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Financing afterlives: an ethnography of life insurance in New Orleans, USA

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Set in a city that is marked by steep racial and class inequalities, this dissertation explores how people prepare financially for futures beyond death and critically examines how these preparations are shaped by racialized notions of human life.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in New Orleans, this study examines how Black policyholders and beneficiaries understand their insurance policies and handle the money these policies generate. It also analyzes the ways that insurance agents promote the purchase of policies and maintain them over time, and how Black funeral directors work with the policies of the dead to arrange dignified funerals.

This makes for an ethnography that recognizes how people use financial instruments to actively produce certain kinds of afterlives, the moral concerns that inform these attempts, and the limits they brush up against.

Financing Afterlives

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An Ethnography of Life Insurance
in New Orleans, USA

