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THE COSMOPOLITAN CANOPY



**RACE AND CIVILITY
IN EVERYDAY LIFE
ELIJAH ANDERSON**

ALSO BY ELIJAH ANDERSON

Against the Wall: Poor, Young, Black, and Male

A Place on the Corner

Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City

Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community

The

COSMOPOLITAN
CANOPY

*Race and Civility
in Everyday Life*

ELIJAH ANDERSON



W. W. Norton & Company New York · London

For my friend and teacher, How

aka Howard S. Beck

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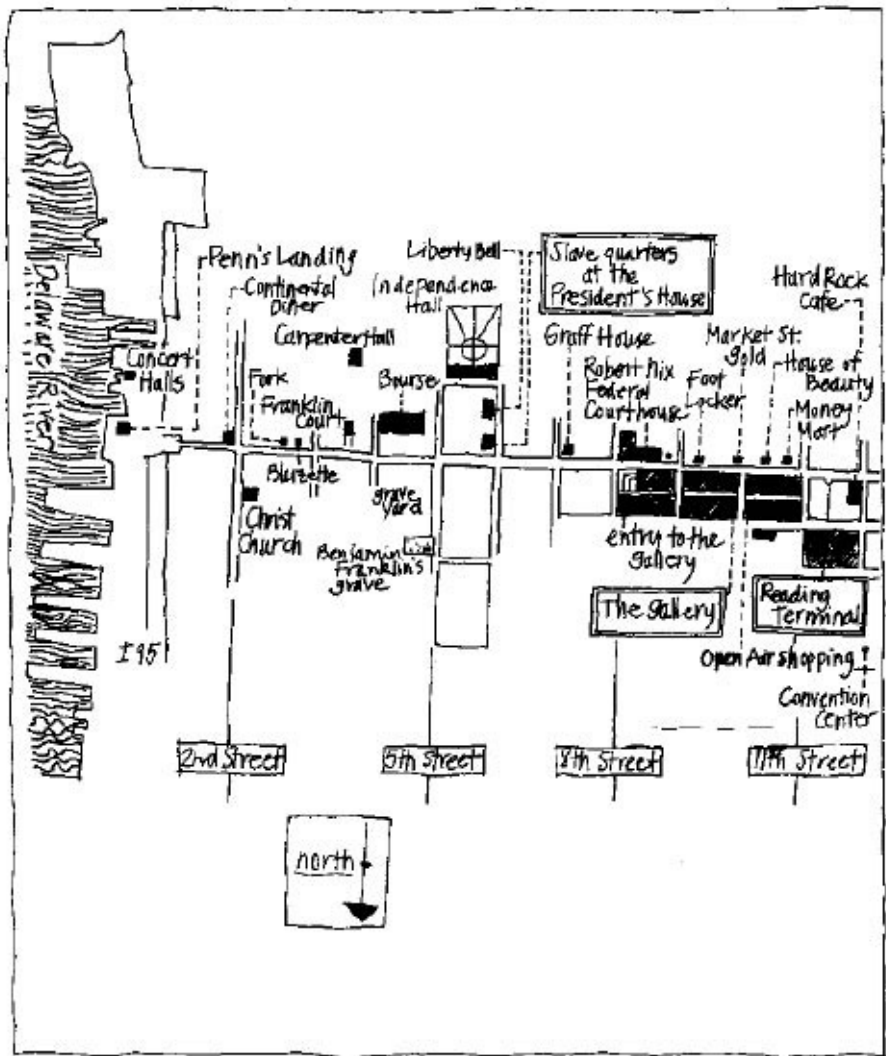
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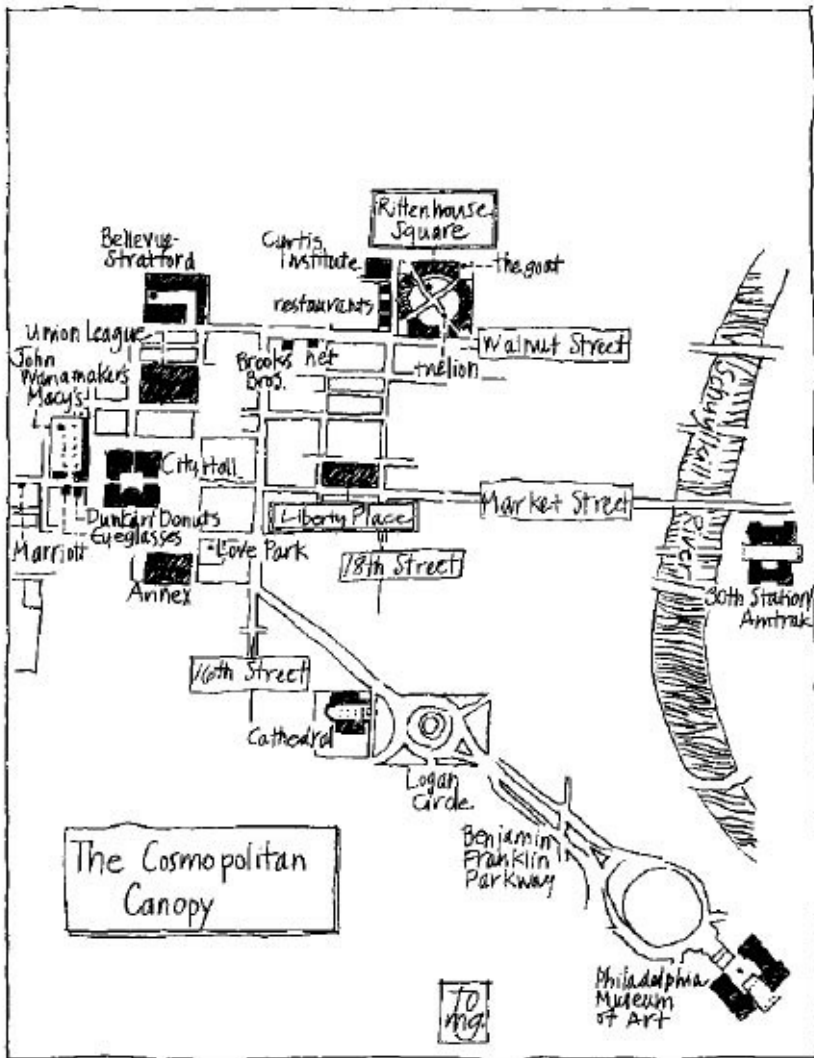
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PREFACE

I have long been fascinated by the lived experience of race in America, especially through my home city of Philadelphia. How do ordinary people in this diverse city interact across and along racial lines? From early morning through late at night, downtown streets are crowded with an ever-changing kaleidoscope of people, not only rushing past one another in dizzying swirls but also mixing and mingling for a moment or two amid the busyness of everyday life. Working people, shoppers, commuters, students, tourists, pleasure seekers, municipal service employees—whole hordes of strangers, a myriad of acquaintances, and intersecting groups of friends—all share public space more or less peacefully. When and how do racial identities figure into these everyday encounters? When and how do city dwellers set aside their own and others' particular racial and ethnic identities to communicate in more cosmopolitan ways? What conditions enable people in some urban places to consort with others with such civility? These questions arise as we observe public life in almost any contemporary American city.

