Salvation On Sand Mountain Snake Handling And Redemption In Southern Appalachia Paperback 2009 Author Dennis Covington

Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling, Redemption, and the Appalachian South

Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (2009 paperback edition) isn't just a book; it's a gripping anthropological study, a poignant exploration of faith, and a deeply personal account of a complex cultural phenomenon. This powerful narrative delves into the world of Pentecostal snake handling in the Southern Appalachians, offering readers a rare glimpse into a community wrestling with faith, fear, and the ever-present possibility of death. This article will explore the book's key themes, its enduring impact, and the unique perspective it offers on religion, culture, and the human spirit.

The World of Appalachian Snake Handling

Covington's book offers a profound look at the practice of **snake handling** within certain Pentecostal churches in the Southern Appalachians. He immerses himself in the lives of these devout believers, witnessing their rituals firsthand and experiencing the intense emotions surrounding their faith. The book isn't just an observation; it's a journey into a world often misunderstood and misrepresented. The author doesn't judge; instead, he seeks to understand the deeply rooted beliefs that drive these individuals to handle venomous snakes as an act of faith. He meticulously documents their daily lives, their struggles, and their unwavering commitment to their interpretation of scripture. This immersive approach allows readers to connect with the community on a human level, moving beyond sensationalized portrayals and into the heart of their beliefs.

Faith, Fear, and the Power of Belief

A central theme running throughout *Salvation on Sand Mountain* is the intricate relationship between faith, fear, and the power of belief. Covington masterfully illustrates how deeply intertwined these elements are within the snake-handling community. The act of handling venomous snakes is not seen as a reckless display, but rather as a demonstration of unwavering faith and trust in God's protection. The constant presence of danger – the very real possibility of death from snakebite – intensifies the spiritual experience. This high-stakes act of faith becomes a powerful testament to their devotion, illustrating the potent force of belief in shaping human behavior and defying perceived limitations. The book explores the complex theological justifications for their practices, providing context and understanding to what might appear to outsiders as inexplicable risk-taking.

Redemption and the Search for Meaning

The concept of **redemption** forms another crucial element in Covington's narrative. He shows how snake handling, while seemingly dangerous and extreme, is viewed by practitioners as a pathway to spiritual purification and redemption. The book highlights the individual stories of congregants grappling with personal struggles and finding solace and meaning within their faith. These are not simply people blindly following tradition; they are individuals seeking a deeper connection with the divine, a path to forgiveness, and a sense of purpose in their lives. The often-difficult lives of these individuals, marked by poverty, hardship, and societal marginalization, underscore the profound spiritual significance of their beliefs.

Covington's Narrative Style and Impact

Covington's writing style is both engaging and insightful. He employs a narrative structure that blends meticulous anthropological observation with personal reflection. This creates an intimate and immersive reading experience, making the complex realities of this community accessible to a wider audience. *Salvation on Sand Mountain* is more than just a factual account; it is a story of people, their faith, and their struggles. The book has earned critical acclaim for its sensitive and nuanced portrayal of this often-misunderstood community, influencing discussions on religious freedom, cultural understanding, and the complex relationship between faith and risk. The book's lasting impact lies in its ability to foster empathy and understanding toward a community often judged and feared. Its exploration of **Southern Appalachian culture** and its unique religious practices offers a crucial contribution to anthropological and sociological scholarship.

Conclusion

Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain* remains a powerful and compelling work of non-fiction. Its exploration of snake handling within the context of Appalachian Pentecostalism provides a profound understanding of faith, fear, redemption, and the diverse tapestry of religious expression in America. By immersing himself in the lives of the community, Covington offers a respectful and insightful perspective that challenges preconceptions and fosters greater understanding of a unique and often misunderstood subculture. The book's enduring relevance lies in its ability to provoke thought, challenge assumptions, and ultimately, to connect readers with the very human search for meaning and redemption.

FAQ: Salvation on Sand Mountain

Q1: Is *Salvation on Sand Mountain* a biased account?

A1: While Covington's perspective is undeniably shaped by his own experiences and observations, the book strives for objectivity. He immerses himself in the community, allowing their voices and experiences to shape the narrative. While his interpretation and analysis are present, he generally avoids overt judgment, presenting a balanced portrayal that allows readers to form their own conclusions.

Q2: What is the significance of snake handling in the context of the book?

A2: Snake handling is central to the book, not as a sensationalized spectacle, but as a key ritual reflecting the community's deep-seated faith and understanding of scripture. It represents a powerful act of faith, demonstrating trust in God's protection and a willingness to embrace risk in the name of religious devotion.

