



Not Just the Levees Broke: My Story During and After Hurricane Katrina

Phyllis Montana-Leblanc , Spike Lee (Foreword by)

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A New Orleans Hurricane Katrina survivor writes an astounding and poignant account of how she and her husband lived through one of the US's worst disasters, and continue to put their lives back together again. Includes a foreword by Spike Lee.

Not Just the Levees Broke: My Story During and After Hurricane Katrina Details

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Author : Phyllis Montana-Leblanc , Spike Lee (Foreword by)

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From Reader Review Not Just the Levees Broke: My Story During and After Hurricane Katrina for online ebook

Bethany says

At the end of this book, I felt as if I knew the author personally; I laughed and cried with her through her struggles during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. I highly recommend this book.

leighcia says

Phyllis Montana-LeBlanc is from a working class family whose house and home were destroyed in Hurricane Katrina. The first part of this memoir narrates her family's experience of the disaster, including the multiple day grueling aftermath of waiting to be rescued. The remaining portion of the memoir recounts Phyllis' emotional life after the hurricane as she copes with her trauma and continues to grow in her faith in God and love and forgiveness for others. This memoir is no literary masterpiece but it manages to be very real, moving and powerful.

Loneunderwriter says

Great book. It is a honest look at hurricane Katrina.

Linda says

author was featured in Spike Lee's documentary "When the Levees Broke"

Charlotte says

Phyllis Montana-Leblanc is a beautiful and human human. I read her book after reading Zeitoun and realizing how little I ever really knew about what happened in New Orleans during Katrina and feeling kind of ashamed about that. Phyllis's story makes it horribly clear how little the government troops did for the people who needed their help. The way they were treated makes me more ashamed. What's worse was that having read Zeitoun, I had found out that somehow they were able to build a large outdoor prison with toilets, food, and water, in four days after the storm. That prison was located about 250 yards from the Superdome behind the Greyhound bus station. They used prison labor from Angola prison to get it done that fast, a feat that the contractor they incarcerated there could barely believe. So all the people in the Superdome and in the Stadium where they threw food that the strongest or meanest people were able to grab and the foul bathrooms and lack of water were not problems that anyone ever wanted to solve. It was mind-boggling to learn. I gave the book only three stars because around the middle I felt that Ms. Leblanc repeats herself and it gets tough to keep going. I could not quite finish the book, but admire Phyllis Montana-Leblanc for both hanging in there during the aftermath and for her strength in writing the book.

Meghan says

she's a survivor, she made it.

Megan (Best of Fates) says

A heart-wrenching first person tale of life in New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina. Phyllis Montana-Leblanc tells of her trauma with a poetry that doesn't disguise the horror of what was done to her and her city.

Kristin says

First off, know that this is primarily focused on one woman and her story. That isn't a bad thing, but if you're looking for more of an analytical, or political approach with statistics this isn't the right "Katrina book". TW: Abuse, Rape, Drug Use, PTSD, Anxiety. Obviously being about Katrina -death and violence, though not as graphic as other stories.

I am amazed at Phyllis' honesty not only with what she endured during Katrina but before and after as well, knowing these traumas give a deeper insight into her thoughts and choices. For a "novice writer" there are still very powerful evocations and metaphors. The images of the "black water being black bodies" and the levees breaking in turn broke "the auction block" are two of the most powerful things I have heard about Katrina and it has been 13 years since the storm and fallout.

It is such a shame that this didn't have a better editor. There is a lot of repetition in the last 100 pages that it distracts from the overall messages Phyllis is trying to impart.

The messages themselves are another issue. A lot of readers don't like how overly religious it can be, and though it was kinda much, I had a bigger issue with how much politically either Phyllis held back or the publisher redacted. Anytime something powerful was said against the government it was then followed by lines of forgiveness or other mediation. While I do believe that for personal resolution Phyllis is at a point of forgiveness, that does not mean that she has to absolve others of their responsibility. Maybe Phyllis was hesitant of the backlash, and maybe she didn't want to be too political, but I hope these were choices she made and not others.

