

Righteous Dopefiend (California Series in Public Anthropology)

By Philippe Bourgois, Jeffrey Schonberg



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This powerful study immerses the reader in the world of homelessness and drug addiction in the contemporary United States. For over a decade Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg followed a social network of two dozen heroin injectors and crack smokers on the streets of San Francisco, accompanying them as they scrambled to generate income through burglary, panhandling, recycling, and day labor. *Righteous Dopefiend* interweaves stunning black-and-white photographs with vivid dialogue, detailed field notes, and critical theoretical analysis. Its gripping narrative develops a cast of characters around the themes of violence, race relations, sexuality, family trauma, embodied suffering, social inequality, and power relations. The result is a dispassionate chronicle of survival, loss, caring, and hope rooted in the addicts' determination to hang on for one more day and one more "fix" through a "moral economy of sharing" that precariously balances mutual solidarity and interpersonal betrayal.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In this gritty ethnography exploring the world of San Francisco's homeless heroin addicts, Bourgois, anthropology and community medicine professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and Schonberg, a photographer and graduate student in medical anthropology, draw on a decade immersed in this subculture to eloquently elaborate on the survival techniques and intimate lives of black and white addicts who live in self-made communities and work the economic fringes for survival. The authors explore racial boundaries and crossings, love stories, family relations, parenting, histories of childhood abuse, as well as the constant work of navigating hostile police enforcement, exploitative and helpful business owners, overburdened medical services and social service bureaucracies. The book details the gruesome material toll of addiction, infection and homelessness and the risks of ongoing personal and institutional violence. Bourgois and Schonberg create a deeply nuanced picture of a population that cannot escape social reprobation, but deserves social inclusion. Schonberg's photographs capture the scars of addiction, the social bonds between romantic pairs and drug-running partners and the concerted efforts at domesticity without a domicile. The collage of case studies, field notes, personal narratives and photography is nothing short of enthralling. (*June*)

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Review

"A deeply nuanced picture of a population that cannot escape social reprobation, but deserves social inclusion. . . . The collage of case studies, field notes, personal narratives and photography is nothing short of enthralling." - Starred Review (*Publishers Weekly* 2009-04-13)

"Get this book and read it. . . . A hell of a story. . . . These people walk by you every day and should not remain invisible."

(San Francisco Bay Guardian 2009-08-19)

"Leaders and readers alike should pay attention to - and heed its warnings and advice. . . . Unflinching and objective. . . . Must be read - and seen."

(San Francisco Chronicle 2009-06-21)

"The authors dare you to ignore the subculture in their field notes and arresting black-and-white images, urging that our failed social systems need repairing and we cannot continue to let these outliers remain invisible."

(*Utne* 2009-07-01)

"Recommended." (*Choice* 2010-07-08)

"One of the most original and important works of its kind. . . . A pathbreaking photo-ethnography, powerful in presentation, content and scope. . . . A must-read, [it] will rock the world of the sheltered middle class and shed new light on the pervasive structural inequalities plaguing contemporary society."

(Elijah Anderson, author of *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community. Philadelphia*

Inquirer 2009-10-04)

"Truly remarkable book." (Grazyna Zajdow *Arena Magazine* 2011-06-17)

"Powerfully candid."
(Zocalo (The Public Square Blog) 2009-06-01)

"With a combination of photographs, dialogue, field notes and critical theory, the book provides a detailed analysis of the social structure of an underground society in contemporary America." (*Roof Magazine* 2009-05-01)

"This book offers as complete and disturbing a view as can be had of just how awful and intractable street life in San Francisco can get."

(San Francisco Chronicle 2009-12-10)

From the Inside Flap

"Based on over a decade of field research, Righteous Dopefiend is a searing portrait of the lives of homeless injection drug users in San Francisco and an analysis of the powerful forces that shape their lives. ... This book brings into our visual and moral field the plight of those whom we have condemned to the margins, documenting the struggle that is the condition of their daily existence and exploring the social structures that enforce their suffering." —Angela Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession Along the Rio Grande*

"Calling this book ethnography would be like calling *The Wire* a cop show: what comes roaring out of its pages is almost as visceral and devastating as spending a night in 'the hole' itself."—Mike Davis, author of *Planet of Slums*

"Plunge beneath the surface of America's no-man's lands. Find in the dead-end alleyways, storage lots, and overgrown embankments the terrifying but strangely ordered world of homeless heroin injectors. This book will test your cultural relativism to destruction, but along the way you will learn a great deal about destitution, about homelessness, about addiction, and about violence at all levels. These dopefiends are 'made in America'."—Paul Willis, author of *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, and co-founding editor of *Ethnography*

"Philippe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg provide a riveting narrative of the daily struggles for survival of homeless people with a physical and emotional addiction to heroin. The authors' poignant account of these experiences features sophisticated analytic themes that enable them insightfully to integrate discussions of agency and moral responsibility on the part of homeless addicts with an analysis of the powerful structural forces that shape the addicts' lives. *Righteous Dopefiend* is a must-read."—William Julius Wilson, author of *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City*

"Bourgois and Schonberg deliver luminous images and intimate portraits of unforgettable Dickensian characters—a host of late-modern hobos, hustlers, dumpster divers, and sweet-talking jivers—whose addiction consigns them to lives of public ignominy and private pleasures transacted under the concrete freeway overpasses of a totally indifferent San Francisco. This tough book is a must-read for all."—Nancy Scheper-Hughes, author of *Death Without Weeping*

"If Pierre Bourdieu, George Orwell, and Walker Evans had met in a homeless encampment under a San

Francisco highway, they could not have produced a more penetrating portrait of America's urban outcasts than *Righteous Dopefiend*. Fusing ethnography, photography, and social theory, Bourgois and Schonberg take the reader on the frantic roller coaster ride of daily subsistence among a clique of indigent heroin addicts. This searing anthropology of everyday violence in the underbelly of the American metropolis will challenge social scientists and public health experts, stun lay readers, and shame public officials oblivious to the social dereliction their failed policies are spawning."—Loïc Wacquant, author of *Urban Outcasts* and *Punishing the Poor*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Terri Hatfield:

Nowadays reading books are more than want or need but also get a life style. This reading habit give you lot of advantages. Associate programs you got of course the knowledge the rest of the information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The info you get based on what kind of e-book you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want truly feel happy read one with theme for entertaining like comic or novel. Typically the Righteous Dopefiend (California Series in Public Anthropology) is kind of guide which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

Gary Bloomfield:

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