front stoop, passing a blunt (a cigar hollowed out and filled with marijuana) back and forth. We have just been to the bar, and Anthony, having had more than a few shots of Hennessy, begins to pace around and talk about his warrants.

"I ain't sweating them, man," he says. "I went to court with ya'll, I be driving around." Here he refers to Reggie's latest court date, which he risked arrest to attend in solidarity.

Chuck tells Anthony that if he keeps talking loudly he'll wake up Pop George, Chuck's grandfather.

"If the law come," Anthony says, ignoring Chuck, "I'm out. You ain't going to see me no more."

I tell Ant that if he has bench warrants, he should go to the Warrant and Surrender Unit and get them taken care of. Chuck nods his head in agreement. A few weeks ago Chuck had missed a court date, and he and I had spent seven and a half hours in the basement of the Criminal Justice Center getting the warrant lifted and a new date.

Anthony says, "I ain't turning myself in. They going to have to come get me. I ain't making their job easier."

Chuck tells him that as long as his warrants are only for failure to appear, not a probation violation, he won't get taken into custody; they'll just issue him a new date. Anthony asks how many men who came to the War-

rant and Surrender office that day for a new date wound up getting taken into custody on the spot. Chuck doesn't answer, and Anthony repeats the question.

Chuck laughs and says, "Three."

Anthony acts out how surprised the men must have looked to see the guards coming up behind them with the handcuffs.

Still pacing, Anthony says, "If they do grab me, I ain't calling nig-gas, like, I need this I need that, put bread on my billzooks [books—commisary], write me, and all this. I'm just calling niggas like: what's going on out there?"

Chuck replies that Anthony will so call for money when he gets to jail, just like everybody else.

Anthony shakes his head no, insisting, "I bids, nigga, I bids!" By this he means that he handles his time in jail without complaint, like a pro.

Talk turns to the two women we'd seen at a bar earlier that night, one of whom used to date Mike, and then Anthony brings it back to his legal matters.

"All my cases was gun cases," he says. "I never caught a drug case."

I take this to mean that he is normally quite skilled at evading the police, and only gets arrested when he is caught carrying a gun because of the various beefs between 4th Street and 6th Street, which are beyond his control.

Anthony continues: "I beats cases. [The s is for extra emphasis.] I'm 27 now, and I been in jail like four, five years, and I ain't got NO convictions."

He turns to me. "How many motherfuckers you know that's my age, A, and don't got no convictions?"

I shrug.

"I'm old as *shit* not to have convictions."

Anthony is now quite drunk and bragging about all kinds of things: the women at the bar whom he could have slept with if he had wanted to, all the free drinks the bartender gave him, his performance on the basketball court earlier today. Chuck keeps telling him to keep quiet, because Pop George will hear him. "As soon as he calls my name," Chuck says, "it's over."

Ant starts saying, half-jokingly, that he is going to rob the next guy to come up the block.

Chuck says, "Just don't put my name in it. Don't put me on your call

list"—by which he means that when Ant gets booked, he better not mention that Chuck had anything to do with the robbery.

Anthony replies, "I'm not getting booked!!"

Chuck repeats that he doesn't want his name in it.

"You crazy," Anthony says. "I never got locked up on 6th Street. When I get locked up, I'm getting locked up on 4th and Castor, 6th and Elmsworth . . ." By this I take him to mean that he knows his neighborhood and its alleys so well that the cops would never catch him here. He also implies that the 6th Street neighborhood contains so many people willing to help him hide that he will always be safe.

Chuck laughs and tells Anthony to take his ass in the house.

Anthony replies, "When did I ever get booked on the 6?!"

Chuck says, "Yo, pipe down."

Anthony nods emphatically, his point made.

A neighbor pulls up with a woman in his car, and the talk turns to who is out creeping, that is, cheating on their spouse.

On this night, Anthony took pride in how he approached his time on the run, and how he typically handled the months or years in jail awaiting trial. He also boasted about his lack of convictions, the first time I'd heard someone bring this up. His account of his conduct throughout his legal woes was offered as a testament to his good character, but also as an indirect way of indicating his respect in the community. Because Anthony's ability to evade the police depended on the willingness of others to open their doors to him and to keep silent in the face of police questioning, the length of his time on the run, the number of his cases that got thrown out for lack of witnesses, and the rarity of his arrests occurring in the 6th Street neighborhood showed the esteem with which neighbors and friends held him.