It was also disheartening to see her judge her own community so harshly. After spending a majority of the book humanizing the victims of Katrina (and to a larger context African Americans) her messages mix up what she was saying. She criticises other survivors for how they spend their money and despite knowing the socioeconomic factors of drugs and crime, calls for a "betterment" without solutions.

Overall I would say a 3.5, for 70% of the book it was a 4 star but unfortunately the last 100 pages are a real mess.

Diann Blakely says

The title of Phyllis Montana-Leblanc's *Not Just the Levees Broke* is derived from Spike Lee's documentary about Katrina. A poem Montana-Leblanc had written the night before Lee paid her a final visit in her FEMA trailer gave him the ending to his work; and he, in turn, was the impetus for her book. Though her language is, for the most part, plain and repertorial (and at times appropriately profane), we see Montana-Leblanc's lyric gifts in the first pages' description of Katrina's clouds, "dark gray, light gray, white, and almost black. . . . They're all separated, as if they know once they connect all hell will break loose." Montana-Leblanc's nightmarish tale fulfills the prophecy in those clouds.??

The evacuation order comes too late from Mayor Ray Nagin. One by one, the floors of the apartment complex where Montana-Leblanc, her husband and other members of her family have taken shelter are torn off by the wind. Debris flies outside, projectiles of death. Her family is split up, first by the storm, then by officials. For eight days, Montana-Leblanc and her husband trudge, nearly sleepless, soaked in foul water and mostly without food, from dry spot to dry spot, waiting in line after line after line, until they are airlifted to San Antonio. The racism that was all too evident on big-screen TV - one of LeBlanc's chapter headings recalls the prevention of the Red Cross from entering the state while military forces were marshaled, officials fearing rioting blacks more than being concerned with helping people - is microcosmically revealed when she realizes that Cheetos are being given only to white people in one feeding station.

(originally written for BookPage)

Phyllis Montana-Leblanc says

Absolute Inspiration to continue my writing. I'm stronger than I ever knew.

Rachel Rubenstein says

Reading this book is like dating gay guys. I did it so I can tell you that you shouldn't.

Jamie says

Rather than posting a long winded review here, I am going to quote the first passage that almost had me in tears. I must be losing some of my softness. You should read this if you really want to know what it was like to go through Katrina and the subsequent levee failures.

"There were people in worse situations than mine, like the woman who called into 911 and got through to the operator and she was in her attic with her infant child and the water was rising up to the attic and all the 911 operator could say was that help was on the way. And then the woman in the attic just gave up and laid her baby in the water and then herself and they both drowned while the operator was on the phone."

Melissa says

Bottom line: Incoherent, rambling mess of a memoir. Clearly Simon & Shuster paid absolutely no attention to this book, as there is not an editor at work at all in this crap.

I really was interested in Ms. Montana-Leblanc's experience up until she and her husband landed at Lackland AFB/Kelly AFB in San Antonio, TX. That is when I had it with her constant whining and shoving her quasi-Christian faith down my throat. She expected steak, baked potato, and merlot to be served at a refugee welcome dinner given by the staff of the hotel she and her husband is staying at in Texas. The spaghetti dinner was "cheap" in her opinion AFTER ALL she and her family went through.

And the shade throwing does not end there. Hubby's ex-wife gets several pages devoted to her evilness while she goes on about her faith in God in those same paragraphs. A aunt is vilified for expressing the opinion that Leblanc came off as "ghetto" in the film. Her celebrity status (she is featured in Spike Lee's When the Levees Broke documentary) is described over and over again, yet no mention of her sister, mother, and autistic nephew are mentioned after they are separated during rescue operations. Her family is living a good steady life in Texas, which she does not agree with - she expects them to come home to New Orleans (the reader finds this out through one of the captions to a photo).