Q3: How does the book address the dangers of snake handling?

A3: Covington acknowledges the inherent risks associated with handling venomous snakes. He details instances of snakebites and their consequences, emphasizing the very real possibility of death. However, the focus remains on understanding the theological framework and beliefs that motivate these practices rather than simply sensationalizing the danger.

Q4: What makes *Salvation on Sand Mountain* different from other books on Appalachian culture?

A4: Unlike many accounts that might focus on a single aspect of Appalachian culture, *Salvation on Sand Mountain* provides a deep dive into a specific religious practice within a broader cultural context. It goes beyond stereotypes and offers a nuanced look at the interplay between faith, culture, and community.

Q5: What is the lasting impact of *Salvation on Sand Mountain*?

A5: The book's impact lies in its ability to challenge preconceptions about Appalachian culture and religious practices. It has contributed to

broader discussions on religious freedom, cultural understanding, and the human search for meaning in the face of hardship. Its sensitive and respectful approach has fostered greater empathy and understanding toward a community that is often misunderstood.

Q6: What are some of the key themes explored in the book?

A6: The key themes include faith, fear, redemption, the power of belief, the human search for meaning, the intricacies of Southern Appalachian culture, and the complex relationship between religion and risk-taking. The book also subtly explores themes of poverty, societal marginalization, and the search for community and belonging.

Q7: Is the book suitable for all readers?

A7: While the book is well-written and accessible, its subject matter might be disturbing or upsetting to some readers. The depiction of snake handling and the potential for serious injury or death is explicitly presented.

Q8: Where can I find *Salvation on Sand Mountain*?

A8: The book is readily available through various online retailers such as Amazon, as well as many libraries. You might also find used copies at independent bookstores or online marketplaces.

Delving into the core of Appalachian faith: A look at Dennis Covington's "Salvation on Sand Mountain"

Dennis Covington's 2009 book, "Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia," isn't merely a account of a particular religious practice; it's a probing exploration of faith, community, and the intricate relationship between belief and reality. The book, a amalgam of investigative accuracy and intimate reflection, offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of Pentecostal snake handling in the Southern Appalachians, challenging preconceptions and widening our grasp of religious expression.

Covington's journey begins with a modest assignment: covering a legal case involving a snake-handling preacher. However, his investigative quickly evolves into something much significant. He immerses himself in the community of Sand Mountain, Alabama, developing relationships with the folk who engage in this risky ritual. He observes firsthand the strong faith, the genuine devotion, and the challenging lives of these individuals.

The book isn't simply an ethnographic study, although it possesses many of those characteristics. Covington's prose is captivating, mixing accurate observations with subjective reflections. He adroitly avoids judgment, allowing the public to develop their own conclusions about the ceremony and its importance. He paints a vivid picture of the culture, showing its virtues and its shortcomings with fair measure.

The central topic of the book is the pursuit for redemption. For the snake handlers of Sand Mountain, handling venomous snakes is a manifestation of their faith, a test of their devotion. The risk involved is seen as a metaphor for the risks and challenges of life, and the survival through these challenges is a indicator of their faith. This perspective provides a framework for understanding the ritual that extends beyond the obvious. It's not simply about showing faith, but also about meeting fear, accepting weakness, and searching a deeper connection with the divine.

Covington's narrative highlights the clashes between faith and reason, tradition and modernity, and the private and the community. He portrays the snake handlers not as zealots, but as complex individuals wrestling with the same concerns as anyone else: affection, loss, fear, and the search for meaning in life. The book effectively illustrates the importance of understanding different cultural and religious perspectives, and the dangers of making judgments based on shallow understanding.

In conclusion, "Salvation on Sand Mountain" is more than just a compelling read; it's a moving study of faith, community, and the human state. Covington’s understanding portrayal allows readers to interact with the nuances of snake handling culture and to grapple with its implications for understanding religion, risk, and the enduring quest for redemption. The book’s lasting impact lies in its ability to test our assumptions

and broaden our understanding of the human soul.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

1. **Is "Salvation on Sand Mountain" a imagined account?** No, it is a factual account based on Covington's direct experiences and research.

2. **What is the main argument of the book?** The main thesis isn't a single, straightforward statement, but rather an study of the complex relationship between faith, risk, and community within the context of Southern Appalachian snake handling.

3. **Is the book judgmental of snake handling?** Covington approaches the topic with a impartial perspective, avoiding judgment and allowing the reader to form their own opinions.

4. **What makes this book so compelling?** The book's impact lies in Covington's captivating writing style, which merges objective reporting with personal reflection, resulting in a emotional and provocative reading experience.

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