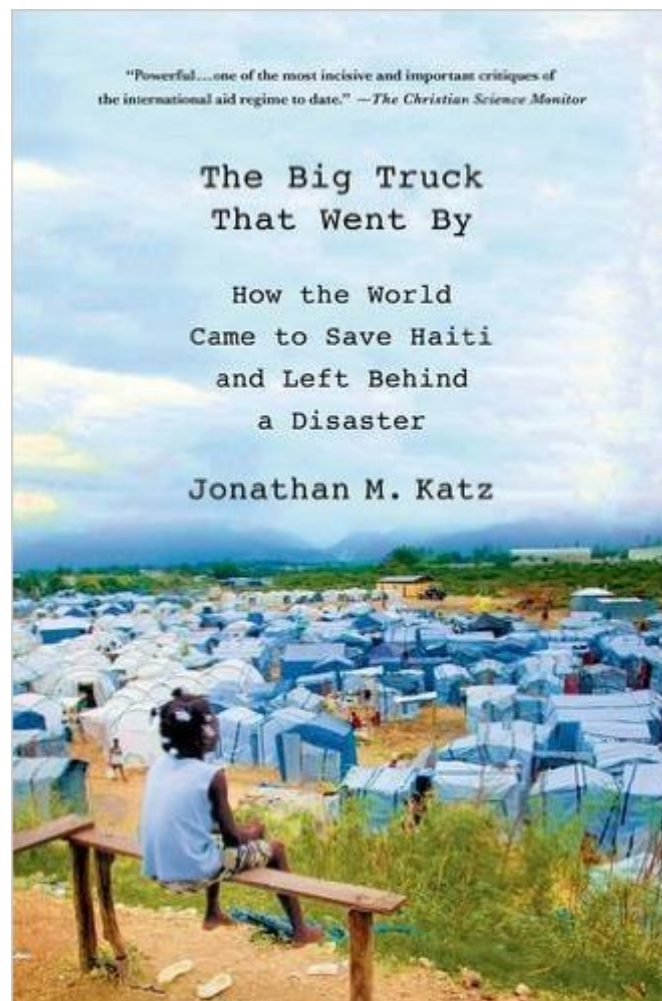


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# The Big Truck That Went By: How The World Came To Save Haiti And Left Behind A Disaster



## Synopsis

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD BY THE AUTHOR Winner, Overseas Press Club of America Cornelius Ryan Award Winner, Washington Office on Latin America/Duke Human Rights Book Award Winner, J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award Finalist, PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Award for Nonfiction Finalist, J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize Finalist, New York Public Library Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism One of the best books of the year according to , Slate, The Christian Science Monitor & Kirkus Reviews, and a Barnes & Noble 'Discover Great New Writers' Book Published to glowing reviews and awards, *The Big Truck That Went By* is a crucial, timely look at a signal failure of international aid. Jonathan M. Katz was the only full-time American news correspondent in Haiti on January 12, 2010, when the deadliest earthquake in the history of the Western Hemisphere struck the island nation. In this visceral first-hand account, Katz takes readers inside the terror of that day, the devastation visited on ordinary Haitians, and through the monumental--yet misbegotten--rescue effort that followed. More than half of American adults gave money for Haiti, part of a global response totaling \$16.3 billion in pledges. But four years later the effort has foundered. Its most important promises--to rebuild safer cities, alleviate severe poverty, and strengthen Haiti to face future disasters--remain unfulfilled. How did so much generosity amount to so little? What went wrong? In what a Miami Herald Op-Ed called "the most important written work to emerge from the rubble," Katz follows the money to uncover startling truths about how good intentions go wrong, and what can be done to make aid "smarter." Reporting alongside Bill Clinton, Wyclef Jean, Sean Penn, and Haiti's leaders and people, Katz creates a complex, darkly funny, and unexpected portrait of one of the world's most fascinating countries. *The Big Truck That Went By* is not only a definitive account of Haiti's earthquake, but of the world we live in today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Haiti. Of all the nooks and crannies in the world, the Caribbean has interested me the least. I've only visited the British Virgin Islands once. In terms of literature, it is only V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* that has stirred some interest. Jonathan M. Katz has written a most illuminating book, fanning my very dormant interest in this area. Katz was the only accredited reporter working full time in Haiti when the deadliest earthquake ever to strike the Western Hemisphere occurred on January 12, 2010. Though his home was largely destroyed, he did survive, largely unscathed, at least physically. He was personally confronted with the classic moral dilemma of a reporter in such a situation: should he provide as accurate a report of the devastation as possible, or should he personally assist in attempting to pull people from the rubble. He chose the former, and I would concur that this was the proper course. Proper reportage of the disaster should bring many more able hands, promptly. In our now "take it for granted" wired world however, getting the message out is difficult when much of the electronic infrastructure is also destroyed; Katz's relates these problems, and overcomes them. His second chapter, fittingly entitled "Love Theme from the Titanic" provides an excellent sketch of Haitian history, most of which was unknown to me. The next chapter covers the relationships between whites and blacks, and the various gradients in between, both internal and external to the country.

It has been said that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions, and nowhere do we see the truth of this more vividly than in Jonathan M. Katz's *The Big Truck That Went By*. Katz shines a bright, unforgiving light on the bureaucracy, politics, and infighting between NGO's that often do more harm than good over the long term with their emergency response to massive disasters. The earthquake that devastated Haiti in January, 2010 generated one of the largest and most costly recovery efforts of modern times. And yet millions of donor pledges never made it to the people who needed it most. Pledged money was never released by the governments that promised aid. Donations made to international charities to help Haiti got spent on the charities' normal operating expenses. Unscrupulous businesses cut behind-the-scenes deals to make sure pledged money was used to buy supplies and services from their companies at considerable profit. And all the while, the people of Haiti were left wondering if their own government was stealing all of the alleged money

that was promised even though the local government had been stripped of any control during the reconstruction. The book highlights the piecemeal, often offensively patronizing, way international disaster relief works. By refusing to give money directly to the Haitian government, citing concerns for corruption, donor nations instead force Haiti to submit to an international, third party committee to oversee how the money is spent. Of course, this results in even less transparency and accountability even as the Haitian government takes the blame for the lack of progress.

Jonathan M. Katz makes a major contribution to the growing library of works describing Haiti after the devastating earthquake of 2010. The author, the only American journalist permanently assigned to Haiti when the earthquake hit, tells the story from the vantage point of a participant observer. The house where he lived in Petionville was destroyed, and he barely escaped with his friend Even. So Katz tells his own tale as well as the tales of those he knew and came to know over the next year. It strikes me that in telling this story, the author must have found it both painful and therapeutic to recall the personal and national losses that accumulated once the earth stopped moving. Having lived in Haiti myself in the 1970's, and having returned three times since the earthquake, I found Katz's descriptions and conclusions accurate, fair and - as is almost always the case when Haiti is the topic of conversation - disappointing and discouraging. Haiti seems to bring out the worst of the "law of unintended consequence" on the part of those from outside of Haiti who promise to help. The help is either not forthcoming, or tied up in so much red tape that the aid seldom makes it to the level of the Haiti people so in need of opportunity to make a safe and sustainable life for themselves. With journalistic precision and deep personal insight, the author chronicles the string of failures to respond to the opportunities after the earthquake to "build Haiti back better." Political intrigue, cover-ups by the UN and other NGO's when the cholera epidemic killed thousands of Haitians, the circus that surrounded the election to replace President Preval are all themes that weave themselves through this book.

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