Over the last half-century a wide array of civil rights legislation, court decisions, and presidential actions, including affirmative action, has made black people full citizens under the law. In these decades a process of incorporation began, opening doors for future generations of African Americans to positions of power, privilege, and prestige. Support for these policies was strong but by no means unanimous; debate about them has intensified even as they have been successful in transforming race relations. The extension of affirmative action to various other underrepresented groups, including women, created more visible diversity in American institutional and cultural life, particularly in urban centers. Social tensions and racial polarization notwithstanding, this process pushed us inexorably toward racial peace, with a public embrace of diversity.

This ethos of getting along, as well as the tremendous growth in immigration, has given rise to the emergence of what I call cosmopolitan canopies¹—settings that offer a respite from the lingering tensions of urban life and an opportunity for diverse peoples to come together. Canopies are in essence pluralistic spaces where people engage one another in a spirit of civility, or even comity and goodwill.² Through personal observation, they may come casually to appreciate one another's differences and empathize with the other in a spirit of shared humanity. Under the canopy this sense of familiarity often breeds comfort and encourages all to be on their best behavior, promoting peaceful relations. Here racially, ethnically, and socially diverse peoples spend casual and purposeful time together, coming to know one another through what I call folk ethnography, a form of people watching that allows individuals informally to gather evidence in social interactions that supports their own viewpoints or transforms their commonsense understandings of social life. In this context of diversity and cosmopolitanism, a cognitive and cultural basis for trust is established that often leads to the emergence of more civil behavior. At present, this emerging phenomenon can be observed in Center City Philadelphia, where I have lived and conducted ethnographic fieldwork for more than thirty years.³

During that time I resided for extended periods in three quite different urban neighborhoods: West Philadelphia, where universities rub elbows with the poor; historic Rittenhouse Square and less prestigious parts of Center City; and Chestnut Hill, an upper-middle-class area toward the northwest. Over the long term I have done fieldwork in many other neighborhoods and followed my subjects in places outsiders seldom enter even by accident. Engaged as a citizen, as well as a disciplined sociologist, I have partaken of the broad spectrum of social life, becoming an “observing participant” in Philadelphia.⁴ This account conveys what I have seen and heard and presents what sense I have been able to make of interactions occurring in public. My primary concern in this book is with the ways in which Philadelphians live race and how this helps to explain how race is lived in contemporary America.

This work grows out of ongoing ethnographic work in Philadelphia—a study of how people go about meeting the demands of everyday life, develop commonsense understandings of their social world, and share these ideas and practices with others in their culture. Local knowledge arises from these concrete experiences and interpersonal interactions.⁵ The ethnographer tries to apprehend and represent this local knowledge in a form that others can comprehend. No ethnography presents exact truths; all accounts of social experience are renderings.

In deference to the privacy of my subjects, who deserve respectful treatment, I have disguised individual identities and actual occurrences while describing social processes and interaction patterns in public. I am most concerned with understanding and portraying the behavior I have observed. In the spirit of the *flâneur*, the wanderer in the city originally described by the French poet Baudelaire,⁶ the work begins with a walking tour of Center City Philadelphia that stops and lingers at the cosmopolitan canopies. After describing several of these iconic spaces, I move inside to the semipublic setting of the workplace. There I take up the issue of the color line, the instances of racial discrimination that are most problematic for the canopy, rending the fabric of civility for a time but not overwhelming or destroying it.

The public spaces of the city are more racially, ethnically, and socially diverse than ever. In many impersonal spaces, social distance and tension as expressed by a wariness of strangers appear to be the order of the day. But the cosmopolitan canopy offers a respite as well as an opportunity for urban denizens to come together to do their business and to engage in “people watching,” or distinctive folk ethnography that serves as a cultural and cognitive base on which people construct behavior in public. In such settings, city dwellers are encouraged to express their cosmopolitan side while keeping their ethnocentric feelings in check. Here, ethnic and racial borders are deemphasized and opportunities for diverse strangers to encounter one another in a relaxed context are created. The cosmopolitan canopy and its lessons contribute to the civility of the increasingly diverse city.

1. A CENTER CITY WALKING TOUR

In 1938 the sociologist Louis Wirth published his seminal essay called “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” based on his observations of city life in Chicago and drawing on the German sociologist Georg Simmel’s earlier work on European cities, “The Metropolis and Mental Life.”¹ What mainly concerned Wirth were the qualities that for him defined the city, particularly size, density, and heterogeneity. Especially striking to him was people’s blasé orientation as they traversed urban space with an impersonal bearing that suggested an attitude of indifference. In the seventy-four years since Wirth’s formulations on urbanism, much has happened to big-city life.² Of course, some conditions have remained constant, but many have changed profoundly. Strongly affected by the forces of industrialism, immigration, and globalization, the American city of today is more racially, ethnically, and socially diverse than ever, with profound cleavages dividing one social group from another.

As anonymous pedestrians actively “see but don’t see” one another, skin color becomes a social border³ that complicates public observations of city life. Today what Wirth described as urbanite blasé indifference seems to have given way to a pervasive wariness toward strangers, particularly anonymous black males. In places such as bus stations, parking garages, and sidewalks, many pedestrians move about guardedly, dealing with strangers by employing elaborate facial and eye work replete with smiles, nods, and gestures designed to carve out an impersonal but private zone for themselves. Increasingly, pedestrians are required to contend publicly with the casualties of modern urban society, not just the persistently poor who at times beg aggressively but also homeless people, street criminals, and the mentally disturbed. Fearful of crime, many are prepared to defend themselves or to quickly summon help—if not from fellow pedestrians, then from the police. In navigating such spaces, people often divert their gazes, looking up, looking down, or looking away, and feign ignorance of the diverse mix of strangers they encounter. Defensively, they “look past” or “look through” the next person, distancing themselves from strangers and effectively consigning their counterparts to a form of social oblivion.

In public, stereotypically, white skin color is most often associated with respectability, civility, and trust, and black skin color is associated with poverty, danger, and distrust—above all, with regard to anonymous young males.⁴ Many ordinary pedestrians feel at ease with others they deem to be more like themselves; the more threatening the “other” is judged to be, the greater the distance displayed. And mainly because of the persistence of what I call the “iconic black ghetto”—the large “unfathomable but dangerous place” in the city where poor black people are concentrated—black people, especially males, bear close scrutiny by virtually everyone else in public.⁵ Black strangers more often greet and otherwise acknowledge other strangers, particularly other blacks. But most other pedestrians, in an effort to remain impersonal, appear simply to follow their noses, at times barely avoiding collisions with other strangers. If they speak at all, they may utter a polite “excuse me” “I’m sorry,” and, if it seems appropriate, they scowl. In effect, people work to shape and guard their own public space.