Getting arrested is nothing to be proud of, but news may travel of a young man's bravery during the beating that sometimes accompanies the arrest—like it did when Ronny neither cried nor begged when the police broke his arm with their batons. An arrest warrant is certainly bad news, but surviving on the run requires skill and cunning, for which a person can be admired and granted some degree of respect. Given the number of restrictions a man on probation or parole has, and

the frequency in which these supervisory sentences result in a violation and a subsequent return to jail or prison, merely continuing to live on the outside can be seen by others as a significant accomplishment.

COMMITMENT AND SACRIFICE IN A FUGITIVE COMMUNITY

Just as young people work out their social relations in the courtroom or construct an honorable identity by handling their legal woes with dignity, so too do they demonstrate their devotion by taking legal risks on one another's behalf. With police stops and searches a daily occurrence, and many residents either going through court cases or risking arrest on sight, there is simply not enough safety from the authorities to go around. Saving oneself may mean giving up a brother, son, or best friend. In the context of legal insecurity, people show their love and commitment to one another by protecting those close to them from the police, sometimes at the cost of their own safety. Some of these gestures are as small as telling a cop that they didn't see which way a man went. Some are bigger, like when a man with a warrant risks an encounter with the police to attend the birth of his child. And some are as big as offering oneself up for another's arrest. Small or large, all these gestures carry deep meaning, becoming rituals that people perform to show respect, to demonstrate love or intimacy, to uphold the revered status of others, and to identify themselves as good people. In this way, people construct a moral world through the looming threat of prison, finding opportunities for acts of protection and sacrifice that bind them to others.

One major risk young men take on behalf of those they hold dear is to attend the funerals of close friends who have been shot. Police usually show up at these services to videotape the mourners with a tripod camera.

Recall that when Ronny's cousin was shot and killed, Reggie attended the funeral although he had a warrant out for his arrest. Reggie phoned me afterward specifically to let me know he had taken this risk on behalf of his deceased friend.

Indeed, a certain amount of this kind of legal risk-taking is expected in very close relationships, such that when a man fails to sacrifice his

personal safety to fulfill his social obligations, it is taken as an indication of selfishness, or a sign that he isn't sufficiently invested in the relationship.

* * *

When Brianna, Chuck's girlfriend, was due with their first child, he promised to attend the birth despite having a low-level warrant out for his arrest. In the end he stayed home, later sitting with me and lamenting how angry Brianna would be that he had failed to show up as he had promised. He wasn't wrong about her reaction—when I arrived at the hospital to see her and the new baby, her mother and aunt were sitting next to her bed, discussing his failures as a father and partner:

BRIANNA: He don't care. I mean, he care, but he don't care *enough*. He going to say [he was saying], "If I get locked up, how I'ma take care of the baby?" It's not like they got him on a body [a murder case] or something—if they did come grab him [arrest him at the hospital], all he would do is sit for a quick three months [the minimum for a probation violation]. The longest it would be would be like six months. Plus, it's not even a guarantee that they would come grab him.

BRIANNA'S AUNT: Keisha baby-dad was up here last month [for the birth of their baby] and he came home. That nigga had a couple jawns [warrants] on him.

BRIANNA: He just don't want to be up there no more [in jail] because he was there like all last year.

BRIANNA'S MOTHER: But think about it, like, in ten years when he looks back, he's going to wish he saw his baby born, he's not going to care that he was sitting [was in jail] for a couple months.

BRIANNA: Exactly.

Chuck's decision to stay home hurt his baby-mom, not only because he had failed to attend the birth of their daughter, but also because he had refused to risk his own safety on behalf of his new family. For Brianna, his willingness to take this risk stood as a folk test of his attachment to her. His failure to show up was a hurtful act, a demonstration of his lack of commitment.

