



City on Fire: The Forgotten Disaster That Devastated a Town and Ignited a Landmark Legal Battle

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On a day that dawned with brisk breezes, a clear sky, and perfect temperatures, the small town of Texas City suddenly found itself facing the greatest industrial disaster in the most industrialized nation on the planet. And, in time, the survivors of that all-American city found themselves wondering if their own government had delivered them into this hell on earth. In 1947, Texas City was experiencing boom times, bristling with chemical and oil plants, built to fuel Europe's seemingly endless appetite for the raw materials needed to rebuild its ruined cities. When an explosion ripped through its docks, the effect was cataclysmic. Thousands of people were wounded or killed, the fire department was decimated, planes were shot out of the sky, and massive ocean-bound freighters disintegrated. The blast knocked people to their knees in Galveston, ten miles away; broke windows in Houston, forty miles away; and rattled a seismograph in Denver, Colorado. Chaos reigned, the military was scrambled, the FBI launched investigations -- and ordinary citizens turned into heroes.

For months on end, the brave residents of what had once been an average American town struggled to restore their families, their homes, their lives. And they also struggled to confront another welling nightmare--the possibility that the tragedy that almost erased their city from existence might have been caused by the very government they thought would protect them.

City on Fire is a painstakingly researched saga of one of the most profound but forgotten disasters in American history. The Texas City Disaster was a searing, apocalyptic event that had an enormous ripple effect for millions of people around the world.

It changed the way Americans respond to disasters and the way people viewed the American government -- the Texas City Disaster opened the door for average Americans to confront their government and its leaders in the nation's courts of law. It was the first time that the United States of America was named as a defendant in a case that, after a series of dizzying twists and turns, would end up in the nation's highest court.

Ultimately, the story of Texas City is a story of courage, humanity, bravery, and a painful quest for justice. It is the story of ordinary Americans behaving in extraordinary ways -- and serving as role models for dignity and grace.

City on Fire: The Forgotten Disaster That Devastated a Town and Ignited a Landmark Legal Battle Details

Date : Published January 1st 2003 by HarperCollins Publishers

ISBN : 9780060185411

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Format : Hardcover 285 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction

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From Reader Review City on Fire: The Forgotten Disaster That Devastated a Town and Ignited a Landmark Legal Battle for online ebook

Jessica Brown says

I found the writing style a bit choppy at first, as the book jumps from 1st person narrator to 1st person narrator. Still overall an engaging book about a horrible disaster I'd never heard of.

Rod Carstens says

City on Fire is a detailed account of the Texas City disaster. A freighter with a cargo of ammonium nitrate exploded in the harbor. It was so powerful it literally destroyed the city. In Houston 45 miles away windows were broken by the explosion. The whole fire department died in the first explosion. Help had to come from Houston and other cities. This is detailed personal account of those who survived and the aftermath. Another ship in the harbor explodes soon after adding to the destruction. It details the social, economic and personal impact of this disaster. For any emergency managers out there this is one of the best descriptions of what a small nuclear device detonating in a community around.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

Hundreds of people were killed when a ship containing ammonium nitrate caught on fire and then exploded in Texas City, Texas in 1947.

Greg says

The reason I read this book was because my book club listed "City on Fire" as our next read, but there were two of this title at the library: the newer, fiction from 2015 and this, a non-fiction. I could have called or sent a text for the author's name, but instead I simply read both. And I liked this one better. Even though I'd lived in Texas for a number of years, I'd never heard about this Texas City disaster. Why do we bury our disasters? As of 2003 (the publication date of this book), why did Texas still have "the greatest percentage of toxic emissions in the country" along with numerous reported odd illnesses? Apparently we don't learn a thing: the current water issue in Flint, Michigan comes immediately to mind. "City on Fire" is a well-researched but stripped-to-the-bone account of this "forgotten" disaster. Minutaglio isn't a show-off author: just because a researcher knows everything doesn't mean he/she should include it. This author also wrote a book about "George W. Bush" and I think it might likewise be an honest, bare-boned account so I might give that a try.

Elisif says

This was an excellent book I read in about a week, which is very fast for me! I could hardly put it down. A very thorough and engaging book about the Texas City Disaster in 1947, when a ship carrying ammonium nitrite exploded and killed 581 or more people. The true number of dead will never be known. I can recommend this book but beware of the chapter immediately following the explosion for harrowing descriptions of some injuries and deaths. The explosion was followed by a landmark legal case, covered in the last few chapters of the book.

