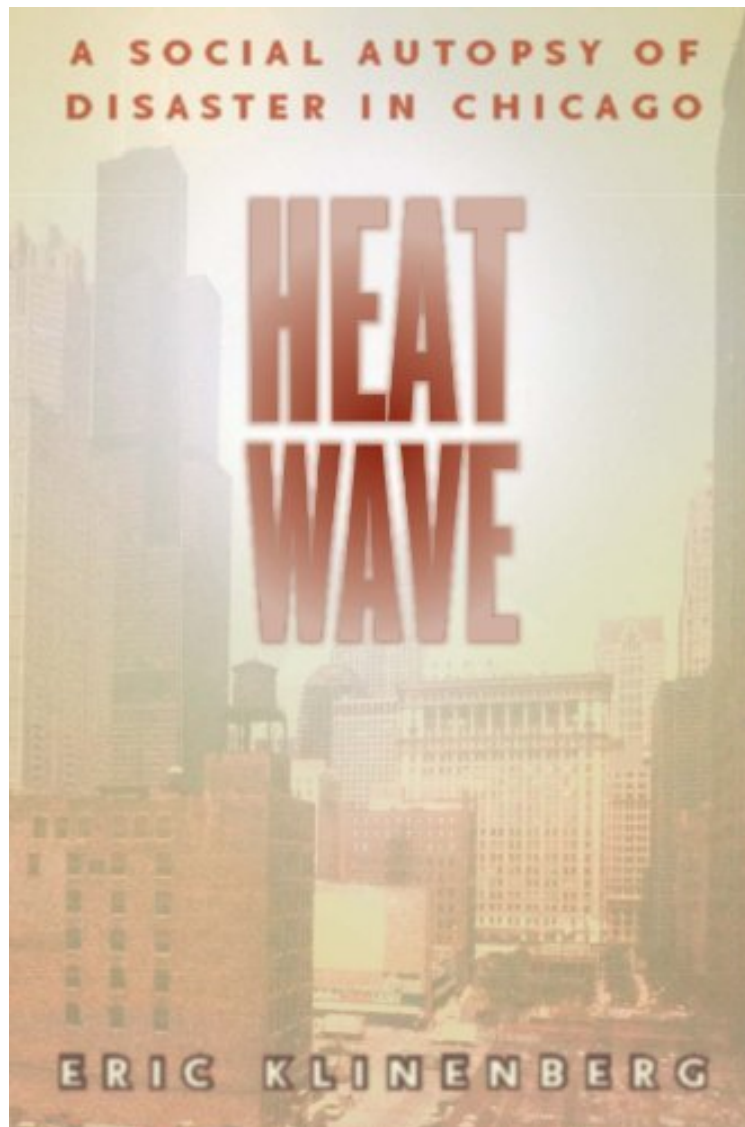


(Read now) Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago (Illinois)

Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago (Illinois)

Eric Klinenberg

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Eric Klinenberg : Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago (Illinois) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago (Illinois):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. a compelling and complex portrait of a disasterBy Stuart R. BlytheIn Heat Wave, the author presents a compelling and complex portrait of a natural and social disaster. Many of us might not think of a heat wave as a natural disaster in the way we think, say, of hurricanes or tornadoes or earthquakes. (I

hadn't thought this way.) But in the U.S., as the author documents, heat waves have taken more lives than the other three events combined. The 1995 heat wave in Chicago was more than a natural disaster, it was a social disaster. It was social because many of the deaths could have been prevented, the author contends. Through a mix of historical research and interviews, the author shows how issues such as age, race, and economics affected those who lived, and those who died. The author is at his most compelling when he compares North Lawndale and South Lawndale. Although both communities are similar in terms of income, North Lawndale is primarily African American, while South Lawndale is primarily Hispanic. The death rates in North Lawndale were significantly higher than in South Lawndale during the heat wave, and the author presents an extensive study of what might have caused that. He even goes so far as to compare the abilities of small, independent churches (prevalent in North Lawndale) and large, Roman Catholic churches (prevalent in South Lawndale) to look after parishioners. What emerges from the author's extensive research is a complex portrait. Through his research, he brings in numerous players, not only community members but experts from the fields of medicine, politics, science, and journalism. This book is worth reading not only for understanding how a heat wave could kill over 700 people but also for understanding how citizens, politicians, scientists, journalists, and others are likely to react to natural disasters.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Masterful and disturbing
By Scott Banks
Another reviewer claims that the author is literally the only person on earth who cares about this subject. This is illuminating, because his subject is 700 people who died, not exactly because no one cared about them, but because of complex social processes that rendered them invisible and isolated them from anyone who would care about them. The author does a masterful job of analyzing how this came to be so, and in the process offers a convincing and starkly damning portrait of the modern American city and the individualistic, privatizing ideologies that have shaped it.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. ... as a school text and it was informative and easy to read
By Jessica
Needed as a school text and it was informative and easy to read.