Though young men with warrants or under court supervision are expected to risk their own safety for the people they love, a man may also measure his feelings for a woman according to how little legal risk he allows *her* to take on his behalf. Mike and Chuck agreed that they'd ask only "hood rats" to smuggle drugs into the visiting room when they were in county jail, never a relative or a real girlfriend, as the risk of arrest was too great. They looked down on other, younger men who thought nothing of having their main girlfriend or baby-mom run balloons of marijuana or pills into the visiting room.⁶

Protecting a loved one from arrest could serve as an apology as well, healing the breach of past wrongs. Chuck and Reggie's mother, Miss Linda, was a consistent user of crack, and would periodically take the money from their pants pockets while they slept (this is called "digging in pockets"). It got to the point that the brothers came up with a series of hiding places in the house, including a hole in the wall and a loose floorboard. Typically, they had only small sums, but one winter night, their mother discovered four hundred dollars in Chuck's back pocket.

Chuck told Mike and me that when he woke up and found the money gone, he confronted Miss Linda, who flatly denied taking it. Chuck declared that he was finished with her, that this was the last time—he would be sleeping at friends' houses or his girlfriend's house from now on.

At the time, Chuck was buying drugs with Mike and Steve; they were pooling their money so they could buy a larger amount at a lower price. They were buying on consignment, receiving the drugs first and making payment after the sales. The four hundred dollars was Chuck's portion of the money they owed their supplier or "connect." This meant that Mike, Steve, and Chuck couldn't pay him back—and worse, couldn't get any more drugs to sell. They were concerned about what their connect would do to them, and also how they'd make any money in the future.

MIKE: I told you not to sleep at your mom's, nigga! You a nut for that.

You a fucking nut. Who she give it to [which drug dealer did she give the money to]? I'ma fuck that nigga up, man. I told those niggas from John Street don't go around there, don't serve her [sell drugs to Chuck's mother]. How many times I got to tell them don't serve her?

True to his word, Chuck stopped sleeping at Miss Linda's and didn't answer when she called his cell phone. This went on for two weeks, until the police showed up at Miss Linda's door, looking for Chuck's younger brother Reggie. The officers came to the house four times over the next two weeks. Each time, Miss Linda refused to give them any information, though she said they threatened to take her youngest son, Tim, away and cut off her welfare. Chuck began phoning to check on her and see how she was doing. When the police stopped coming, he moved back home.

It seemed as if by protecting Reggie from the police, and by withstanding the violence of the raids, Miss Linda made amends for the money she'd stolen. The first night that Chuck was back sleeping at her house, she beamed: "I *always* protect my sons. You can say a lot of things about me, but I'm not letting them take my babies."

Just as protecting someone from arrest is considered an act of commitment and affection, carelessly putting others at risk is taken to be a sign of negligence, an indication of a person's bad character.

It is a warm spring day, and Anthony and I are sitting on Miss Linda's steps along with a few neighbors and friends. Miss Linda pokes her head out the kitchen door and says her stomach is talking; she asks Ant to go and get hoagies. She tells him she also wants three bags of pork rinds. Her youngest son, Tim, who is fifteen now, gives Anthony two dollars for loosies (single cigarettes) and says that he wants his change back, and that Ant better not smoke any of them before he gets back. I get up and say, "I'll go with you," and Miss Linda jokes, "Yeah, you better go, 'cause Ant ain't got no money." As we get up to go, Miss Linda starts trying to persuade a neighbor to play spades with her, a dollar a hand. He is protesting that he has to go to work soon.

Anthony and I walk down the alley and over to Pappi's store. Ant puts the pork-rind chips on the counter and says, "Let me get three." Pappi's son passes him three single cigarettes, which cost a dollar fifty. I pick up the hoagies from the back counter where Pappi's youngest daughter is on the grill, and she hands them to me silently.

As Anthony and I walk out of the store, we see two cop cars stopped about fifty yards to the left. Two people, a young man and a young woman who look no older than 15, stand facing the side of one of the cars, with

their arms up over their heads and their forearms leaning on the car. A Black, heavy-set cop in his forties is patting down the young man while a thinner white cop in his midthirties stands nearby.

As he crosses the street in front of me, the white cop looks at Ant, who immediately starts running toward Miss Linda's house. The cop starts off after him and by the time I catch up, Anthony is walking out of Miss Linda's house in handcuffs, followed by the cop. The cop is on the radio asking for someone to search the bushes in the front of the house; he thinks Anthony threw a gun there.

