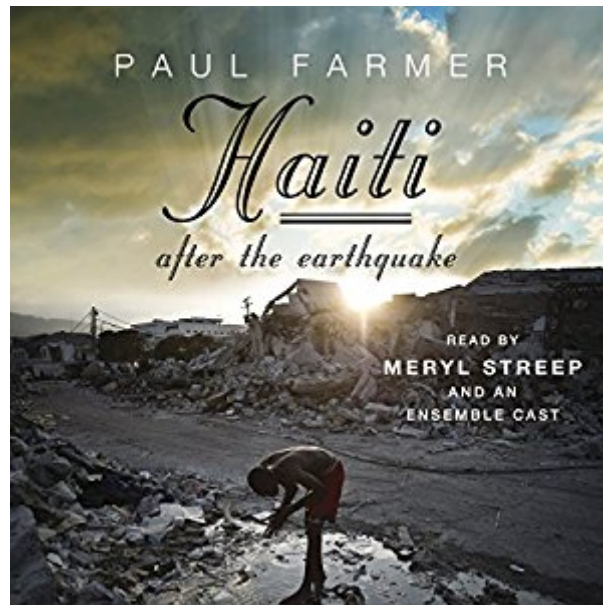


The book was found

Haiti After The Earthquake



Synopsis

On January 12, 2010, a major earthquake struck near Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Hundreds of thousands of people died, and the greater part of the capital was demolished. Dr. Paul Farmer, U.N. deputy special envoy to Haiti, who had worked in the country for nearly thirty years treating infectious diseases like tuberculosis and AIDS, and former President Bill Clinton, the U.N. special envoy to Haiti, had just begun to work on an extensive development plan to improve living conditions in Haiti. Now their project was transformed into a massive international rescue and relief effort. In his own words, Farmer documents this effort, including the harrowing obstacles and the small triumphs. Despite an outpouring of aid, the challenges were astronomical. U.N. plans were crippled by Haiti's fragile infrastructure and the death of U.N. staff members who had been based in Port-au-Prince. In chronicling the relief effort, Farmer draws attention to the social issues that made Haiti so vulnerable to this natural disaster. Yet Farmer's account is not a gloomy catalog of impenetrable problems. As devastating as Haiti's circumstances are, its population manages to keep going. Farmer shows how, even in the barest camps, Haitians organize themselves, creating small businesses such as beauty parlors. His narrative is interwoven with stories from Haitians themselves and from doctors and others working on the ground. Ultimately this is a story of human endurance and humility in difficult circumstances and seemingly overwhelming odds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I write about this with some ambivalence. Having been recently to Haiti for a reporting project on the aftermath of the earthquake, this book was a valuable first guide. It starts out very strong, evoking the carnage, the initial pulling together, and the incredible efforts of relief workers to save lives and locate bodies. There are some extremely moving essays by witnesses, many of them medical workers whose life work has been ruined or badly damaged. The death toll was almost unprecedented, some 300,000 died within the first weeks - it was one of the only recorded major earthquakes ever to occur in a capital city at 7 on the richter scale. The first days occupy 120 pages. At first, I was with it, but after 70 pages it was almost too much. The book then degenerates into a helter skelter commentary that mixes policy, individual medical cases, and the personal efforts of the author, Dr. Paul Farmer of Harvard University. It is part lament, part prescription, part cry of anguish, part triumph, but leaves the terrible question of what can really be done. Not only is it difficult to get a clear idea of what is happening, but there are gaps in coverage, outdated observations, and factual errors. For example, in my reporting project, I was investigating the establishment an internal displaced persons camp, Corail, which was established as a temporary site but is becoming a permanent ghetto - they took homeless people there to avoid rain-induced mudslides, but it too is in a flood plane. Farmer said the project was considered and then unfortunately abandoned. Moreover, the role of the US military is barely covered, and they provided crucial rescue and medical services in the first 3 months, truly a triumph for American aid.

I came to know Paul Farmer's work through Tracy Kidder's book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, which led me to admire Farmer but also to find him a little bit inaccessible in his intensity. I then read Farmer's own *Infections and Inequalities*, which I thoroughly enjoyed. So when I saw that Farmer had put together a book on Haiti's experience after the earthquake, I jumped at it. The first two-thirds of the book are by Farmer, and while there are compelling elements, it felt like some of the content was extraneous. On the one hand, Farmer's account of arriving in Haiti immediately after the quake and working to make do in very difficult circumstances was compelling. His work with former US President Bill Clinton to marshal and coordinate resources from the international community, with all of the strange dynamics that entails, was also very interesting. He also includes a brief history of Haiti, which was interesting for me since it's been a while since I read anything on the country. At the same time, Farmer includes a lengthy obituary of a co-founder of Partners in Health, Farmer's charity. He includes the story of rebuilding in Rwanda after the quake. Myriad characters file in and out, so many that I had trouble keeping track of who was who. Occasionally the book felt redundant. For example, some of the discussion of the US floating hospital, the USS Comfort, is repeated.

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