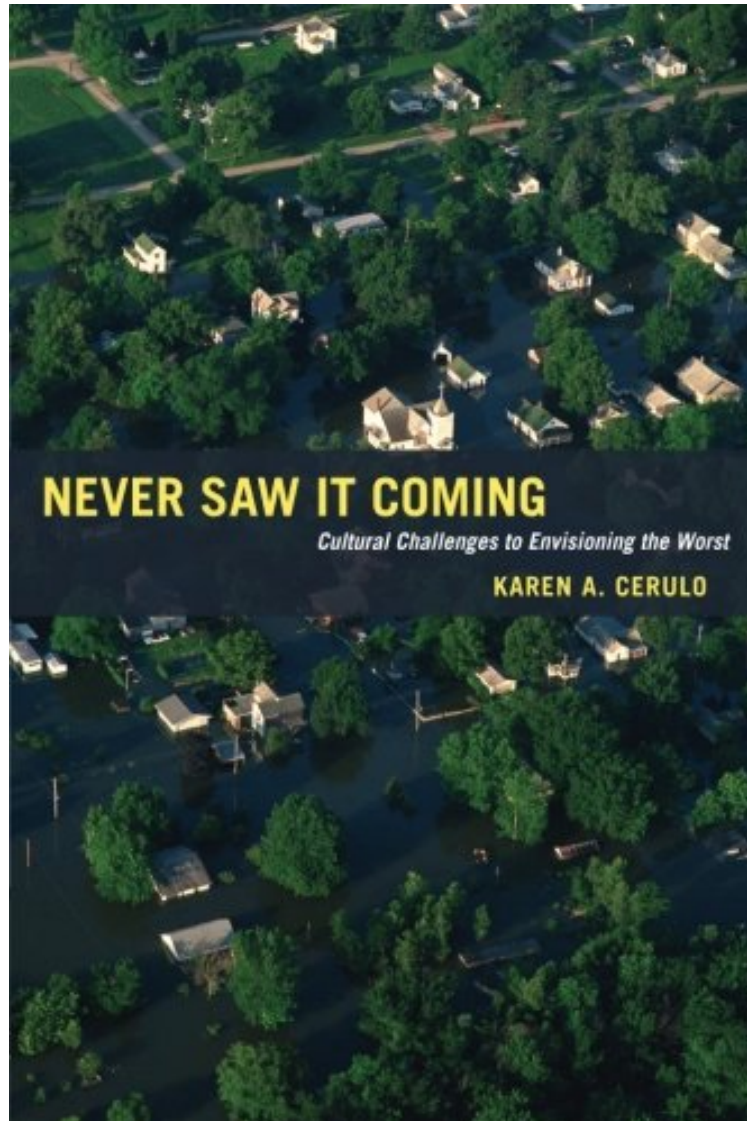


(Online library) Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst

Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst

Karen A. Cerulo

*DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub*



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#1916307 in Books Karen A Cerulo 2006-09-15 2006-09-15Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.00 x .80 x 6.00l, 1.01 #File Name: 0226100332336 pagesNever Saw It Coming Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst | File size: 40.Mb

Karen A. Cerulo : Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst:

28 of 30 people found the following review helpful. Why Rose Colored Glasses May Make You TripBy Dr. Richard G. PettyWe are constantly being exhorted to be positive: think positive, be positive, smile a lot, and the world will be

