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Markets Of Sorrow, Labors Of Faith: New Orleans In The Wake Of Katrina



Synopsis

Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith is an ethnographic account of long-term recovery in post-Katrina New Orleans. It is also a sobering exploration of the privatization of vital social services under market-driven governance. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, public agencies subcontracted disaster relief to private companies that turned the humanitarian work of recovery into lucrative business. These enterprises profited from the very suffering that they failed to ameliorate, producing a second-order disaster that exacerbated inequalities based on race and class and leaving residents to rebuild almost entirely on their own. Filled with the often desperate voices of residents who returned to New Orleans, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith* describes the human toll of disaster capitalism and the affect economy it has produced. While for-profit companies delayed delivery of federal resources to returning residents, faith-based and nonprofit groups stepped in to rebuild, compelled by the moral pull of charity and the emotional rewards of volunteer labor. Adams traces the success of charity efforts, even while noting an irony of neoliberalism, which encourages the very same for-profit companies to exploit these charities as another market opportunity. In so doing, the companies profit not once but twice on disaster.

Book Information

Paperback: 248 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books (March 4, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822354497

ISBN-13: 978-0822354499

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #327,702 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #121 in [Books > Science & Math > Earth Sciences > Atmospheric Sciences](#) #820 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Urban](#) #1021 in [Books > History > Americas > Native American](#)

Customer Reviews

"Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith is public anthropology at its finest. Vincanne Adams has written a devastating portrait of market failure in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and a cautionary tale about what might happen if the private sector takes charge of the welfare state." —Eric Klinenberg, author of *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* "Everybody's disaster is somebody's

good luck. As disaster capitalism becomes an ever larger segment of the post-climate-change economy, New Orleans provides a fundamental case history. *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith* describes in damning detail what happens to the social contract when disaster means profit, with the markup paid in human suffering. Meanwhile, churches, charities, and volunteers add up to a big business of unpaid work. Vincanne Adams's feeling for how the soulful people of New Orleans created their own recoveries comes through on every page." —Ned Sublette, author of *The World That Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* "Vincanne Adams has given us a brilliant and poignant ethnographic account of post-Katrina New Orleans. This is an ambitious intervention not only in how we understand the iconic 'disaster' that is Katrina but also in how we understand neoliberalism writ large. Adams breaks new ground by showing how the making of market rule is entangled with endeavors of relief, humanitarianism, charity, welfare, and faith. This is not just the story of New Orleans; it is the story of aid and development everywhere. *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith* is thus a model for social scientific inquiry in the twenty-first century." —Ananya Roy, author of *Poverty Capital: Microfinance and the Making of Development* "Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith offers a nuanced, sophisticated and long-term account of the misery faced by New Orleans residents in the years after the Hurricane Katrina disaster of 2005. . . . Adams's rich description, plethora of personal interviews and close-knit observations provide insight into the impact of Hurricane Katrina in bringing to the forefront of debate the basic social, environmental and economic vulnerabilities that characterise US society." (Kevin Fox Gotham *Gotham Times Higher Education*) "This work helpfully describes how not to handle a recovery. Recommended not only for Gulf Coast collections, but also for academic libraries supporting programs in public administration or emergency preparedness." (Sonnet Ireland *Library Journal*) "Adams recounts heartbreaking stories of people stonewalled by Road Home, beset by depression and suicide, living rooms full of paperwork, still waiting for money promised to them. . . . In concert with the rest of the study, the two chapters on Road Home represent a true triumph of the potential of politically informed ethnography." (Thomas Jessen Adams *American Quarterly*) "[T]his cautionary tale from New Orleans provides intellectual tools for those who want to build 'another world' where meeting human need, not profit, becomes society's organizing principle." (John Arena *Journal of Anthropological Research*) "In the practice of public administration, we remain accountable for the responsibilities of government and the practice of public management. Transparency is paramount if the victims who become the consumers of aid relief are to retain faith in the equity and ethics of the process of crisis recovery. *Markets of Sorrow,*

Labors of Faith is a book recommended for scholars and practitioners exploring the ethical dilemmas surrounding public management in the face of disaster. – (Nicole L. Cline Public Integrity) – “This is public anthropology at its best, not only addressing core topics of our discipline but also illuminating social, economic and political issues that concern us all. – (Stephan Kloos Social Anthropology)

Vincanne Adams is Professor of Medical Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology, History and Social Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. She has written and edited numerous books in medical anthropology, including *Sex and Development: Science, Sexuality and Morality in Global Perspective* (coedited with Stacy Leigh Pigg) also published by Duke University Press.

