

Eggers retells Katrina with "Zeitoun"

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On August 28, 2005 Hurricane Katrina tore through the city of New Orleans, killing over 1,000 of the cities occupants and causing billions of dollars worth of damage repairs. To some in the U.S., living outside of New Orleans, the destruction of the city was met with feelings of sadness and sympathy.

While those who were sympathetic to the residents of New Orleans sought out ways to provide relief, others scoffed at those stuck in the storm with feelings of indifference, saying the victims saw it coming. The media made matters worst, portraying New Orleans as a sunken city gone to hell, where criminals ruled the streets turned to rivers.

Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a painting

contractor from Jableh, Syria, enjoyed life in New Orleans with his wife and children prior to the winds and rain of Katrina peeling apart buildings like bananas and oranges. When the mayor of New Orleans and the governor of Louisiana issued an evacuation, Zeitoun's wife, Kathy, left the city with their four children while Zeitoun willingly stayed behind to look after their home and his other properties.

Dave Eggers, a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critic's Circle Award finalist, captures this family's story of struggle and faith in his fifth book, "Zeitoun." Eggers, who is best known for his novel, "What is the What," which chronicled the journey of the Sudanese Lost Boy, Valentino Achak Deng, offers both the sympathetic and indifferent outsiders an intimate new perspective on this devastating event.

Eggers, once again,

demonstrates his skill as one of our best contemporary writers. "Zeitoun" reads like non-fiction comparable in form to Capote's "In Cold Blood." Readers become acquainted with the Zeitouns as they wake up Friday morning, August 26, 2005 just as warning of the storm broadcasts over their radios and televisions.

From the beginning of the book until its end, Eggers provides a back story to Zeitoun's life in Syria, how he and his brothers had a passion for the sea and his Muslim faith. The reader learns about Kathy's upbringing and her choice to convert to the Muslim faith prior to meeting Zeitoun.

Like in many of his books, Eggers writes while balancing such themes as compassion, sadness and, surprisingly, humor. Eggers mentions how Kathy rolls her eyes at her husband after he impulsively purchases a used canoe. Upon its purchase the canoe just hangs in the family's

garage.

However, once New Orleans is underwater, Zeitoun believes that it was the will of God that inspired him to purchase the canoe. He then embarks on his mission from God, rescuing victims from their houses and feeding abandoned dogs the meat from his freezer. Zeitoun's mission is inspiring to read until people with guns raid his one and only property that has a working telephone and hold him as a prisoner.

The book reveals how in the wake of confusion and disaster, government became corrupt, discarding some of the country's most sacred freedoms and principles. In his frequent encounters with law enforcement and the National Guard, Zeitoun worries about his ethnicity and faith as being the criteria that make one easily mistaken for a terrorist. Throughout the story, he is referred to as Taliban by the

men and women he respected for doing such a great service to the country he loved.

Like the previous novel, "What is the What," where all proceeds of the book go to The Valentino Achak Deng Foundation in order to rebuild southern Sudan, the proceeds from "Zeitoun," go to the Zeitoun Foundation in an effort to rebuild New Orleans and raise awareness for human respect worldwide.

"Zeitoun" is, by far, the best book I have read all year. Reading this book in conjunction with schoolwork is not recommended. Grades will suffer. If I had the means, I would be purchasing boxed shipments of this book and mailing copies out to random strangers. Dave Eggers has a knack for creating well-crafted stories on real-life heroes. By doing so and perhaps without even realizing it, himself, he is embarking on his own literary journey of heroic proportions.

"Glee" a drink of sarcasm and music

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The recipe that creator Ryan Murphy used to compose Fox's new comedy, "Glee," parallels a margarita recipe. Too much lime juice makes a margarita too sour just as too much satire and sarcasm would produce a bitter show.

Fortunately, "Glee" was masterfully written, meticulously designed and suitably cast. Murphy combined recycled scenes, cliché characters and a substandard plot. After topping the mix off with music, dance and wit, he shook and poured a light, sarcastic and clever musical comedy.

In the adult realm of the show, Will Schuester (Matthew Morrison), a teacher and the leader of Glee club, has a slightly whiny, very crazy wife at home and an infatuated, obsessive-compulsive guidance counselor at school. Meanwhile the idealistic teacher must keep his club out from under the fierce cheerleading coach's looming foot. The students face typical teenage obstacles, like unrequited love, sex, coming out and fitting in. Jane Lynch is the Jose Cuervo of

Murphy's margarita. She delivers the show's best performance as the cutthroat cheer coach, Sue Sylvester, who threatens, intimidates and belittles with a sharp comedic edge.