Anthony is yelling that his lip is busted and bleeding. Then he turns to me and says, "It's cool, A, I'ma be home in a minute. It's cool," to which Miss Linda replies, "Shit. He ain't staying *here*."

The cop puts Anthony into the backseat, placing his hand on top of Ant's head as he gets into the car. Anthony is talking at me through the closed window, but I can't hear him; I shrug at him and shake my head. Two more squad cars pull up into the alleyway with sirens blaring and lights flashing. Neighbors are coming outside or leaning out of their windows to look.

The cop who chased down Anthony asks Miss Linda her name, whether this is her house, and what her relationship is to Anthony. She flatly denies that he lives with her and says he is just someone she knows from around the neighborhood. The cop asks her for his name, and she says, "Ask *him* what his name is." The cop asks her who I am to her, and Miss Linda replies, "That's my fucking white girl. Is it a problem?" The cop tells her not to use profanity and to take a seat.

Miss Linda begins yelling at Anthony through the closed window of the police car: "Don't you ever bring the law to my house! That's what you get, nigga! That's what the fuck you get. Don't think I'ma take your calls, either; don't even bother putting this number on your list!"

The cop tells us not to go back inside, and I wonder where Tim is. It seems to take a long time for the police to fill out the paperwork, and a small crowd has now gathered at the end of the alley.

When the police leave, Miss Linda goes inside and calls to Tim, who has been hiding in a fallen wall of the basement. "Ain't nobody looking for you," she says as he crawls out.

Miss Linda is now convinced the police will come back that night and raid the house. She grabs her glass pipes and her marijuana stash from

the top shelf of the glass china cabinet in the dining room and phones Mike, asking him to come for Chuck's gun. She leaves to put her contraband in her secret hiding spot and returns a few minutes later, looking calmer, though she continues to say over and over how this has messed up her whole day. Then Reggie calls from jail, and she picks up the phone and says:

"This dickhead runs into the house! Brings the cops all in here. They found the holster, the bullets. Don't ask me which fucking bullets; I don't know which bullets. Mike needs to get back here and get all the shit out of here, before they come back again. Because they definitely coming back—if not tonight, tomorrow night."

After pouring another drink and taking a drag from a neighbor's cigarette, she starts talking about past raids on her house. Then she says, "Anthony's problem is he is selfish. He don't think. They almost took my son today, and I just got him back two fucking weeks ago [from juvenile detention]. Not even two weeks."

And so the giving and taking of legal risk becomes a way that people in the neighborhood of 6th Street define their relationships, honor or dishonor someone, and draw moral distinctions among one another. Giving up another person under pressure is seen as a shameful act of betrayal. Doing so voluntarily is considered an act of retribution, or the start of an open conflict. The unintentional bringing of "heat" is taken as a sign of negligence or of bad character.

* * *

From these examples, we can see that the heavy presence of the police and the looming threat of prison enter into the rituals of gift-giving that unite people. Like the giving of food, shelter, or child care,⁷ protecting loved ones from the police, or risking arrest on their behalf, becomes part of an ongoing give-and-take that creates and sustains social relationships.

This brings us to an interesting wrinkle. Despite the norm of silence and the high value placed on protecting others, doing so—particularly at personal expense—doesn't always reflect well on the person making the sacrifice. Someone can put herself at risk too freely, or for people with whom she is not perceived to be on terms intimate enough to merit the gesture, thus diminishing the value of the protection and

that of the giver. Sometimes people are perceived to protect others in a desperate or manipulative way, to increase their intimacy with someone who may not otherwise be interested in a closer connection. Such was the case when Chuck's ex-girlfriend allowed him to stay at her place for a month while he was on the run, without asking for anything in return but his company.

Protecting others, or risking one's safety for their wellbeing, is hazardous to the giver not only because of the risk of arrest or other harm, but also because either action signals a strength of attachment that may later be mocked. For instance, a woman may risk arrest on behalf of her boyfriend by sneaking drugs into jail, only to find out that this man has cheated on her, or has told others that she means little to him. A man may protect a friend with whom he has been arrested, only to learn later the friend gave him up quickly when the police offered him a deal. Hence, protecting others opens a person up to the humiliation of being scorned or used.

THE MORAL AMBIGUITY OF ENCOUNTERS WITH THE LAW

We have seen how the looming threat of prison can provide opportunities for someone to demonstrate love, affection, or antagonism toward others; make claims about his own character or sentiments; or draw conclusions about other people's.