Arrived in a sealed package.

As a Katrina survivor born and raised in St. Bernard Parish, ByWater (not "the" ByWater), Marigny (not "the" Marigny) and the French Quarter - this book is chockfull of misinformation. Don't have a clue who she spoke to - but for example - there is no way Katrina water sat for 3 weeks. We would not have been allowed by in on our "3 week look and leave" if we still had 9' of water in our houses. The water sat for ONE WEEK, the LA Nat'l Guard had to dispose of corpses (both human and animal), and then they had to clear the streets, so we could get in after 3 weeks to go home and recover what we could. And then we had to leave again. Also, I checked my own highly reliable source who said there were NO PARAMILITARY in St. Bernard Parish with AK47's EVER before, during or after the storm. This comes from a high ranking officer. I couldn't get through the rest of the book, because I was finding way too many lies at the very beginning. I can only imagine elaborate stories inflated after what I read. What's the worst shame in this is that professors are actually using this in their teachings. They may as well had our Novels written by Stephen King. That's about what this amounts too. Grandiose stories not to be believed. Embellishments that do - not - exist.

The book is both academically brilliant and an engaging read; it carries a strong political message (without being ideological) but is also a respectful homage to both the victims and the volunteers affected by Katrina, who deserve their stories - and, more importantly, the truth about Katrina and its aftermath - to be heard. It is one of the best and most sustained critiques I've read on the failure of

neoliberal governance, in this case in the field of disaster recovery. Adams takes the triple man-made disaster of hurricane Katrina (direct storm impact, subsequent floods, and the disaster of "recovery") as an illustrative case study of what happens when governments outsource some of their core responsibilities to private subcontractors, and when a capitalist market logic demands that even humanitarian aid needs to be "profitable". (What happens is that the government, the taxpayer, volunteer helpers and victims alike are exploited by companies whose stock values directly correlate with the suffering of people on the ground.) Adams is a careful writer. She does not make any unsubstantiated claims or engages in fanciful theory here, nor is she propagating any particular political stance (unless honesty and accountability are political stances). Rather, she covers every angle of her analysis with numbers and insightful ethnographic material. The stories of both rich and poor, black and white New Orleansians speak for themselves, as they illustrate the process and logic of how billions of government dollars disappeared in corporate pockets rather than reaching those they were intended for. In my opinion this is one of the best books in public anthropology in the recent years. It deserves to be widely read - especially in the US, but also elsewhere - as a warning and reminder of the bleak future that an unfettered market ideology holds for all of us.

I lived through the recovery of New Orleans, and I can tell you that this book is an excellent account of the suffering unleashed for the "recovery" that wasn't...for tens of thousands of New Orleanians who haven't returned. The evidence of this "recovery" is still sitting on the streets of the city with the thousands of boarded up homes whose owners were never offered the kind of help that actually allows one to rebuild and return. This has also reduced the lot of rental properties, contributing to an immense rise in rentals in the city that "forgot to care". With the demolition of public housing, the failure of the Road Home to help folks rebuild, and with the people of New Orleans almost completely reliant on volunteer labor to rebuild, we have a city now which is lauded by the neoliberals as a model of "resiliency". "Resiliency" is the new code word for "adaptation" to privatized disaster aid rather than dissent and actual recovery. Adams delves deeply into this form of privatized, volunteer aid and uncovers the stink of this "recovery". Well researched, compelling and gut wrenching.

Vincanne Adams combines the heartbreaking, real-life stories of Katrina survivors with the political, governmental, and for-profit agendas that made the "recovery" so difficult for so many. Thoughtful, heartfelt, factual, and compelling, her book is thoroughly researched and carefully documented. More than that, Vincanne makes you feel with and for the people who lived through this huge

American disaster. Ultimately, her book is also about hope and the faith we have in the people in our lives who always step forward to help those of us in need.

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