Yet there are heterogeneous and densely populated bounded public spaces within cities that offer a respite from this wariness, settings where a mix of people can feel comfortable enough to relax their guard and go about their business more casually. In these areas people display a degree of cosmopolitanism, by which I mean acceptance of the space as belonging to all kinds of people.⁶ In Philadelphia this cosmopolitan zone is known as Center City. Here we find cosmopolitan canopies where the display of public acceptance by all of all is especially intense, becoming one of the defining characteristics of the place.

Having come to know these cosmopolitan canopies, as well as other spaces that seem to defy the spirit of cosmopolitanism, I invite you to take a virtual walk with me from Philadelphia's eastern border at the Delaware River, along its central axis, Market Street, all the way to the core's western boundary, the Schuylkill River and Thirtieth Street Station, which connects Philadelphia by rail to its surrounding suburbs and the rest of the country.

A good place to begin is Penn's Landing, as it is locally known, which commemorates the arrival of William Penn, Philadelphia's founder, in the late seventeenth century. Today Penn's Landing contains various attractions, including eateries, a concert hall, a floating restaurant, and the Independence Seaport Museum. The area draws large crowds of people who indulge in exotic cuisines, tour the museum, attend a performance, walk their dogs, or simply sit along the banks of the river and watch the boats go by.

As we move west from Penn's Landing, we cross I-95 and reach the beginning of Market Street. Walking up Market, a wide boulevard heading west away from the Delaware River, we encounter buildings and establishments from many periods of Philadelphia's history. Immediately on the right, Second Street is the old Christ Church, where George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and other founding fathers worshipped. Franklin is buried in the graveyard behind the church, and the pew where he used to sit has been roped off. Between Third and Fourth streets along Market is the original brick-and-wood post office, with the site of Franklin's house just behind it.

The area is a hodgepodge now. A few inexpensive stores, left over from the days before outlet malls, sell men's suits and shirts, ladies' accessories, and Army-Navy surplus merchandise. Interspersed among these stores are popular restaurants and watering holes such as the Continental Bar and Restaurant; Fork, an upscale eatery; and Bluezette, a black-oriented nightclub. Some local nightspots offer dancing. These places draw a mix of people, but a young and hip crowd from the city and the suburbs predominates. In the evening, especially on weekends, the area is crowded. It attracts different types of people at different times of the day and the year. Its social neutrality is remarkable. Diverse people converge, defining the setting as belonging to everyone and deemphasizing race and other particularities. No one group claims priority, a hallmark of the cosmopolitan canopy.

Beginning around 5:30 in the evening on weekend nights, the spaces around Second and Market Street transition to a nightspot. What earlier was a somewhat tame business district serving the local neighborhood changes abruptly. Its more ethnic, even sleepy public face comes alive and turns cosmopolitan. Every other establishment has become a destination for young adults from South Jersey, the Philadelphia suburbs, and local colleges and universities. Here young people dance with all kinds of others, including those from the North Philadelphia ghettos and the river wards of Kensington and Northern Liberties. White, black, Latino, and others from all over the city, and the world, mingle to the sounds of salsa at Cuba Libre.

The area just north of this section of Market, called Old City in an effort to appeal to tourists, is the heart of the local art scene. In order to draw a crowd, most galleries coordinate their openings on the first Friday of each month. The galleries attract an upscale but laid-back and mature clientele that

adds a certain mix to the nightlife. The site of much recent investment and new and rehabbed construction, the neighborhood has become vibrant, even “hot,” drawing many young students, professionals, families and singles alike. In nice weather a festive atmosphere prevails on first Friday, as crowds wander from one gallery to another, sharing the sidewalks with informal outdoor exhibits and the occasional street performer or musician playing for tips.

Not everyone, however, is welcome there. I have seen black vendors spread out their wares of incense, bootleg music and videos, ties and scarves, as well as African beads, statuettes, and other ornamental items in this area, only to have a policeman come along and tell them they must leave. These street vendors are tolerated farther up Market, but not on Second Street. The black vendor here is viewed as “out of place,” a renegade and not an artist, and a potential danger, a threat. If he didn't know it before, he is quickly made aware that he does not belong.

As we walk up Market and approach Fourth Street, the Bourse is on the left. Opened in 1895, the commodities exchange, modeled after a mercantile exchange in the German port city of Hamburg, was the first in the United States. The building was strikingly modern in its time, with its steel frame, multilevel design, and skylights; now a mall, it still seems contemporary. Originally it housed grain dealers, export agents, steamship lines, and telephone and telegraph companies, as well as the commercial, maritime, and stock exchanges. From its inception it was a kind of canopy, facilitating cooperation among its business tenants and allowing customers to feel enclosed in its open interior. Today the Bourse holds retail and food stores, as well as dozens of other types of small businesses. It is still an urban gathering place where people come to do business, shop, and people watch.

Continuing west along Market, we cross Independence Mall, with its view of Carpenters' Hall, where the first Continental Congress met. Nearby is the site of George Washington's house, which served as his office and residence through the 1790s, while the new nation's capital was under construction. Although Pennsylvania had passed a gradual emancipation law in 1780, the president and his family were attended by at least eight slaves they brought from Mount Vernon. Two managed to escape to freedom. Years later John Adams, an opponent of slavery, occupied the same dwelling. When the site for the new Liberty Bell Center was being excavated in 2006, archaeologists discovered remains of the slave quarters behind the stables, and controversy swirled about how Washington's slaves should be represented here. Facing the mall is the Federal District courthouse, and a few blocks up sits the house where Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. And in the distance is Congress Hall, the relatively small building, still intact and open to visitors, that housed the Constitutional Convention.

We continue our tour up Market to Ninth Street. Anchored by the Gallery, an urban mall built in the 1970s that currently includes a Big Kmart and a Burlington Coat Factory as its major tenants, this area has been home to discount stores for decades. A downtown destination for people from the city's poorer neighborhoods, particularly blacks and other people of color, the Gallery gives serious pause to members of the typical suburban crowd. The grand main entrance is at Ninth and Market street, where a large sign above wide steps leads directly to the lower level. All sorts of decidedly nonsuburban people occupy the stairs; homeboys, young black men in their twenties, and other black, brown, and white members of the underemployed and working poor are scattered around. The Gallery sits near the bus and subway transit lines that connect several black ghetto communities to this part of the city, providing the black poor with a degree of access that enables them to congregate here. Here they shop, hang out, or gather to socialize, talking and laughing out loud among their friends, their presence staking a claim on the Gallery and advertising what is to be encountered inside.

By noon on warm summer days, black religious proselytizers in front of the building often

preach on a microphone and offer fliers to passersby, many of whom try to ignore them. There is always a certain hustle and bustle throughout the day, although at midmorning it is relatively quiet. To enter the Gallery, we must make our way past this phalanx of people and descend the steps, which is rather daunting to would-be shoppers from the suburban middle class.

