

***Crook Manifesto*, by Colson Whitehead**

Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy

Colson Whitehead's new crime caper, *Crook Manifesto*, is the much-anticipated sequel to his bestselling novel, *Harlem Shuffle*. Once again, Harlem furniture salesman Ray Carney takes center stage.

Crook Manifesto begins in 1971, a few years after *Harlem Shuffle* leaves off. Ray Carney, proprietor of Carney's Furniture on 125th Street, has been on the "straight and narrow for four years of honest and rewarding work in home furnishings." In his youth, Ray, the son of the late Big Mike Carney, a Harlem hoodlum, was caught up in his father's shady dealings. Now a solid family man, Ray and his wife Elizabeth reside in Strivers' Row, an elegant section of Harlem, with their two kids, John and May.

Anyone who lived in New York City in the grimy 1970s will appreciate Whitehead's atmospheric rendering of the City in crisis—sanitation strikes, graffiti, muggings. And those sirens: "Business, orderly business, unfolded inside the walls of Carney's Furniture, but out on the street it was Harlem rules: rowdy, unpredictable. The sirens zipped up and down the avenues as regularly as subway trains, all hours, per calamity's timetable."

Ray's days of respectability, alas, were numbered when the Jackson 5 were booked in Madison Square Garden. His teenage daughter May had her heart set on going, but no tickets were available. Ray called a contact with dubious connections. And just like that, Ray Carney unwittingly was pulled back into the game.

Several characters return in *Crook Manifesto*, including corrupt Detective Munson and actress Lucinda Cole. It's Pepper—Big Mike's former crime crony—however, who steals every scene. Pepper, "a six-foot frown molded by black magic into human form," is a frequent guest at the Carney home, where the kids call him Uncle Pepper. He disapproves of places with only one way out, and his personal code demands that he "doesn't work with dopeheads and never knocks over a bank on a Tuesday." As Pepper tells a client, "A man has a hierarchy of crime, of what is morally acceptable and what is not, a crook manifesto."

Reflective of the turbulent 1970s, *Crook Manifesto* is grittier and more violent than *Harlem Shuffle*. While Whitehead's searing social satire may not appeal to everyone, fans of his masterful storytelling (including this reviewer) eagerly await the trilogy's final novel, which will depict Ray Carney in the 1980s. "Harlem was the same place it had always been," Pepper muses near the end of *Crook Manifesto*. "It's the people who come and go, and the buildings. But Harlem never budes."