



Testify

POEMS BY

Douglas Manuel

An interrogation on race in America that feigns no easy answers. In these poems Manuel crafts spaces that seek steady reconciliation between past and present, self and family, faith and skepticism. As racial tensions heighten across the country, *Testify* offers an introspection rather than voicing a movement, arguing that individual experience is key to understanding the truth of the trials at hand.

A book of elegiac ambivalence, *Testify's* speaker often finds himself trapped between received binaries: black and white, ghetto and suburban, atheism and Catholicism. In many ways, this work is a Bildungsroman detailing the maturation of a black man raised in the crack-laden 1980s, with hip-hop, jazz, and blues as its soundtrack. Rendered with keen attention to the economic decline of the Midwest due to the departure of the automotive industry, this book portrays the speaker wrestling with his city's demise, family relationships, interracial love, and notions of black masculinity. Never letting anyone, including the speaker off the hook, *Testify* refuses sentimentality and didacticism and dwells in a space of uncertainty, where meaning and identity are messy, complicated, and multivalent.

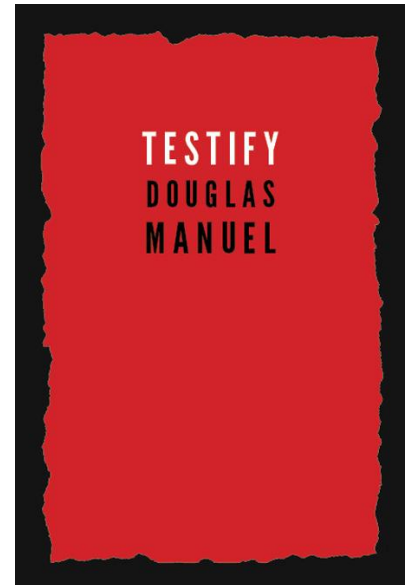
ADVANCE PRAISE

"In his breathtaking debut, *Testify*, Douglas Manuel charts the raw emotional complexities and the impossible daily reckonings that confront a young black man coming of age today in America. Faced at every turn with condescending, fixed assumptions about his 'proper' role in his community and culture, the speaker faces each indictment with a stunning and searing intelligence. Each powerful testimony in this collection stands as evidence of an eloquent and dramatic new voice in American poetry."

—David St. John, author of *The Auroras* and *Study for the World's Body*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Douglas Manuel was born in Anderson, Indiana. He received a BA in Creative Writing from Arizona State University and a MFA from Butler University where he was the Managing Editor of *Booth a Journal*. He is currently a Middleton and Dornsife Fellow at the University of Southern California where he is pursuing a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing. He was a recipient of the Chris McCarthy Scholarship for the Napa Valley Writers' Conference and has been the Poetry Editor for Gold Line Press as well as was one of the Managing Editors of Ricochet Editions. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Rhino*, *North American Review*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Many Mountains Moving* and elsewhere.



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FROM TESTIFY

Mic Drop

Grandma's grave remains unmarked. It was me
who was supposed to buy her headstone.

After finding out her plot was still uncrowned,
I promised.

I promised to give dad my truck.
I promised to quit smoking, to say sorry more.

My apologies as bare as the stretch of land above her.
Promised I'd send my brother fifty dollars. Promised

I'd holla at my auntie at least once a month.
In the restlessness night gives,
I saw Mounds State Park,

the pavilion filled with every broken promise
congregating as though this was a church revival.

Mother and father both walking as though their legs
were never lost.

Me at a podium, with a microphone:
I'm sorry. I am so sorry.

My act of contrition
interrupted by voices. My past and future selves loudest

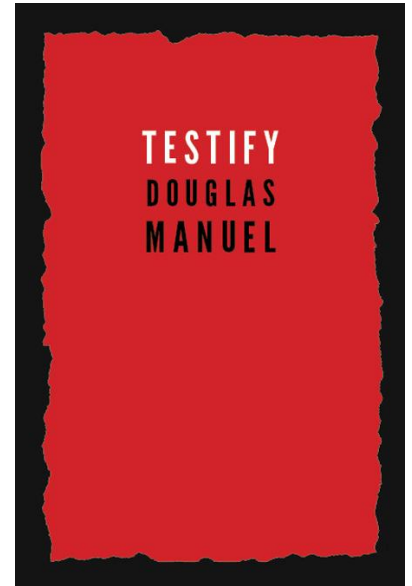
of all. They offer punishments: *Lashings? Guillotine?*
Electric chair? The noose? Banishment? Stones?

To get out of there I had to become Father Bob,
the holiest man I ever saw in flesh. Mirror to face,

I am him, aquiline nose, crow-claw eyebrows, skin
yellowed around eyes and joints.

We do the magic trick

he always did. He pulls my thumb
off, and after a quick smoker's cough, puts it back.



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