Just west of the Gallery, at Market and Eleventh, is an open-air street market with a large and visible black presence. Licensed vendors selling T-shirts, incense, jewelry, scarves, African garb, and other items share sidewalk space with hustlers plying passersby with drugs, bootleg videos, and other illicit goods. Middle Eastern men sell cheap jewelry to African Americans. Their demeanor is usually one of tolerance, but occasionally blacks receive defensive stares. Black people interpret what they call "the look" as intolerance or, at worst, "the hostile gaze" of racism; yet they continue to patronize these shops. In this block the legal meets the illegal; depending on the time of day, or day of the week, either legitimate or underground sellers predominate.

On Saturdays, the whole area is transformed into a carnival-like setting. Low-income people shop, stroll, or simply watch others, staring, meeting, talking, and looking to see and to be seen; some watch those who are watching them. Vendors find customers, drug dealers make deals, friends encounter friends by happenstance and habit, and young people organize evenings together. This area near the Gallery qualifies as an outdoor social center, an informal setting where leisurely inner-city working-class black people give face time to one another, mixing among themselves and with Latinas and some working-class whites, and all enjoy themselves. However, the vagaries of the weather and the open presence of criminal activity at times make this an edgy scene, which leaves completely comfortable only those who possess ghetto-honed street smarts. Usually the scene is pleasant and relatively relaxed.

Across Market Street, next to the Robert Nix Federal Building and the William Penn Annex of the U.S. Post Office, a group of stores competes for the same low-income, mostly black clientele that frequents the informal street market. At the House of Beauty, which sells low-priced items such as barrettes, combs, perfume, and wigs and extensions using real human hair, women and children trick in and out. Next door is Market Street Gold, a bling-filled jewelry store, and then a Foot Locker with its big red sign. A bold yellow Money Mart sign promises check-cashing services, catering to those who barely manage from one payday to another. Adjacent is Philly's Kids, a children's clothing and shoe store. Along this stretch, vacant storefronts advertise for new tenants. In fact, the whole block between Eighth and Ninth streets signals its perennial status as "development in waiting." West of Eleventh Street, establishments drawing business from the Convention Center, one block north of Arch Street, begin to dominate, including two major hotels. The centerpiece is the Reading Terminal Market, a Philadelphia landmark that has benefited from the upsurge in tourists and particularly convention-goers in the city.

Always a place where many different types of people came together, the Reading Terminal today serves as a major cosmopolitan canopy. Its denizens represent a diverse lot who come here to shop while becoming exposed to various kinds of people getting along quite well together. Indeed, the setting epitomizes the cosmopolitan canopy, for it represents not only the great racial, ethnic, and class diversity of the city of Philadelphia but also the goodwill that is expressed and experienced by most who enter these premises. The friendly attitude that prevails here is infectious. Established and reinforced by old-timers, it spreads to newcomers as they enter. People here model civility and civility for one another, contributing profoundly to the definition of the local situation. In these circumstances people observe one another, becoming ever more urban by learning through their interactions the parameters of behavior allowed here and at the same time making sense of one another. Here the

engage in the intense form of people watching I call folk ethnography, a peculiar way of making cultural sense of strangers in public places.

A Hard Rock Café, identified by its trademark huge guitar hanging over the entrance, occupies the corner of the Reading Terminal building. Pedestrians stop and look around, being careful not to bump into others as they take in the sights. Meanwhile, city buses roar by. Cars and taxis are everywhere. The mass of pedestrians moves about, seeing but not seeing, paying what Erving Goffman called “civil inattention”⁷ as they move along the sidewalks and cross at the lights, or occasionally jaywalk. The setting hustles and bustles with life.

Farther up the street are a Dunkin’ Donuts and an Eyeglass Emporium; up to the corner and down the way is a Marriott Residence Hotel. Not long ago moderately priced electronics stores and strip joints lined these streets, and boom boxes, their sounds, and their devotees were ubiquitous. But these establishments and their clientele were pushed out to make way for the new Convention Center. Facing City Hall on the other side of Market, the Wanamaker Building, which once housed the original Philadelphia department store, now houses a Macy’s, the only true department store remaining of the original four in Center City; it serves as a reminder that the heyday of urban retail has long passed. Yet, the recent history of this streetscape points to the possibility that those smaller upscale businesses may expand. This area is in flux as the new competes to establish itself among remnants of the old.

One interesting bridge between the old and new is the Wanamaker’s Organ (Macy’s) Christmas Light Show, a tradition in Philadelphia since 1956. A few weeks before Christmas, the department store is transformed into a community space where residents from all over the city gather to see the annual spectacle of lights and hear carols played on the famous Wanamaker’s organ, the largest functioning pipe organ in the world. A spacious corner section of the store is given over for this event and all kinds of children are in attendance with their parents in tow. It is a high time for the holiday expression of “goodwill toward men,” taking place under the canopy that was long known as “Job Wanamaker’s,” but which continues this distinctive tradition as Macy’s.

Historically, City Hall has served as a giant, ongoing public works project that sits astride the intersection of Market and Broad streets at the center of the “green Country Towne” originally laid out by William Penn. It is still the official central point of the expanded city, connecting all four directions and offering impressive views. This massive Second Empire–style building has provided jobs for many of the city’s residents, starting with Irish and Italian immigrant construction workers. Designed to be the world’s tallest office building, it was begun in 1871, but the task took thirty years during which time skyscrapers in New York City and Chicago surpassed its 549 feet. Maintaining the vast structure, with its profusion of intricate decorative detail, continues to occupy city workers and contractors. Thousands of municipal employees staff its many offices, where citizens come to do business large and small. Traffic must circle around it, but pedestrians can walk straight through on both Market and Broad. On most days only a few people sit in the courtyard.

To the south are the Union League and the old Bellevue Hotel, two Philadelphia institutions long associated with the elite, whom Leonard Richards called “gentlemen of property and standing.”⁸ In profound contrast, not far to the north lie some of Philadelphia’s poorest black ghettos. On the west side Market Street becomes a corridor of residential and office high-rises; on the other corner the Benjamin Franklin Parkway leads past luxury apartments, large office buildings, and various public institutions to the Art Museum. Here, catty-corner to City Hall, is Love Park. Like most public space it has been used for purposes not intended by its designers and hotly contested over the decades. Originally, the park was planned as a fitting terminus to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Built in the

late 1960s atop an underground parking garage, it was dedicated as a memorial to the late President John F. Kennedy. The plaza gets its name from the sculpture *LOVE*, by Robert Indiana, which was placed there for the U.S. bicentennial in 1976. Its removal in 1978 provoked such public outcry that the chairman of the Philadelphia Art Commission bought and reinstalled it that same year as a “gift to the city.”

The place flourished for a decade or more, but then went through ups and downs as the fortunes of Center City fluctuated, despite the high hopes of urban developers. Adjacent to Suburban Station, it is a space where streetwise urban dwellers would not venture at night, as reports of murder, muggings, and incivility are all too common there, in what is essentially a kind of no-man’s land in the middle of Philadelphia’s downtown. Originally, black children from the local neighborhoods came there to play the game of double Dutch jump rope. In the 1980s skateboarders frequented the plaza for its attractive smooth surfaces and curving steps, and in the 1990s some of its stars made it famous by winning professional skateboarding competitions. In 2001–2002, the park hosted the X Games, which were televised internationally. When the games ended, Mayor John Street tried to enforce the existing ban on skateboarding on public property and had the park renovated to be less hospitable to skateboarders. When this policy became an issue in his reelection campaign, he promised to build an alternative skate park, but nothing seems to have been done.

