



Patina: A Profane Archaeology

Shannon Lee Dawdy

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When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the world reacted with shock on seeing residents of this distinctive city left abandoned to the floodwaters. After the last rescue was completed, a new worry arose—that New Orleans’s unique historic fabric sat in ruins, and we had lost one of the most charming old cities of the New World.

In *Patina*, anthropologist Shannon Lee Dawdy examines what was lost and found through the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Tracking the rich history and unique physicality of New Orleans, she explains how it came to adopt the nickname “the antique city.” With innovative applications of “thing theory,” *Patina* studies the influence of specific items—such as souvenirs, heirlooms, and Hurricane Katrina ruins—to explore how the city’s residents use material objects to comprehend time, history, and their connection to one another. A leading figure in “archaeology of the contemporary,” Dawdy draws on archaeological evidence, archival and literary texts, and dozens of post-Katrina interviews to explore how the patina aesthetic informs a political nostalgia that is critical of the present. An intriguing study of the power of everyday objects, *Patina* demonstrates how sharing in the care of a historic landscape can unite a city’s population—despite extreme divisions of class and race—and help envision a way of life that offers not a return to the past, but an alternative future.

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