Diana H. says

This was an interesting story from post WWII Texas. Even though we as citizens know that the government does not always have our best interests at the forefront of their minds. This problem with elected officials is evident in how the people of Texas City, TX were treated after a preventable disaster happened in their city. Well-written, and very informative, this story is a testament to the will of people who suffer the unthinkable and still rebuild their lives. This is a definite read for anyone interested in little known historical events that happened within our own borders.

Selena says

Great book on an unheard-of disaster. Well, at least I never heard of it and I'm sure other people haven't either. Remarkable that so many things, so much stupidity could lead to such a devastating event. Yet another book that goes to show how money is more important than people and when you try to get help from your government, you're shunned. These poor people living in the shadows of war and post-war production of dangerous chemicals and materials never even knew what hit them. What a slap in the face too that these people couldn't get a dime from their government while their government was at the same time handing over millions of dollars to people in Japan and Germany for their losses. Great book if you like disasters and the litigation surrounding them. Easy and quick book to read for anyone.

Jim says

I have read several accounts of the Texas City explosion that occurred right after WWII, when a group of volunteer firefighters tried to douse a phosphate fire in a freighter resulting in one of the greatest disasters in US history. The explosion took out most of the city, threw chunks of bulkhead for miles, and wiped out most of the people who were observing the fire. An amazing account.

Niki Whiteside says

Isn't it amazing what we take for granted? Safety is not a given and a small thing can forever alter the world as we know it.

I live just a few miles up the road from where this occurred and have visited the sites since, including the small cemetery. What a tragedy for this small town.

Diana says

Great book about a disaster that many people don't seem to know about. The book is about what happened to Texas City, Texas when the SS Grandcamp caught fire with ammonium nitrate fertilizer on board. It also describes the aftermath and the legal issues that followed. This is a re-read for me prior to a trip to Houston, Texas. One of the places we plan to visit is Texas City. If you enjoy unknown history of the US, I suggest this reading this one.

Joy says

This is an excellent non-fiction account of the disaster in Texas City, Texas. on April 16, 1947. Texas city is a little city on the Gulf Coast where the petro-chemical industry, with the US Government, as a knowing participant, blatantly ignored the welfare of its blue collar whites, and working poor blacks/Hispanics turned its back on a situation which cost almost two thousand people their lives, injuring more than 5,000 and has become the most deadly industrial accident in US history.

The French ship "Grandcamp" was taking on a partial load of ammonium nitrate at Dock O in Texas City when a small fire broke out in the hold. Rather than risk ruining ALL the cargo with water, the French decided to try smothering the fire. When this failed, it was too late to do the job right. There resulted two explosions which destroyed the "Grandcamp" and obliterated most of the dock area and the heart of the adjacent city. After the first explosion, the townspeople rushed to the wharf to see the sight and a short time later were obliterated by the second explosion on another ship with the same cargo and docked nearby. Some 20 hours later, yet another ship with the ammonium nitrate cargo exploded when tug boats were unable to pull it away from the disaster area.

Texas City is about 40 miles southeast of Houston and I have lived in this general area all my life. I have no direct memory of this event as I was only 4.5 months old at the time but there are few life-long residents of this part of Texas who aren't familiar with the stories told by parents and grandparents.

This book is not a pleasurable read. It is pretty dry in the detailed account of how this disaster came to be. It becomes heart-breaking in the account of the devastation of the lives of the workers and inhabitants of the city. I would not suggest you read the book unless you have a major interest in modern Texas History. Therein is MY interest in reading it.

The author did a masterful job of making it real. I just thought I knew the story.....

Scott S. says

Essential reading for fans of American history and/or non-fiction 'novels.' This tragic chronicle of the April

1947 "Texas City Disaster" is more compelling than the dry title may suggest.

Mark says

Wonderful book, for such a sad subject. I would be interested to know how long the idea of "in the best interest of the government" lasted. And if that was the case, I'm shocked the government allowed the Agent Orange lawsuits to go forward.

Diana says

I was fascinated by this book. It reads like a novel but is nonfiction. I had never heard of the Texas City disaster and yet, all considered, it wasn't that long ago (1947). An explosion results when the cargo (ammonium nitrate fertilizer) in a large container ship ignites. It has a domino effect and things go from bad to worse. Interesting characters include a priest who has a premonition of his own death. I never heard of this event, and yet, I thought that part of history was to learn from our mistakes. It's almost as if this information was suppressed.

Steven says

This is a great story about a long-forgotten moment in US History. It is also, for me a family story. I was surprised to find my great-grandparents' experiences recounted in the book.