An organization and website, Free LOVE Park, advocates its restoration for skateboarders. Its website asks, “Where has the LOVE gone?” The park still plays a civic role on occasion. It is the main site for political rallies in the city, and every four years the Democratic Party’s presidential candidates speak to large and diverse crowds. The water in the fountain is often dyed to mark special occasions: pink for breast cancer awareness month; blue for police officers killed in the line of duty; red for the Phillies’ 2008 World Series victory. On nice days it functions as a cosmopolitan canopy. People pursue their own particular pastimes, from youthful skateboarders to chess players young and old. Interracial groups of people eat lunch and engage in urban sociability. No one group claims this public space; the urbanites who congregate here understand that they and others are always welcome.

At lunchtime on weekdays, small groups of white corporate types walk around, apparently on their way to a restaurant or back to their offices, often with a lone black person among them. This phenomenon is common, but not the reverse; I have never observed a group of black professionals with a lone white one. The social interactions that involve these well-educated, well-heeled, and often sharply dressed black men are especially interesting ethnographically. Black professionals and executives in white-dominated corporations are at once members of an elite class and of a historically stigmatized group. They occupy an in-between position, incorporated into the professional class but not entirely at home there. Many are expected to “represent the race” to the elite and represent management to black subordinates. Yet they are sometimes mistaken for their poor and marginalized cousins from the ghetto. Awareness of this common predicament links anonymous black professionals in predominantly white public settings. When I pass by a black man alone among his white colleagues, he gives me a knowing look, or even greets me; the others are unaware that we’ve just had a privileged ethnic communication.

In other intimate interior spaces that range from quasi-public to semiprivate, the canopy effect is a matter of degree. At Broad and Chestnut streets, for a long time, a jazz bar exhibited qualities once intimate and public. Here’s how I described it in my journal:

After descending the steps off Broad Street down into Zanzibar Blue, you feel as though you have entered a dark inner sanctum, an underground world of live music, food,

liquor, and a cosmopolitan mix of people who have in common a certain appreciation of jazz. On the left is a bar with a few people sitting around, sipping their drinks and nodding to the smooth beat. As your eyes slowly adjust to the gloom, little candlelit lamps become visible atop neat rows of four-top tables with blood-red tablecloths. You then encounter two hefty black bouncers in dark suits. They engage the visitor with small talk while checking him out to see what his business is, especially if he is a stranger dressed in dark clothes, though here everything has a dark hue.

Over in the corner sits a dark-skinned black man engaging his brown-skinned honey; his gold-rimmed glasses sparkle, capturing and reflecting the scarce light. Nearer the bandstand, nine black women gather to honor a friend on her birthday—as becomes apparent later on when the waiter delivers a small cake with two candles on top. On the other side, facing the bandstand, another black couple enjoys a meal while waiting for the set to begin. The maitre d' shows another black man and me to a table, first a two-top but then a four-top that we accept more happily. We both order Delta catfish, Cokes, and bread to keep us until the meal arrives. We talk. More people slowly appear. A young, white, professional-looking couple sits behind us. In a while, to our right, another; and in fifteen minutes, still another. The place seems to be filling up, though it has a long way to go. This is Sunday night in downtown Philly. Our Cokes and bread arrive, and we sip and nibble and talk, taking in more of the scene.

The band is now set up: a cool-looking white man on guitar, a black Muslim with a coofee (cap) on sax, a small brown-skinned man on drums, and the leader, a muscular, baldheaded black man, on bass. The leader opens with the usual introductions. To start the first set, he makes fun of straying black men and their family responsibilities while pleading for the audience not to be too judgmental—“give a brother some slack because he always comes home.” Chuckles come from the audience, the blacks perhaps “getting it” more than the whites. The combo plays. Naturally, the sounds are smooth, melodious, stark, and loud. People go into conscious listening and watching mode, as they are here to see the show—and it's quite a show.

A show is being put on by the clientele as well as by the combo. People observe one another, watching how others react to the sounds. When a player works especially hard to bring out an unusual or seemingly difficult but appealing sound, the audience collectively agrees to give the player some recognition—applause, that is. And when the guitar player makes a sound not commonly associated with the guitar, members of the audience clap spontaneously, almost on cue. It is particularly interesting when the blacks clap enthusiastically for the white player. Everyone notices. People here are aware of each other but at the same time anonymous. They feel a sense of community while they are here, and then they move on.

Another intimate setting is the off-track betting establishment, located on Market, near Seventeenth.

Here a diversity of people gathers, for the ostensible purpose of betting on the horses. Located in the center of downtown, the setting is quite accessible to the various ethnic neighborhoods of the city, by car or by public transportation. Upon approaching this space, you must make your way through a throng of pedestrians, your progress depending

on the time of day and, of course, the weather. As might be expected, the crowd that gathers in this parlor is a diverse collection of people reminiscent of a Damon Runyon short story.

After entering one Saturday afternoon, Acel, a black friend of mine, and I make our way downstairs to find the betting emporium. The air is dank and heavy with smoke, from both cigars and cigarettes, and leaves even nonsmokers' clothing reeking, especially on summer days. The space underground is in marked contrast to the bright sunlight of the street. The arrangement is unique: TV monitors line the walls, and the clientele sits transfixed, all eyes on the monitors, as they track the horses and their bets in the comfort of a space they have made their own. Here they can sit back and enjoy a cold one or a smoke without worrying about offending anyone. While betting is supposedly the main purpose for coming here, the atmosphere itself is a significant draw. All kinds of people are present, including characters who appear to have come through the school of hard knocks as well as others who seem more genteel. It is a racially and ethnically mixed crowd of people who hail from the nearby Irish, Italian, and African American neighborhoods. Throughout the afternoon men and women sit in their seats against the wall or at the bar, smoking and drinking, talking and laughing with other regulars, or making fast friends of people they've just met. Here people bet on possibility, and the charge they get from the visit is most often deemed to be worth the cost.

Moving on south down to Sixteenth Street, we enter the heart of the Center City business district. Here the crowds of executives and office workers ebb and flow with the time of day. The streets are rather narrow and the high-rises shoot straight up, forming deep urban canyons. At 9:00 a.m. the streets are teeming with people who scurry about Center City from their parking garages, from public transportation, or, increasingly, straight from their in-town homes. After the initial surge things quiet down for the rest of the morning. At noon they rev up again, as people spill out of the office buildings and converge on the eateries, or venture into the parks and squares to enjoy their lunch with friends and colleagues. The pattern is repeated in the afternoon; the sidewalks are relatively unpopulated until 4:00 p.m., when they begin to fill with people on their way home or to evening engagements. On weekends these streets are quiet, and many of the otherwise bustling lunch places are closed.