When Anthony ran into Miss Linda's house as the police chased him, he had clearly placed others at risk, and Miss Linda's anger was understood to be an appropriate reaction to his thoughtless actions. But often it is not so clear who has placed whom at risk, or how much risk an individual had really added to what a person already faced. If someone has protected another and risked arrest to do so, disputes may arise concerning how much protection was given, or how serious the risk really was. The giver may feel that the recipient has undervalued the gesture, that he's squandered his safety on someone who didn't appreciate it. Or the recipient may feel that the giver is trying to claim credit for a gesture that wasn't intended to be benevolent. Because police encounters, court hearings, and probation meetings have unpredictable outcomes, it's not always obvious how a given brush with the authorities

would have gone if a person had acted differently. The functionality of run-ins with the law as expressive opportunities in social relationships is complicated by the inherent ambiguity of these encounters.

The following extended excerpt from field notes reveals this ambiguity:

We are going OT—out of town. I am driving with a girlfriend of mine from school, who sits across from me in the passenger seat. Mike and Chuck are sitting in the backseat. They are smoking an L (a marijuana cigarette), passing it back and forth and ashing it out the window.

A cop car flashes us to pull over. My girlfriend yells, "Oh, shit!" and gets a bottle of perfume out of her purse; she begins spraying the car and the rest of us. "Grass," from the Gap. Mike throws the butt of the L out the window as we pull over onto the gravel.

Two white police officers come to the car and ask me for my license and registration. I ask them why I am being pulled over, and one says that I was going over the speed limit. They walk back to their car to run my name and the tags. As we are waiting, Mike asks how fast I'd been driving, and I feel that he's accusing me. Chuck says quietly, "She wasn't going more than like a pound," which means fifty.

One of the officers comes back to the window and says that he smelled marijuana when he approached the vehicle, and asks us all to get out of the car. They tell my girlfriend and me to stand over to the side, and they tell Mike and Chuck to face the car, put their hands up on the hood, and spread their legs. One officer is radioing for a female cop to come and search us, though in the end he never bothers with it. He pats Mike down as he is pressed up against the car.

The officer who had been on the radio begins searching the car. I watch as he pulls the contents out of the side door pockets and from under the seat. Mostly papers of mine from school. I think about what could incriminate us there. In the side door pocket on the driver's side, the officer finds some needle-and-tube contraption. He sort of chuckles and holds it up to the other officer like he's found something good. I explain that it is part of the kit Mike's baby-mom is learning from in her studies to become a nurse's assistant, which is in fact exactly what it is. He lets it go.

The officer searching Mike demands to know who was smoking marijuana, who it belonged to. Mike says loudly, "It was mine. It was mine." The

officer asks, "Where is it?" Mike says, "There ain't no more, I smoked it all." As the officer turns toward us, Mike says to him, "They don't have nothing on them, they don't even smoke weed."

After Mike declares that it was his marijuana, the officer searches him again, opening the pockets of his jacket and jeans. A small bag of marijuana falls out. The officer puts handcuffs on him and says that he will be taken to the police station and charged. He tells the three of us to go, without ever touching me or my girlfriend. I ask if we can stay and wait to hear where they are taking Mike, but they say no, and order us to drive away.

Later, Mike tells me that at the precinct they made him pull up his testicles and cough, and a small bag of cocaine dropped from his anus. Now he's being charged with possession of marijuana and possession of cocaine, though very small amounts of both. Later, I ask Chuck if he had drugs on him, and he nods. In the lining of your jeans? He nods again. But they hadn't searched him.

I know that Mike must be bailed out quickly if he's going to make it out on bail at all, because he's on probation in Bucks County. At some point the detainer from that probation will show up in the system, and then his bail will be denied, because a person on probation isn't allowed to make bail in another case.

Chuck falls easily asleep, not seeming concerned. My girlfriend and I stay up all night, going to different houses and collecting money. When I get the call from Mike the next morning that he has had the bail hearing and we need to come to the courthouse with \$500, we are ready, and post it within the hour. I drive out to the county jail alone. I wait for many hours for Mike to be released, twisting my hair in ringlets and trying to ignore a young man who keeps asking if I am here for my boyfriend. Then Mike comes out, and we drive home.