If Lynch is the Cuervo, then the Patron is the subtle mocking of other shows and movies about high school. For example, the second episode features a scene where members of the Glee club go to a rival's practice to scout the choreographer. Shot, lit and written similarly to the matching scene from "Bring It On," it will evoke a nostalgic feeling before the viewer even has a chance to put the pieces together.

Some of the funniest scenes come from the minor characters. In the second episode, a flamboyant teacher with a Dr. Phil voice discusses singer Josh Groban. When another teacher asks who Groban is, the former teacher responds hotly, "Who is Josh Groban? Kill yourself!"

But "Glee" is not just a laugh-out-loud comedy; it has layers of humor and it's the details that

make the show great. When the guidance counselor talks Rachel (Lea Michele) about bulimia, the camera pans a shelf of satirically titled pamphlets such as "Divorce: Why Your Parents Stopped Loving You," "I Can't Stop Touching Myself," "Wow! There's a Hair Down There," and the one Rachel receives,

"So You Like Throwing Up."

The musical numbers aren't bad either. The cast is very talented and songs range from disco to Kanye West. Don't be put off by the musical format; "Glee" will leave viewers so much more fulfilled than American Idol could.

What Murphy created in "Glee" is a fresh outlook on

tired, old ideas. Like the first sip of a margarita, "Glee" is unexpectedly good in a tart way. With a completely different flavor than other shows on the air, "Glee" will leave viewers feeling happy light-hearted, for an hour anyway. The rest of the evening would depend on those margaritas.

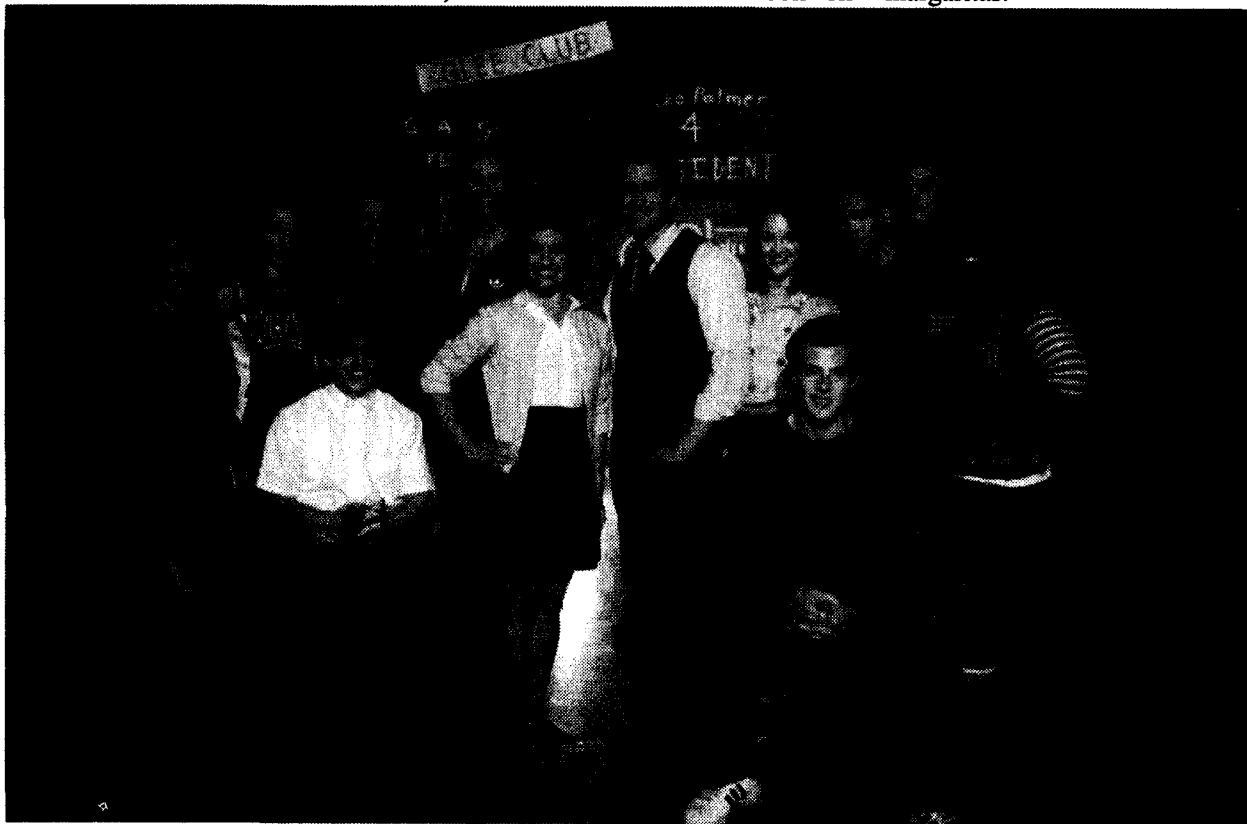


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