Four blocks west and two blocks south of City Hall is the prestigious Rittenhouse Square area with its hotels, boutiques, and upscale restaurants. Purveyors of gourmet meals and luxury goods are interspersed with establishments offering moderately priced necessities. Sidewalk cafés have come into vogue. Some draw a tony clientele, others an assortment ranging from university students to young professionals and office workers of all races. Here lunch is a more leisurely affair that includes a sizable helping of socializing. People congregate here after work, too, often drawn by the promise of encounters with members of the opposite sex. This attractive young crowd contributes to the interesting mix of street life. So do the nannies and the well-heeled homeboys who shop at Net, an expensive retailer whose clothes appeal to young hipsters, including drug dealers.

Just down the street is Brooks Brothers, a long-established, conservative clothier catering to young professionals, black as well as white. Tweeter, an electronics store, was also on this stretch and attracted a mixed group of customers. Street life in and around Rittenhouse Square includes the occasional homeless person, although some who look homeless on closer inspection are found not to be; they may be mentally ill and have a place of residence, but present themselves on the street in the seemingly aimless manner of the homeless. Easily confused with the destitute, they wander about the

streets alongside the homeboys, professionals, and suburbanites. Immigrants are also in evidence. Traversing these public spaces, we overhear many different languages—including Spanish, Russian, Polish, Hebrew, Chinese, and Somali—as people speak to one another or to someone near or far away via cell phone. Everyone takes these conversations for granted as part of ordinary life. Paying “civil inattention,”⁹ pedestrians may pretend not to notice what others say, but in reality they consciously or unconsciously watch and enjoy eavesdropping and taking in whatever snippets of conversations they can understand.

Around the corner from Rittenhouse Square between Seventeenth and Eighteenth, a McDonald's frequented by locals is nestled between two buildings in the middle of the block. Like other establishments in the area, it experiences periodic surges of patrons who use this space in ways peculiar to their needs. On most mornings it serves as a gathering spot for the elderly of the neighborhood, at least some of whom are well-heeled. They congregate for breakfast, or sometimes just for coffee, but mainly they socialize. Many are proud regulars whose conversations feature the doings of their children and grandchildren. After sitting around for a couple of hours, they leave just before the lunch rush and are replaced by noisy young students from the nearby schools. Through the morning these elders sometimes vie for space with the homeless, as the staff works to figure out who is who.

Such goings-on peg this place as a hybrid institution, whose ostensible purpose is providing fast food but which also serves as a site for slow-paced sociability. The Barnes & Noble bookstore up the street in the next block serves a similar hybrid purpose. The homeless and mentally ill are present there, too, although they may try to pass themselves off as normal. They sit at the tables in the café for hours, engrossed in books and magazines, hoping to pass the inspection of employees charged with keeping an eye on everyone, but especially on the homeless. In inclement weather employees may tolerate these unwanted visitors, whom they are able to spot in a minute by citing their appearance and, at times, their odor. The staff acknowledges that a game is going on, as the store serves as a hangout for people who sometimes buy little or nothing; they opt to enforce the rules sporadically, in response to problems they observe among customers.

Rittenhouse Square occupies a slightly enlarged city block from Eighteenth to Nineteenth and Walnut to Locust. The most successful and prestigious of William Penn's original squares, Rittenhouse Square boasts old shade trees, exotic plantings, elegant entrances, and self-conscious civilized behavior. The park itself has many uses; the activities carried on there are as varied as the people who engage in them. This urban green space not only serves as a backyard for the high-rise apartment buildings in the surrounding neighborhood but attracts people from all over Center City and various other parts of Philadelphia.

On nice days people from all walks of life inhabit the park. Old men of any color or ethnicity play chess or checkers; elderly white women and men promenade, some escorted by their black home health aides. Young people play Frisbee, lounge on park benches, and sunbathe or nap on the grass. One or two students from the Curtis Institute of Music across the street are playing music, their instrument cases open on the pavement in front of them as people cock their heads to listen or simply stop for a while, sometimes throwing coins or even bills into the cases. Dogs, with their owners in tow, have a field day. The homeless, the mentally ill, the well-to-do, students, black homeboys, bicycle messengers, office workers, and businesspeople are all here, observing the show and, for the most part, not only getting along but thriving on one another's energy.

In the square, children are ever present. After decades of losing families to the suburbs, over the past ten or fifteen years Center City has been attracting them. Increased investment, ten-year tax

abatements on new homes, and improvements to the infrastructure drew suburbanites, especially younger families, back into the city, producing a more varied mix of people who make use of the square. "Billy" the goat, a small metal sculpture located in the southwest corner of the park, attracts young children and their parents. Many simply hang out, whiling away the afternoon. Some make daily pilgrimage to this spot, allowing their charges access to the goat and a chance to socialize with other children. The children squeal and climb all over the structure, while their parents chat. The goat has become a gathering place for families who meet as strangers and may strike up conversations and eventually friendships. Today a wide range of people call Center City home: affluent immigrants, the urban middle class, empty nesters, African Americans formerly of North Philadelphia, ethnic whites from South Philadelphia and other nearby neighborhoods, and students who attend the University of Pennsylvania, Temple University, the Curtis Institute, the University of the Arts, or the Academy of Fine Arts.

Here they find a sense of community as they go about their business, talking, eating, sitting on the benches, or strolling about. The park is also home to hustlers of legal and illegal wares and spiritual proselytizers. Some carry on group activities and may try to recruit people to join them. A battle for space is going on between the poorer people who used to frequent the place and the more affluent residents, new and old, with the police acting as their agents. In the days of decline the police were more tolerant of the homeless and other poor people who slept on benches or spent their days panhandling or just hanging out in and around the square. Now they discourage them, although not in an acrimonious way. It is significant that the affluent are prevailing here. Generally when the poor and homeless invade an area, the affluent give it up, but here the middle and upper classes, who are predominantly white, are standing firm and even taking back Center City from the black poor and the homeless who staked claims on steam vents and doorways throughout the downtown area. There is still, however, a residue of the former time in a peculiar turn taking that occurs in the use of space in the area. In the morning the crowd is quite diverse. By midday the white middle class becomes predominant. At night the area becomes darker in hue. These fluctuating tones might be seen simply as matters of degree, for the night also brings out white people. Increasing restaurants that compete with eateries in Old City ring the square. On Eighteenth Street, Devon and Rouge serve lunch and dinner and are also hot spots for nightlife.

Leaving the square, we walk up Walnut Street to the Schuylkill River, the western boundary of William Penn's original city, and across the bridge to West Philadelphia. Facing the river on the other side and to the north along Market Street is the Thirtieth Street Station. The grand waiting room is filled with people from up and down the eastern seaboard. Many travel between Philadelphia and New York and Washington, some commuting regularly, others making the trip occasionally for business or pleasure. At the same time, the station handles a huge number of daily commuters from the Philadelphia suburbs. Most of these folks are white, but increasing numbers of them are black. Among them are lawyers, doctors, college students, and office workers bound for businesses located in Philadelphia proper.