As soon as he walks out the door, I am full of descriptions of recent events—how we found out what police station he was being held at, who we got the money from, how we ran to the courthouse before anyone found out about the detainer to post the bail, how quickly I drove to the county jail to get him, how long I waited, who was in the waiting room, how I dodged their advances, and so forth.

Mike stops me finally, telling me to be quiet, looking frustrated and angry.

"What are you mad for? I spend two days making sure you come home, and now you have attitude?"

Mike explains that I don't appreciate the gravity of what has happened, of how close I'd come to being arrested. He had prevented this by taking the blame himself, which he didn't have to do.

I protest that since it was in fact his marijuana and cocaine, and he was the one who'd been smoking in the car, I shouldn't have to thank him for keeping me safe from an arrest.

He counters with the argument that his actions during this police encounter differed from his habitual practice. He says that when the cops come, people typically remove the drugs from their person and place them in the car if they can't toss them successfully from the vehicle. The drugs get found in the car, nobody admits guilt, and down at the police station the chips fall where they may. Most of the time, Mike explains, this means that the driver takes the fall, even if he wasn't the one carrying the drugs. By not placing the drugs in the car, and by vocally admitting his guilt at the start of the search, he'd spared the rest of us from arrest, and me—the driver—in particular.

Mike then explains that he wouldn't have done this for just anyone; in fact, if Chuck had been the only other person with him, he wouldn't have admitted to anything. But he felt like I had really been there for him, and so he wanted to do this thing for me, to show me that I was appreciated. He seems angry that I don't understand the weight of this gesture, and frustrated that he has to explain it to me.

The next day, Chuck and I discuss what happened, and when I mention that Mike had taken the blame on our behalf, Chuck frowns and says, "That's what he's saying?" He then explains that when Mike said he could have tossed the drugs in the car, leading me, the driver, to potentially take the blame, he was lying, because he hadn't actually thought of that at the time. Chuck claims that Mike hadn't remembered he was carrying the weed bag until it dropped out of his pocket while the cop searched him. He hadn't remembered he had the small bag of cocaine, either, until he was in the back of the police car. If he had remembered these items before he was searched, Chuck says, he probably would have tossed them both in the car, no matter what the consequences.

"But what about when he said that we didn't have anything on us, when he said it was his weed?" I ask. Clearly this was an instance of Mike's taking

the blame squarely and gallantly on his shoulders, saving the rest of us from a potential arrest. Chuck then explains that Mike's speaking up actually didn't protect us. If he hadn't spoken up, we might all have been taken to the police station and questioned. But my girlfriend and I wouldn't have been charged with anything, Chuck says, since we were clean—we had no drugs on us, we didn't have any warrants, we weren't on probation (which we would be violating by driving), and no drugs were in fact found in the car. He says, "They was going to let you go regardless." He then explains that Mike probably figured that since I'd been questioned only once before, and wasn't practiced in withstanding threats from police, he couldn't count on my silence. Especially not my girlfriend's, Chuck points out. "Who is Mike to her?"

"Now he wants to act like he did that shit for you," Chuck says. "But think about it: like, if you going to get booked, it's better to get booked *alone*."

To work out whether Chuck's account is valid, I try to think of what my friend from school could have possibly told the police about Mike. Well, at least his real name. In the hope that his other cases wouldn't come into play and to make it harder for them to find him once he made bail, Mike had given the two officers a fake name and had scraped his fingertips off on a metal grate in the cell so that they couldn't find him through his prints.

After a few days, Mike still seems angry with me that I didn't express gratitude for the sacrifice he'd made on my behalf, and that I didn't accept his version of events. I speak to Aisha on the phone, relaying the events of the past days to her, describing what Mike had done and how close we had come to being arrested. I make sure Mike is within earshot while I talk to her, and this seems to patch things up between us. Chuck says nothing else to me about it.