your oyster! And don't you dare start looking into the reasons why something has happened in your life or business, because you might come up with a negative answer and then you'll feel bad! Everywhere we see lists of the strongest and fastest athletes and the greatest price savings. When we construct lists of the awful, it is usually to celebrate their awfulness. Most of us have a natural tendency to avert our eyes from the truly abysmal. For some people, negative thoughts are just their way of dealing with the world or to protect the integrity of their egos. Trying to make these sturdy souls into happy smiling people can sometimes be a recipe for disaster. Now this new book by Karen Cerulo suggests that the constant cultural pressure to be optimistic may sometimes be counter-productive. The book is divided into eight chapters: Chapter One: What's the Worst That Could Happen? Chapter Two: The Breadth and Scope of Positive Asymmetry Chapter Three: Practicing Positive Asymmetry Chapter Four: Positive Asymmetry and the Subjective Side of Scientific Measurement Chapter Five: Being Labeled the Worst--Real in Its Consequences? Chapter Six: Exceptions to the Rule Chapter Seven: Emancipating Structures and Cognitive Styles Chapter Eight: Can Symmetrical Vision Be Achieved? Followed by "Notes" and "References." Karen coins a name for our unbalanced view of the world - "positive asymmetry" - to capture the way in which we emphasize the best and overlook the worst. As an example she takes the surveys in Consumer Reports that catalog a list of the finest hotels, while the less popular are lumped together at the bottom of the heap. Many of us have had fun trying to find the "world's worst hotel," but once again we tend to do that for amusement instead of admiration. She also points out that books for expectant parents spend far more space on baby names than they do on the risks of birth defects or stillbirths. Her hypothesis is that this "positive asymmetry" gives us a blind spot for catastrophes, reversals or any kind of worst-case scenario. She believes that this is why experts often fail to pay attention to warnings of impending disaster. She uses examples such as the Challenger space shuttle tragedy and the terror attacks on New York in 2001. Readers will be able to come up with many other examples: the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961; people who do not even try to plan for the future; the invasion of Iraq in 2003: does nobody read history books? And there are, of course, many others. Karen also concedes that there are two areas of American life where the rule of positive asymmetry does not hold: medicine and computers. Doctors and computer engineers are looking for problems: from day one we train medical students to be very suspicious. They are not naturally pessimistic: it is their job to assume the worst. She credits this professional pessimism for containing the SARS outbreak and the Y2K worry. Karen's message is one of trying to maintain balance and a realistic evaluation of any situation. This is often easier said than done, and as much as I like this book, I am left with a question: why would we want to keep a catalog of the nasty and the negative? Is there any good reason for wanting to keep tabs on the worst hotel in America or the team with the worst performance in the league? Each might elicit pity or mirth. But is there any biological or cultural sense in pursuing the worst? Despite that question, this is an interesting and engaging book that encourages us to think a little differently, and that is always a good thing! 12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. The power of negative thinking By Paul Peters I draw the title for this review from a series of articles on Slate.com that discuss the power that negative thinking, or being prepared, can have on our society. This book forms an important part of that article and contributes to a continued debate regarding how our society tends to accentuate the positive. Karen Cerulo provides us with a readable, albeit academic, book about how we planning and preparing for "worst-case" scenarios is what keeps our society going. More importantly, what can help to prevent disasters, disease outbreaks, and provide for public safety. I highly recommend this book for people who are interested in this debate, especially those who are skeptical of the more-popular book "The Secret".

People especially Americans are by and large optimists. They're much better at imagining best-case scenarios (I could win the lottery!) than worst-case scenarios (A hurricane could destroy my neighborhood!). This is true not just of their approach to imagining the future, but of their memories as well: people are better able to describe the best moments of their lives than they are the worst. Though there are psychological reasons for this phenomenon, Karen A. Cerulo, in *Never Saw It Coming*, considers instead the role of society in fostering this attitude. What kinds of communities develop this pattern of thought, which do not, and what does that say about human ability to evaluate possible outcomes of decisions and events? Cerulo takes readers to diverse realms of experience, including intimate family relationships, key transitions in our lives, the places we work and play, and the boardrooms of organizations and bureaucracies. Using interviews, surveys, artistic and fictional accounts, media reports, historical data, and official records, she illuminates one of the most common, yet least studied, of human traits: a blatant disregard for worst-case scenarios. *Never Saw It Coming*, therefore, will be crucial to anyone who wants to understand human attempts to picture or plan the future. In *Never Saw It Coming*, Karen Cerulo argues that in American society there is a positive symmetry, a tendency to focus on and exaggerate the best, the winner, the most optimistic outcome and outlook. Thus, the conceptions of the worst are underdeveloped and elided. Naturally, as she masterfully outlines, there are dramatic consequences to this characterological inability to imagine and prepare for the worst, as the failure to heed memos leading up to both the 9/11 and NASA Challenger disasters, for instance, so painfully reminded us.--Robin Wagner-Pacifi, Swarthmore College Katrina, 9/11, and the War in Iraq all demonstrate the costliness of failing to anticipate worst-case scenarios. *Never Saw It Coming* explains why it is so hard to do so: adaptive behavior hard-wired into human cognition is complemented and reinforced by cultural practices, which are in turn institutionalized in the rules

and structures of formal organizations. But Karen Cerulo doesn't just diagnose the problem; she uses case studies of settings in which people effectively anticipate and deal with potential disaster to describe structural solutions to the chronic dilemmas she describes so well. *Never Saw It Coming* is a powerful contribution to the emerging fields of cognitive and moral sociology.--Paul DiMaggio, Princeton University

Katrina, 9/11, and the War in Iraq all demonstrate the costliness of failing to anticipate worst-case scenarios. *Never Saw It Coming* explains why it is so hard to do so: adaptive behavior hard-wired into human cognition is complemented and reinforced by cultural practices, which are in turn institutionalized in the rules and structures of formal organizations. But Karen Cerulo doesn't just diagnose the problem; she uses case studies of settings in which people effectively anticipate and deal with potential disaster to describe structural solutions to the chronic dilemmas she describes so well. *Never Saw It Coming* is a powerful contribution to the emerging fields of cognitive and moral sociology.--Paul DiMaggio, Princeton University