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Zeitoun



Synopsis

The true story of one family, caught between America's two biggest policy disasters: the war on terror and the response to Hurricane Katrina. Abdulrahman and Kathy Zeitoun run a house-painting business in New Orleans. In August of 2005, as Hurricane Katrina approaches, Kathy evacuates with their four young children, leaving Zeitoun to watch over the business. In the days following the storm he travels the city by canoe, feeding abandoned animals and helping elderly neighbors. Then, on September 6th, police officers armed with M-16s arrest Zeitoun in his home. Told with eloquence and compassion, *Zeitoun* is a riveting account of one family's unthinkable struggle with forces beyond wind and water. A New York Times Notable Book An O, The Oprah Magazine Terrific Read of the Year A Huffington Post Best Book of the Year A New Yorker Favorite Book of the Year A Chicago Tribune Favorite Nonfiction Book of the Year A Kansas City Star Best Book of the Year A San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year An Entertainment Weekly Best Book of the Decade

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Customer Reviews

Through the story of one man's experience after Hurricane Katrina, Eggers draws an indelible picture of Bush-era crisis management. Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a successful Syrian-born painting contractor, decides to stay in New Orleans and protect his property while his family flees. After the levees break, he uses a small canoe to rescue people, before being arrested by an armed squad and swept powerlessly into a vortex of bureaucratic brutality. When a guard accuses him of being a member of Al Qaeda, he sees that race and culture may explain his predicament. Eggers,

compiling his account from interviews, sensibly resists rhetorical grandstanding, letting injustices speak for themselves. His skill is most evident in how closely he involves the reader in Zeitoun's thoughts. Thrown into one of a series of wire cages, Zeitoun speculates, with a contractor's practicality, that construction of his prison must have begun within a day or so of the hurricane. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

The New York Times Book Review called Zeitoun "the stuff of great narrative fiction," and critics agreed that Eggers tells Zeitoun's tragic story without the postmodern trickery and tirades he has exhibited in previous works. Instead, he allows the story to tell itself while imbuing Zeitoun's tragedy with deep sympathy and emotion. Although Eggers didn't witness Hurricane Katrina's devastation firsthand, he captures the experience through Zeitoun's eyes and approaches his subject very intimately. A few critics noted that while this perspective was convincing, it required "faith on the part of the reader that everything in the book happened as it appears here" (San Francisco Chronicle). But this was a minor complaint in an overall unforgettable story. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

In ZEITOUN, David Eggers has written a remarkable true story of one man's struggle to both survive and make a difference in an atmosphere of devastation and official incompetence. In reviewing this book, I'll be struggling against the use of superlatives and glowing adjectives, the bane of those who evaluate the worthiness of another person's writing. Eggers has focused on many aspects of Hurricane Katrina. His probing examination reveals the overwhelming extent of the destruction, personal choices on how to cope with it, the ineptitude and cruelty displayed by officialdom, and individual stories of courage and compassion. The author has obviously connected with the Zeitoun family. Abdulrahman and Kathy Zeitoun, along with their children and many relatives scattered around the world, personify the closeness and love that every family strives for. It was the group effort that overcame an individual's hardship. Distance, cost, or time were not factors in their efforts that ultimately brought the ordeal to a somewhat satisfactory conclusion. Eggers portrays this intimate bond with obvious admiration. Eggers is not so complimentary about the government's handling of its relief efforts. Officials responsible with maintaining order and providing assistance were caught up in the immensity of the disaster. Their confusion eventually gave way to abuse of power, indolence, and a herd mentality that resulted in the total breakdown of what should have been a humanitarian effort. I was outraged by the arrest of Zeitoun and his comrades in the first place and then totally devastated by their subsequent treatment by over officious law

enforcement and military personnel. The bullying attitude by law enforcement is a problem that still exists today. The sad part, as recounted in ZEITOUN, is that this idiotic attitude starts at the top and then permeates the entire organization. Who the hell was responsible for this debacle? Has anyone been called to account for it? Abdulrahmin and Kathy's anxiety about keeping in touch with each other, although great during the actual storm, was exacerbated by Abdulrahmin's arrest. Panicky feelings of despair, and hopelessness became unbearable. The after effects of their ordeal seem more influenced by their encounters with law enforcement than by the storm itself. Their resilience is simply amazing, as is their ability to forgive. If this is a trait produced by their devout Muslim religion, then I'm impressed. So I absolutely recommend this book. The writing is outstanding. The experience is mesmerizing. The lessons learned are eye-opening. The characters are unforgettable. Zeitoun (pronounced zay-toon) is a name for the ages. Schuyler T. Wallace
Author of TIN LIZARD TALES

This book is outside of my usual reading list; however I'm so glad I picked up this book. It is an easy read that provides excellent insight into the experience of a 'good American family' who found themselves on the wrong side of the American gov't. Near the end of the book the author provides some insight how the gov't came to its conclusion's although as is usual there is zero accountability. Our country's reaction to the tragedy of 9/11 was driven by fear; I can think of no decision that is made in a state of fear that turns out well.

A fascinating story, filled with disturbing information about the behavior of FEMA, the National Guard, and Homeland Security during the terrible events of Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath. This man was a hero, and was treated like first a criminal, and later as a terrorist due to his Syrian roots. Even more heartbreaking was to read in the news about how his and his family's life has unraveled in the decade since. The writing was sometimes irritating, as we were put inside Zeitoun's and others' minds at times when it seemed preposterous. I can see that Dave Eggers wanted to tell this story, but his doing this made me wonder about how impartial he was in his telling.

Abdulrahman Zeitoun is a successful Syrian immigrant, married to an American woman who has converted to Islam, living in New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina is bearing down on the New Orleans and while his wife and children evacuate for a safer place, Zeitoun stays in the city to watch after his home and business. Eggers' non-fiction novel shares with us in spare, unflinching prose the aftermath of this disaster on Zeitoun, his family, relatives and business. This material in the hands

of a master storyteller like Eggers results in a book impossible to put down that conjures a range of emotions. Contrary to some review comments that Eggers blindly supports Islam and is Anti-Christian in this book, I vehemently disagree. In fact, I don't think Eggers takes a position at all on the subject of religion. I do think Eggers "reports" on the reality of bias in our society. In post-9/11 America, Arab men frequently encounter this bias and Zeitoun's experience is no different. However, Eggers never indicates this is the norm and or should be expected. "Zeitoun" works on many levels. It is a classic American immigrant story -- of the hope, struggle, success, failure and perseverance in the face of adversity. It is also a man vs. nature story -- about the magnitude and impact of natural disasters and the reality that there are amazing survival stories that exist next to tragic death and destruction. "Zeitoun" is certainly not the expansive history of Hurricane Katrina that Doug Brinkley's "Great Deluge" masterfully covers. But for as long as we talk about Katrina, "Zeitoun" will be the definitive personal account of what people went through in New Orleans as the storm leveled their city. Eggers reduces a monumental and epic historical event into a very intimate, provocative and thought-provoking book that anyone interested in Katrina, its impact on a city and people should read this book.

I never imagined such devastation in New Orleans . The atrocious behaviors of various troops sent to restore law and order. The lack of preparedness of the powers that be to save the lives and take care of their citizens. Most appallingly the treatment of this sweet, hard working law abiding family.

Eye opening background on Katrina both before and after. In addition, it explains the Muslim religion of which I lacked knowledge. The issues faced due to conditions and corrupt police are shocking and presented in a way to educate those of us not living in the paths of hurricanes or facing stereotypes.

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Zeitoun

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