

Crimes of Humanity

Lynn D. Fausett

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Never invest in a private gold mine in Africa. And never, ever, work in a gold mine in a war zone. These are two of the many lessons readers should take away from Lynn D. Fausett's memoir about his adventures in Liberia during the late 1990s.

Crimes of Humanity is more than just another account of one white man's descent into a complex tribal world of corruption, greed, murder, and war. It is a plea to the West to help set right the terrible wrongs that have been and are still being perpetrated on the people of Africa—most often by their own leaders. This plea is painted in very real and horrifying detail; it is delivered with an honesty that longs for, but does not offer, much hope.

The first half of this four hundred-page work is gripping. It is a terrific page-turner, complete with rich, colorful characters and a constant stream of events and adventures that are exciting, disgusting, terrifying, and wondrous, often at the same time. Vivid descriptions of life and death in the Liberian war zone abound. Fausett brings the reader along on his epic and frightening journey.

A lapsed Mormon, divorced father, and generally disillusioned lost soul, Fausett takes a job in Africa, with a fair knowledge of conditions there, because "I deserved to be awake and not sleepwalking through life."

Thrust into a "land of chaos," where friendships, loyalties, and alliances shift by the minute, Fausett manages to find some purpose and meaning in his time in Liberia. His working visit is cut short, however, when the country's long-simmering civil war boils over into an orgy of atrocities. Fausett has to flee for his life. Plagued by worry and guilt, he returns to Liberia to help the poor, brutalized people who work in the gold and diamond mines for his company.

The first half of Fausett's memoir is truly exceptional, its prose breathless and thrilling. Unfortunately, the second half does little more than repeat and revisit the themes, events, and lessons of the first half. This criticism aside, Fausett's book is a solid read. It is, the author notes, an exploration of "the unrealism the idea of wealth creates and about the false dreams it hatches."

Crimes of Humanity is a vivid chronicle of work and survival in a land both blessed and cursed with natural wealth. It is the white man's burden-story writ large, with a devastating, if sadly predictable, end.

MARK G. MCLAUGHLIN (October 11, 2011)

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