From these field notes, we can see that it can be quite unclear who has taken the blame for whom, or how much risk there really was in the first place. I believed that Mike had taken blame that was rightfully his, but he felt that he had made a significant sacrifice for me, and that I didn't understand the situation enough to appropriately value his gesture. I began to be convinced by Mike's arguments until I talked with Chuck, who had a different interpretation from either of us. Chuck agreed with Mike that keeping drugs on you instead of throwing them

in the car should be understood as a gesture of sacrifice, protecting the driver at your personal expense. That is, he didn't dispute that passengers in a car ordinarily drop the drugs, leaving the driver holding the bag. What Chuck was disputing was whether Mike had *remembered* that he had drugs on him. If he'd actually forgotten, then he'd kept the rest of us safe unintentionally and was now trying to get credit for it. Furthermore, by quickly admitting to the police that he was carrying the marijuana and we weren't, Mike actually wasn't preventing our arrest. According to Chuck, what he was preventing was the possibility that we'd talk. Mike was trying to avoid putting us in a position where we'd compromise his freedom.

Added to these interpretations is a fourth, which I came up with while rereading my field notes a few days later. The person who actually may have benefited from Mike's impromptu confession was not me or my friend from school but Chuck, who did have drugs on him, and likely would have been searched next if Mike hadn't spoken up and claimed responsibility when he did. Chuck would have been in a much more vulnerable position to inform on Mike to reduce his own charges, so Mike's taking the blame prevented that from happening. Neither Chuck nor Mike mentioned this, at least not while I was present. In fact, Mike specifically told me that he wouldn't have taken the blame if only Chuck had been in the car.

From this single police stop, a great many interpretations of the risks involved and the motivations behind the actions of the parties present can be put forth. One reason it may have been important for Mike to provide a version of the events that involved his taking the blame for us is that a person's character is defined in part by whether he will risk arrest to protect the people he cares about. Residents of the 6th Street neighborhood tend to downplay how much they put others at risk, and to exaggerate their acts of protection and sacrifice. Men spread the news widely when they testify on behalf of a friend on trial, wanting others to know of their loyalty and good character. On the other hand, people suspected of caving under police pressure vehemently deny having done so, though the strength of the denial is at times taken as a sign of guilt in itself.

The inherent ambiguity and uncertainty of encounters with the police, trial dates, probation hearings, and the like make these events diffi-

cult ones on which to base decisions about people's characters, feelings, or motivations. And yet, in part because these events are so uncertain and ambiguous, they leave considerable room for interpretation, sometimes allowing those involved to construct a version of events in which they behaved bravely and honorably.

THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AS A SOCIAL WORLD FOR YOUNG ADULTS

In the hyper-policed Black neighborhood of 6th Street, the penal system has become a central institution in the lives of young people and their families, coordinating social life and creating a meaningful moral framework through which young people carve out their identities, demonstrate their attachment to one another, and judge one another's character.

The events marking a young man's passage through the system come to serve as collective rituals that confer identity and establish relationships. The sentencing hearing, initial jail visits, and homecomings serve as important social events, indicating how popular he is or how much status he has, as well as where people stand in his life.

By protecting one another from the authorities or risking arrest on one another's behalf, members of the 6th Street community demonstrate their attachment to their family and friends and lay claim to decency and honor. Risking arrest to attend a family function or hiding a wanted relative or partner in one's home becomes an act of love and devotion, binding people together. Such risk-taking can also serve as an apology, healing the wounds of a past wrong. Indeed, how people conduct themselves given their own legal entanglements and those of others becomes a source of distinction, marking them as brave or weak, responsible or reckless, loyal or disloyal, or at least providing the resources for so claiming. In the 6th Street neighborhood and many like it, the criminal justice system now sets the terms for coming of age; it is a key stage on which the drama of young adulthood is played, not only for the young men moving through it but for their parents as well.

To be sure, around 6th Street and other segregated Black neighborhoods like it, the drama of youth continues to play out on the street corner, in class, and on the football field. But it also plays out—and for

some it mainly plays out—in bail offices, courtrooms, and jail visiting halls. As boys around 6th Street become young men, many make the transition from home and school to detention centers and jails. The police and the courts increasingly take up their time and dictate their activities; their daily round consists of writing letters to the parole board or waiting in line at the probation office, making phone calls to the house arrest monitor, and meeting with the “back judge” from prior cases.

But to say that the penal system has become a central institutional basis for adolescence and young adulthood is not to say that it is equal to the other institutions which might occupy young people's time and form the basis of their social identities and relationships.