When they arrive, many transit riders make their way to the coffee shops for a bite before work. The Thirtieth Street Station offers a few commercial amenities: a flower shop in the corner, a shoeshine stand against the wall, even a common area where tables invite coffee drinkers. Nearby is the bookstore and newsstand, where any number of regional and national newspapers can be found. All these people are thrown together and enjoy a kind of comity and goodwill, or at least civility for the moment, until they go on their way to work, to school, or to other appointments. If they choose to wait here, they must sit on one of the many smooth wooden benches alongside complete strangers.

Choosing a seat requires observation and thought, so that you sit next to someone who won't be a bother. People read the paper or a book; some simply stare into space; others pay civil inattention. Many more are on the move toward a connecting trolley underground, and a few choose to walk to their local destination.

After we walk past the memorial angel statue and through the double doors at the east end of the station, we encounter the taxi queue outside. The line is populated predominantly by white, middle-class business and professional people who are headed to Center City or the university area.

Walking west, we pass through the area commonly known as University City. The University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University have become the predominant presences here. The cosmopolitan feel of Center City reaches into this neighborhood, but only as far as Fifty-Second Street, where you would be hard-pressed on any given day to find more than a handful of whites or others who are not African American. Residents and those using the streets and parks and businesses here are largely working class; many trace their ancestors to the plantations of the Deep South. Today the children and grandchildren of these southern migrants remember what West Philadelphia was like years ago. There is a history of invasion and succession, the classic process first identified by the Chicago sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess.¹⁰ Essentially, as blacks moved into a neighborhood, the whites who predated them there moved out. The process was sometimes gradual, in other cases quite rapid, but the pattern and the result were almost always the same.

As these communities changed from white to black, city services declined, and the withdrawal of resources contributed to the deterioration of the neighborhood. Deindustrialization left in its wake widespread unemployment and service jobs that seldom paid a living wage. Banks and insurance companies redlined the black neighborhoods, and upwardly mobile blacks ultimately moved out. Then, from a malign combination of the decline in available employment and the persistence of racial discrimination, black poverty became ever more concentrated and entrenched. The underground economy of hustling and drug dealing was left to pick up the slack. The authorities, particularly the police, paid scant attention and sometimes abused the victims themselves. The criminal justice system came to be viewed as arbitrary, ineffective, and unworthy of trust. Street justice emerged in the place of civil law, and reputation and street credibility became increasingly important for feeling safe and secure in one's own community.¹¹ The use of weapons for self-protection

spread from criminal perpetrators to potential victims, generating a self-reinforcing spiral of fear and mayhem and fueling the negative image of the iconic black ghetto.

Where Market Street intersects Fifty-Second Street is a classic strip found in every city with a black ghetto of any size. Colloquially referred to as "the Street" or "the Block," in Chicago it is Cottage Grove; in Gary it is Broadway; in Memphis it is Beale. The Street is famous and its reputation is widespread. The historic bright-light district of the segregated black community, it is where things are "really happening," where those "in the know" know where to go, where the best nightlife in the city is reputed to be found. As the hippest street in town, it is derisively referred to as part of the chitlin' circuit, where authentic blues and jazz clubs operate with marginal, if any, white involvement with their presentation or proceeds.

At the end of Market Street, continuing west, we reach the city limits. A concentrated black presence spreads in both directions, north and south. The area to the south, formerly the site of heavy industry and manufacturing plants, is in the throes of deindustrialization; the nearby airport does not make up the difference. It had once been a working-class white area, but as whites fled, the district became black and poorer as well.

Most of Philadelphia's working-class neighborhoods have particular racial-ethnic identities. The

city remains, for the most part, a patchwork of racially distinct neighborhoods, and its residents have an exquisite sense of who does and who does not belong. When people hear that a man comes from Kensington, West Philly, or Chestnut Hill, for example, they will often classify him according to the cognitive map of local ethnic geography as Irish, African American, or WASP. The most powerfully imagined neighborhood is the iconic black ghetto, or “the ’hood,” often associated in the minds of outsiders with poverty, crime, and violence. This icon is by definition a figment of the imagination of those with little or no direct experience with the ghetto or contact with those who live there, and yet when a black person navigates spaces outside the ghetto, those he encounters very often make reference to this residential area in order to make sense of him, although their interpretation is often erroneous. Even middle-class African Americans outside of the helping professions may have limited knowledge of the texture and rhythms of life inside these isolated neighborhoods. Still, like that whites and recent immigrants, their sense of group position is strongly affected by their perspective of the imagined ghetto.¹²

Nevertheless, as we have seen in this chapter’s virtual walk from Philadelphia’s eastern boundary at the Delaware River to as far west as the Thirtieth Street Station, racial separateness is not the city’s only story. In some public spaces all kinds of people coexist and have learned to get along at times unself-consciously. Along this central spine of Market Street and at other places, too, are cosmopolitan canopies where people of differing racial and cultural types not only share space but seek out each other’s presence. In other places, by contrast, they behave in ways that appear to challenge the cosmopolitanism of the Center City.

I now turn to those canopies, in order to explore them more fully and to understand better how they work their magic.

2. The Reading Terminal: A Cosmopolitan Canopy

Occupying a full city block in Center City Philadelphia, the Reading Terminal Market is composed of numerous shops, restaurants, and kiosks that offer an array of goods and services. In this highly diverse setting all kinds of people shop, eat, and stroll. Adjacent to the new Convention Center, it is centrally located among downtown office buildings and upscale condominiums but not far from white, working-class Kensington and black North Philadelphia. The Terminal building itself, an enormous former train shed, has been part of Philadelphia for more than a century. In the 1990s, when the Convention Center complex was designed and built, the space for the market was kept more or less intact. Many longtime customers feared that it would become simply an upscale tourist attraction, a food court more than a market, but so far the look of the place has more or less stayed the same, and it continues to draw residents from local neighborhoods, including professionals from Center City as well as Irish, Italian, Asian, and African Americans from Philadelphia's ethnic enclaves. Virtually all racial groups are well represented at Reading Terminal, but not in even proportions. On average, about 35 percent of the people there are black, about 10 to 15 percent are Asian and other people of color, and the rest are white, whether WASP or ethnic. The visual, impressionistic makeup of the place is that it is mostly white and middle class with a healthy mixture of people of color.

The Terminal is a colorful place, full of hustle and bustle. Food is a major theme; its pervasive smells invite tasting. The shops are bright and clean, a few adorned with neon lights. Some of the craft shops have been carrying more expensive pieces aimed at tourists. But the grocery stalls still offer fresh produce and meat direct from Lancaster County farms, fish, seafood, and a wide array of fruits and vegetables; these stalls are interspersed with others selling flowers, health supplements, tea, coffee, spices, books, and crafts. A number of businesses are family owned. Amish farm families are in strong presence in the market; their traditional dress adds an exotic element, while their high-quality home-grown meats and vegetables are affordable as well as delectable. Asian families are also well represented, selling all kinds of fresh fish and produce. Blacks own only a few businesses here, including an African crafts shop that sells masks, beads, and other adornments. Delilah's provides delicious African American cuisine, or "soul food." Among the other eateries are a Thai place, an oyster bar, a French bakery, a Jewish bakery, a juice bar, a beer garden, and a cookie company, making the Terminal a particularly busy place at lunchtime.

