



Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina

By Vincanne Adams

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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.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*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' 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 *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*)

“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*)

About the Author

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.

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