The events marking a man's passage through the penal system may become occasions for his girlfriend to dress up and do her nails, but a trial is not a school dance. These are rituals of diminishment and degradation, not celebration or accomplishment. Even if a young woman can emerge proudly from a sentencing hearing because she sat in the first row with the young man's mother, this doesn't change the fact that she is watching the young man she loves being taken away to prison.

Mothers may express their parental care and support by attending their son's court dates and by visiting him in jail, but these activities don't provide the same gratification they might experience attending a school basketball game, recital, or play. Even a mother who can take some pride in the attention she pays to her son's legal matters must face other, unpleasant emotions: distress for this to be happening, pain for what her son will go through in jail or prison, shame for what the boy has gotten himself into, guilt for having failed to prevent it. While families certainly celebrate a young man's homecoming from jail, dismissed case, or successful completion of a probation or parole term, they rarely do so with a cake and balloons. These happy moments are tinged with the unavoidable fact that even good news from the courts isn't something to be truly proud of. Unlike a graduation or a first day on the job, they aren't moves up so much as a clearing of legal entanglements, a resetting of the young man's life at zero. Now perhaps he might begin to make some progress in the domains that afford him some standing and stability—the domains of school, work, and family, in which he has fallen woefully behind.

The issue of agency also persists. Teenagers everywhere may feel that decisions are being made for them, and that they don't have as much control over their lives as they would like. But school and jobs do afford them some chance to work hard and reap the benefits of their efforts. In contrast, much of a young man's passage through the penal system reminds him every day that he is at the mercy of larger forces that do not wish him well.

The seemingly arbitrary nature of the criminal justice system, from the moment the police stop a man to the moment his parole sentence ends, leaves a young man feeling that he cannot actively determine how his life turns out. At any moment he may be taken into custody, while the man standing next to him is not. Once he catches a case, he begins attending court dates, perhaps one a month for what may turn into more than a year of continuances and postponements. Each time he enters the courthouse, he has little idea whether the authorities will decide he should be taken into custody on the spot and continue his case from jail, or whether he will simply be given a new court date and sent home. Uncertainty persists as to whether this day will mark an ending to his legal woes or his last day as a free man. The difference between a case getting thrown out and moving forward may have very little to do with the young man's conduct—he has only to wait and worry. If he is sitting in jail, he often has no idea how long he'll be there. Even when issued a fixed sentence, he doesn't know when he'll be paroled, and if granted parole, he may wait months for his papers to come through.

Young men cannot control when or where the criminal justice system may take them, nor can they control who attends the events marking their passage through it. Though surely high school offers significant opportunities for humiliation and conflict, a man sitting in jail or prison has less say over who attends the major events in his life than he would in, say, planning his prom date. And so these occasions become times of tension and humiliation, not just for the man in question but for his significant others, creating problems in relationships perhaps more often than do the rituals that we typically associate with coming of age.

The criminal justice system furnishes a good deal of expressive equipment for a man to demonstrate his love, honor, attachment, or

open hostility, but upon closer inspection these are also wanting. The uncertainty of encounters with the police makes it hard for these to become the moments when his character is decided on, and the looming threat of prison makes it difficult for him to conduct himself as he might wish.

The act of informing, when done freely and without pressure, can be rightfully taken as an act of aggression, or a payback for some wrong. But people aren't always given the free choice to inform or to keep silent. Rather, informing happens under duress, so people are betraying those they'd rather protect, and their character is becoming established during a situation over which they have little control and certainly haven't freely entered into. Whereas many of us living in other communities are able to construct an identity as a good person without risking much of our safety or security to do so, young people on 6th Street find that their character becomes fixed in moments of fear and desperation, when under the threat of violence and confinement they must choose between their own safety and the security of someone they hold dear.

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Thus, the moral world that people weave around the courts, the police, and the threat of prison involves suspicion, betrayal, and disappointment. To repair the damages that so frequently occur to the self and to relationships, young men and women try to cover up the bad things they are made to do, or spin them in a positive light. Relationships between friends, partners, and family members require a good deal of forgiving and forgetting. Still, people create a meaningful social world and moral life from whatever cards they have been dealt, and young people growing up in poor and segregated Black neighborhoods, under heavy policing and the threat of prison, are no exception.