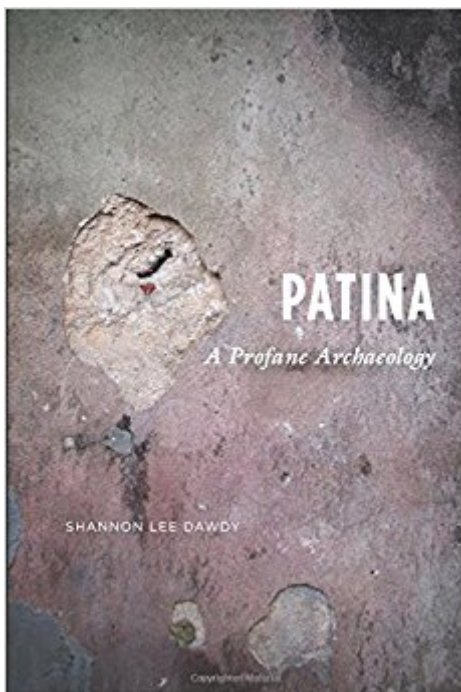


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# Patina: A Profane Archaeology



## Synopsis

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 material evidence, archival and literary texts, and dozens of post-Katrina interviews to explore how the patina aesthetic informs a trenchant political critique. 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 inspire civil camaraderie based on a nostalgia that offers not a return to the past but an alternative future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“*Patina* is a wonderfully original and inspiring piece of work, which challenges the

conventional approaches of archaeology, anthropology, and history. Dawdy succeeds in capturing the memory of an extraordinary place that encapsulates many contradictions and tensions within American identity: the city of New Orleans. With this book, Dawdy offers a major contribution to the growing theoretical foundations of this alternative approach of the past; which acknowledges the present to be the only point where from the past can be accurately explored and understood. *Patina* is a milestone in the new academic focus on historical thought – a pioneer work which will set the bar for future specialists in this growing field. (Laurent Olivier, National Archaeological Museum of Saint-Germain-en-Laye) "Taking New Orleans and the legacy of Katrina as its center, this book bridges several disciplines: archaeology, cultural heritage and tourism, anthropology, and social theory are all involved to develop Dawdy's construction of "patina." There is much here on the urban archaeology of New Orleans and on local understandings of the material residue of the city's past, but the real focus is social theory and, specifically, how to understand the power of objects in people's lives. Even while taking theory as a focus, the writing is clear, and the extensive examples Dawdy draws from both local archaeology and interviews to help anchor the argument in the material world. It will appeal to archaeologists and anthropologists at the graduate and professional levels, and would be suitable for undergraduates with a bit of grounding in those fields." (Choice) "Dawdy's storming new book is about a hurricane from the near past. But at a moment when so much archaeological thinking is dead in the water, it is a straw in the wind suggesting that the new, vital, cross-disciplinary contributions that have started to condense in one disciplinary subfield – contemporary archaeology – are reaching a new velocity. Her unapologetically humanist approach to natural disaster, physical heritage, material things and the profane strata of contemporary life means that *Patina* is not only a landmark volume for anthropological archaeology, historic preservation and material culture studies, but also a welcome antidote to the tired trope of ruination." (Sculpture Journal) "Dawdy's *Patina* is a book that creates concepts. Bringing historical archaeology into conversation with anthropology, this brilliant book provides a beautifully authored, nuanced, and detailed ethnographic account of the layers of human and non-human entanglement that make up the space-time of both pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans. Dawdy's archaeo-anthropological query excavates not only material objects, but also concepts out of this city's layers of built and destroyed environment. In the process, her book transforms New Orleans into an urban space-time generative of ideas that I am certain will be of great comparative interest further afield. (Yael Navaro, University of Cambridge) "Patina draws the reader in and doesn't let go. At once evocative and

analytical, this book operates at two deftly interwoven levels, as both a portrait of the city of New Orleans told through its material culture and a provocative theoretical argument. Patina is refreshingly free of academic clutter but richly patinated with layers of subtle thought. Historical archaeology will never be the same after it. (Mary Weismantel, Northwestern University)

“Dawdy’s vivid and original book provides new ways of understanding the connections between aesthetics, time, and late modern social worlds. Richly grounded both in both its empirical and philosophical material, Patina can be read simultaneously as a social and political critique of late capitalism and a call for a new kind of archaeology which is attentive not only to deep pasts, but to the ways in which they intervene and surface in the present. Dawdy’s powerful vision of a profane archaeological methodology will resonate strongly across the humanities and social sciences.” (Rodney Harrison, UCL Institute of Archaeology)

Shannon Lee Dawdy is associate professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago. She was awarded a MacArthur Genius Fellowship in 2010.

Shannon Dawdy offers a way of looking at place and time that changes one’s perspective. It gets at the heart of how we interact with our history and how we behave in our environment today. New Orleans is a model because it contains - and loses - so much, is so dynamic ecologically while the human beings cling to their life boats of memory and, I’ll say it, desire. If she didn’t pin down all her work with her large world of academic references and her own impressive list of sites she has worked on, this would be a great read for everyone. But it still maintains great readability along with the academic tetherings; everyone should give it a thoughtful, ultimately enjoyable and enlightening, read.

Amazing

It comes as usual.

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