On Thursday, July 13, 1995, Chicagoans awoke to a blistering day in which the temperature would reach 106 degrees. The heat index, which measures how the temperature actually feels on the body, would hit 126 degrees by the time the day was over. Meteorologists had been warning residents about a two-day heat wave, but these temperatures did not end that soon. When the heat wave broke a week later, city streets had buckled; the records for electrical use were shattered; and power grids had failed, leaving residents without electricity for up to two days. And by July 20, over seven hundred people had perished—more than twice the number that died in the Chicago Fire of 1871, twenty times the number of those struck by Hurricane Andrew in 1992—in the great Chicago heat wave, one of the deadliest in American history. Heat waves in the United States kill more people during a typical year than all other natural disasters combined. Until now, no one could explain either the overwhelming number or the heartbreaking manner of the deaths resulting from the 1995 Chicago heat wave. Meteorologists and medical scientists have been unable to account for the scale of the trauma, and political officials have puzzled over the sources of the city's vulnerability. In *Heat Wave*, Eric Klinenberg takes us inside the anatomy of the metropolis to conduct what he calls a "social autopsy," examining the social, political, and institutional organs of the city that made this urban disaster so much worse than it ought to have been. Starting with the question of why so many people died at home alone, Klinenberg investigates why some neighborhoods experienced greater mortality than others, how the city government responded to the crisis, and how journalists, scientists, and public officials reported on and explained these events. Through a combination of years of fieldwork, extensive interviews, and archival research, Klinenberg uncovers how a number of surprising and unsettling forms of social breakdown—including the literal and social isolation of seniors, the institutional abandonment of poor neighborhoods, and the retrenchment of public assistance programs—contributed to the high fatality rates. The human catastrophe, he argues, cannot simply be blamed on the failures of any particular individuals or organizations. For when hundreds of people die behind locked doors and sealed windows, out of contact with friends, family, community groups, and public agencies, everyone is implicated in their demise. As Klinenberg demonstrates in this incisive and gripping account of the contemporary urban condition, the widening cracks in the social foundations of American cities that the 1995 Chicago heat wave made visible have by no means subsided as the temperatures returned to normal. The forces that affected Chicago so disastrously remain in play in America's cities, and we ignore them at our peril.

From *The New England Journal of Medicine*
Like motorists who slow down to stare at the aftermath of car crashes, most people are fascinated by meteorologic disasters. The perils of weathering a hurricane, a tsunami's destruction of property, and the human drama of a flood all make for riveting tales of struggle and survival. Yet one kind of weather-related catastrophe -- a deadly wave of heat and humidity -- seems not to get nearly the notice given the others, despite the fact that it kills more than all the other kinds combined. Why heat waves are such a quiet menace and how social conditions contributed to more than 700 deaths during a week-long wave of unprecedented heat and humidity in Chicago in 1995 are the focus of *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*, written by sociologist Eric Klinenberg. The term "social isolation" is usually applied to those living in remote locations, but Klinenberg

demonstrates that this unfortunate condition also applies to thousands of people (primarily senior citizens) in our nation's largest cities. And so it was in 1995. Thousands of Chicago's elderly lived alone (many of them in or near poverty), isolated in many ways and by many factors. When the record-breaking heat and humidity arrived and stayed, these men and women started dying, one at a time and quietly, behind closed, locked doors. The immediate reasons were apparent. Many seniors did not have air conditioning in their houses or apartments. Of those who did have air conditioning, many chose not to use it, fearing utility bills that they could not afford to pay. Fear of crime kept others from leaving their homes to use free neighborhood "cooling centers." Still other elderly Chicagoans knew, from a physiological standpoint, that they were hot but were simply unaware that they were in danger. Klinenberg shows in detail how the tragedy was compounded by many factors and interests, including a public health and medical establishment that did not anticipate the magnitude of the looming danger and local news media that treated the severe heat and humidity as little more than a novel topic for lighthearted feature stories. The author also examines key sociological factors relating to the elderly, including the perils of "aging in place" while the surrounding environment changes; the idealization and valuing of personal independence among seniors; and differences between men and women in the establishment of friendships and other interpersonal connections. Heat Wave is a fascinating book, in part because the social conditions that led to Chicago's 1995 tragedy still exist, for the most part, throughout our nation and its aging population. People are still at risk. The book is not without its flaws. Klinenberg strays from sociological analysis and into a politicized attack when he examines the 1995 response of Mayor Richard M. Daley and his administration. He makes far too much of the mayor's brief questioning of exactly what constitutes a "heat-related death" -- a question, I might add, that most of us had at the time. The author erroneously claims that the response of the Daley administration was driven more by public-relations damage control than by a desire to understand the tragedy and prevent further deaths and that a report issued by the Mayor's Commission on Extreme Weather Conditions was little more than "spin," when it was in fact the product of careful deliberation by leading figures in public health, medicine, gerontology, meteorology, and other fields. Indeed, the report laid the groundwork for Chicago's successful response to extreme weather, which was credited with saving hundreds of lives in the summer of 1999. The report has been widely requested by and circulated to public health planners throughout the nation. Other descriptions of the mayoral response are similarly off-base. As a deputy commissioner of the Health Department in 1995, I was there for every step of the action, in front of the cameras and microphones and around the table at meetings about emergency response. Klinenberg and his sources were not there. Klinenberg also puts considerable emphasis on racial disparities in the 1995 heat deaths. (The raw death totals indicate a rough parity between mortality rates in the black and white populations, but age-adjusted rates supplied by the author claim otherwise.) In his biography posted on the Web site of Northwestern University, where he teaches, Klinenberg notes his interest in the exploration of "race as a principle of vision, division, and domination." His focus on race is therefore understandable, but many do not see race as the risk factor that he claims it is. Its flaws aside, Heat Wave is a thought-provoking examination that challenges everyone in medicine and public health to look beyond our training to consider sociological conditions as risk factors. It issues a call for all segments of the population to reestablish those familial and social connections that we once seemed to have but now, all too often, do not. John Wilhelm, M.D., M.P.H. Copyright 2002 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS. By the end of Heat Wave, Klinenberg has traced the lines of culpability in dozens of directions, drawing a dense and subtle portrait of exactly what happened during that week in July.