Self-righteous hypocritical rumor-mongering preachiness written as though someone just transcribed word for word her inner monologue. 0 stars. And be careful, because this author has come after reviewers on Amazon for less than glowing 5 star reviews.

Jeannie says

I have very mixed emotions about this book. Maybe my expectations for this book were too high.

The subject of hurrican Katrina and the devastation of New Orleans has fascinated me since it happened and I've read quite a few other books about it but none like this. Phyllis is not a writer, that's evident from the way this is written, it's more her rambling and cussing and blaming everyone for what happened. I didn't feel all that was necessary, yes I feel her pain and her rage over the horribly lackluster response our government gave during this disaster, I have never believed (as many others did) that they got what they deserved for not leaving knowing Katrina was coming, New Orleans is their home!! I doubt I would have left either.

But the rambling and repetition eventually got on my nerves and that was about half way through the book (not good). Towards the end she did way too much preaching and talking of her faith, fine and dandy, but I don't want your beliefs forced down my throat!

This book seemed to be all about Phyllis. For example the Photo Insert photos were only of her, her family, their apartment, the inside of their apartment. Where were the photos of New Orleans, her neighbors, others

impacted by this tragedy? I would have liked to see what the FEMA trailers looked like (heard reports of how bad they were), but there was none of that, it was all about Phyllis.

The book was way too long and every time I hoped and prayed it was the end, there would be another section, one called "Phyllisopical Food for Thought" which was nothing but a repeat of everything she had already written and then a whole section of her poetry (which honey if that's poetry, well then I'm a poet too.) I have nothing but empathy and sorrow for what New Orleans residents endured during this time, but this book didn't bring any of those emotions out in me. I found myself irritated with this woman, her cussing and religious views all thrown into one sentence, talking love everyone one moment and talking hate the next. Those words totally contradicted the other. I also found her to be racially biased. This woman is a mess in my opinion and so is this book. This is my review and these are my opinions, I know others might enjoy/love this book. If you think you are one give it a chance.

B. Graves says

Upon starting, I loved this book. She writes the way she talks and when there's such crazy, intense stuff going on, it was refreshing to hear it like it is. Everything she wrote during Katrina was really interesting and horrible and real. The treatment of the people of New Orleans is just astounding. Everyone dropped the ball on this one. The mayor, the governor, the president, FEMA, EVERYONE. Things should have been better for these people when all of this went down.

It's when she starts to write about what happened AFTERWARDS that really begins to bug me. I don't presume for a second to know what it's like to go through this kind of ordeal. I have no idea how I or people I know would react. I can only speculate. I had a lot of problems with her reactions to things - but this is just based on my personal behavior and how I deal with issues myself. I come from a long line of fighters. No hysterics, no making yourself crazy, none of that nonsense. You can't function in fear. You do what needs to be done. Once everything is over, once everyone is safe, you can freak out.

I also believe in personal responsibility and gratitude when it's due. I don't understand waiting for someone to come save you. I feel like some of the people of New Orleans are still waiting for someone to come fix things for them. Things need to be fixed, don't get me wrong. But it's not in someone's best interest to wait around for it to come and do it for you. It's about going out, working as much as you can, earning what you deserve and going from there. It's about picking yourself up with the hands and feet you were given and fixing your own life.

I don't agree with complaining that you're still living in a FEMA trailer 3 years later and things with money are just bad - when you don't have a job and your husband makes all the money for the household.

I don't understand complaining about the first hot meal you've had in days and how it's "the cheapest thing they could make" and how you'd like a steak instead.

There's also a lot of poetry at the end of the book that I skimmed through or skipped - but that's because I don't really like poetry, I have no idea whether it was good or not.

I think this book is definitely worth the read. There are some parts of it that are golden. It would be wise to go in without judgement and take it as a part of someone's life and what happened as opposed to the voice of everyone involved.