Equally striking is the diversity of workers and the general comity with which they interact. For example, black men work for the German butcher with apparent easygoing demeanor and attitude. Some of the white-owned businesses even have black cashiers, which would have been rare or nonexistent not too many years ago. The customers, too, seem to be on their best behavior. People appear relaxed and are often observed interacting across the color line. The clientele at the many food counters represents various classes, races, and ethnicities. A black businessman can be seen talking on his cell phone. Hispanic construction workers are relaxing on their lunch break. This is a calm environment of equivalent, symmetrical relationships—a respite from the streets outside.

The Terminal has always been known as a place where anyone could expect civility. In the days when blacks never knew what treatment they would be given in public, they could come to the Terminal and know they would not be hassled.¹ The ambience has always been comfortable and inviting. Perhaps the focus on food is a reason for this, suggesting a kind of multiethnic festival. On any given day, one might see a Chinese woman eating pizza, a white businessman enjoying collard greens and fried chicken, or an Italian family lunching on sushi. When diverse people are eating on another's food, a social good is performed for those observing. As people become intimate through such shared experiences, some barriers can be broken. The many lunch counters encourage strangers to interact, as they rub elbows while eating. At certain counters in particular, talking with strangers seems to be the norm. One woman told me, "You cannot get people to shut up." The Terminal is a neutral space in which people who behave civilly, whatever their ethnicity, usually will not be scrutinized, as would likely happen in the city's ethnic neighborhoods if an unknown person were to pass through. In those neighborhoods taking keen notice of strangers is the first line of defense, but the Terminal is not defended in this manner.

Multiple sets of doors on three sides of the market are used from morning to late afternoon, six days a week. Upon entering from any side, you are met by shoppers; diners; unobtrusive security guards, both black and white; retired people; teenagers who hang out with their friends; twentysomethings who come to meet friends and potential romantic partners; homeless people who gravitate to the market for shelter, food, and the unhindered use of public bathrooms; and business executives and workers from nearby office buildings who make up the lunch crowd. Wholesome sandwiches or full-plate lunches can be bought at a reasonable price and consumed quickly on the premises or taken out. At one buffet, you can get a hot meal of collard greens, chicken, sausage, roast beef, and salad for around eight dollars. Working people and retirees on fixed incomes take advantage of this bargain, at times meeting their old friends and making new ones. For instance:

Maxine Little,² an eighty-four-year-old black woman who lives alone in Germantown, takes the bus down Germantown Avenue almost daily "just to see what's going on." She typically arrives and walks around the market, has her lunch at Tootsie's Salad Bar, sees what she can see. Sometimes she encounters a "friend" or someone to talk with. After lunch she catches the bus and heads back up the avenue. Mrs. Little is an invalid, who moves about the Terminal with the aid of a walker—for her, the Terminal is an important social center.

At this cafeteria-style diner located inside the Terminal, strangers sit at the counter and eat together, watching the passing Terminal traffic and goings-on. Often the people who come for lunch are elderly and living on fixed incomes. They hail from many different parts of Philadelphia, but come here to eat a hot meal and to socialize with whoever is available. For some, lunching here is a critical part of a daily routine. Some journey to the Terminal just for this one meal—a smorgasbord of eats presented in buffet style for eight dollars. That is sometimes the only meal of the day for Mrs. Little, though she may "pick up some fruit" from one of the green grocers. The workers at the various stalls all know her and look forward to her visits; when she fails to show up, they grow concerned. She knows they care for her and feels valued.

Along the market's back wall, near the restrooms, black shoeshine men work and socialize, keeping up with one another. They share personal stories and seem always ready for a good laugh.

Italians, Jews, Asians, and blacks sit nearby, snacking on baked goods and coffee while enjoying melodious piano sounds played live for tips. The municipal courthouse is within a short walk, and occasionally people appear for lunch with “Juror” stickers affixed to their clothing. There is always a scene to be part of and to observe here.

Under the canopy people relax their guard, although not completely. They look more directly at others as they observe the goings-on, and they move about with a greater sense of security. As they stroll up and down the aisles, stopping at the shops and kiosks to examine what is for sale and perhaps make purchases, they experience other people up close, and they generally seem to extend their trust to others. There is little cause for worry or alarm. People stop and buy items or just walk around “getting into the mix” and enjoying “being out and about.” Sometimes they spontaneously greet one another, verbally or with gestures; some bump into friends, who may well hang out here on a regular basis. A feeling of being involved with the others who are present here emerges, creating a remarkable atmosphere.

On a rainy Tuesday afternoon in October, I was enjoying a bowl of oyster soup at Pearl’s Oyster Bar in the Reading Terminal Market. About eight people sat around the bar eating a late lunch, or having drinks with their friends. Seated across from the main entrance that looks out on a busy street of Center City, and glad to be out of the rain, by turns I sipped my soup, read the local paper, and observed the comings and goings of the clientele. Suddenly, a signature event occurred. An elderly black woman aided by a walker appeared at the entrance of the Terminal and began to negotiate the heavy double doors. Clearly she was having trouble. At noontime, when the heavy traffic flows in and out, she would have had little trouble entering the building, but in the late afternoon things are quieter, the traffic is settled down, and the doors are often closed. Before I could offer assistance, a young white man with strawberry-blond hair and dressed in construction clothes who was dining with a friend sprang to his feet and offered the old woman a hand, helping her through the large doors. Once she and her bags were safely inside, I overheard him ask, “Are you alright? You OK?” He wondered whether he could be of further assistance. “Yes, son, thank you,” she murmured, as she ambled off down one of the aisles of the Terminal. As I looked around, I saw that everyone’s eyes were on this interaction, a model of public race relations characteristic of the Reading Terminal. The young man seemed to know that all eyes were on them, as he looked back at the woman a few times, completing his “performance.” Then, as quickly as this incident began, it was over. But it likely made an impression on observers and, for the moment, reinforced the public definition of affairs in this space: kindness and civility were the order of the day, regardless of color, gender, or age.

The cosmopolitan canopy that seems to extend over the Reading Terminal Market can be divided into large, impersonal zones and more intimate ones, the former being somewhat off-putting and the latter socially more encouraging. In the more intimate settings within the canopy, such as the Down Home Diner counter, people often feel welcome and secure enough to relax, even to the point of engaging complete strangers in conversation. In these circumstances people carry on their business but also formulate or reformulate their ideas about others with whom they share this public space.

When taking a seat at the Down Home Diner, indeed at any coffee bar or lunch counter, people feel they have a license to speak with others and others have a license to speak with them.³ C

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