



# Overcoming Katrina

## African American Voices from the Crescent City and Beyond

D'Ann R. Penner and Keith C. Ferdinand; Foreword by Jimmy Carter

This book tells the stories of 27 New Orleanians as they fought to survive Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Their oral histories offer first-hand experiences: three days on a roof with Navy veteran Leonard Smith; at the convention center with waitress Eleanor Thornton; and with Willie Pitford, an elevator man, as he rescued 150 people in New Orleans East. *Overcoming Katrina* approaches the question of why New Orleans matters, from perspectives of the individuals who lived, loved, worked, and celebrated life and death there prior to being scattered across the country by Hurricane Katrina. These narratives are memorials to the corner stores, the Baptist churches, the community health clinics, and those streets where the aunties stood on the corner, and whose physical traces have now all been washed away. They conclude with visions of a safer, equitably rebuilt New Orleans.

"These compelling personal narratives convey the rich African American family, community, and institutional life that have created the historic foundation of New Orleans. They are stories of hard work, dignity, survival, courage, and heroic acts by ordinary people. And they are stories of an incompetent federal government, an indifferent president, and of citizens treated like an enemy in their own country. Read this book."--Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, author of *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Harvard, 2003)

"The oral histories of these twenty-seven African Americans bring us as close as we will come to the full human dimensions and significance of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. They remember that epochal event not as victims but as members of a community that resisted slavery and racism and built a rich and powerful culture. Told through the unique prism of New Orleans and Katrina, their memories will make you weep and wonder at the resilience of the human spirit. The authors have produced a stunning document, one that calls on us all to work for a better world."  
--Michael K. Honey, author of *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* and *Black Workers Remember, An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle*

D'Ann R. Penner is the Social Justice Fellow at the Office of the Appellate Defender. Keith C. Ferdinand is the Founder of Heartbeats Life Center, a cardiology clinic and human rights organization based in New Orleans's Ninth Ward.

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