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Planet of Slums

By Mike Davis



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According to the united nations, more than one billion people now live in the slums of the cities of the South. In this brilliant and ambitious book, Mike Davis explores the future of a radically unequal and explosively unstable urban world. From the sprawling barricadas of Lima to the garbage hills of Manila, urbanization has been disconnected from industrialization, and even from economic growth. Davis portrays a vast humanity warehoused in shantytowns and exiled from the formal world economy. He argues that the rise of this informal urban proletariat is a wholly unforeseen development, and asks whether the great slums, as a terrified Victorian middle class once imagined, are volcanoes waiting to erupt.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Urban theorist Davis takes a global approach to documenting the astonishing depth of squalid poverty that dominates the lives of the planet's increasingly urban population, detailing poor urban communities from Cape Town and Caracas to Casablanca and Khartoum. Davis argues health, justice and social issues associated with gargantuan slums (the largest, in Mexico City, has an estimated population of 4 million) get overlooked in world politics: "The demonizing rhetorics of the various international 'wars' on terrorism, drugs, and crime are so much semantic apartheid: they construct epistemological walls around gecekondu, favelas, and chawls that disable any honest debate about the daily violence of economic exclusion." Though Davis focuses on individual communities, he presents statistics showing the skyrocketing population and number of "megaslums" (informally, "stinking mountains of shit" or, formally, "when shanty-towns and squatter communities merge in continuous belts of informal housing and poverty, usually on the urban periphery") since the 1960s. Layered over the hard numbers are a fascinating grid of specific area studies and sub-topics ranging from how the Olympics has spurred the forceful relocation of thousands (and, sometimes, hundreds of thousands) of the urban poor, to the conversion of formerly second world countries to third world status. Davis paints a bleak picture of the upward trend in urbanization and maintains a stark outlook for slum-dwellers' futures.

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Review

"A profound enquiry into an urgent subject ... a brilliant book."

—**Arundhati Roy**

"With cool indignation, Davis argues that the exponential growth of slums is no accident but the result of a perfect storm of corrupt leadership, institutional failure, and IMF-imposed programs leading to a massive transfer of wealth from rich to poor ... Like the work of Jacob Riis, Ida Tarbell, and Lincoln Steffens over a century ago, this searing indictment makes the shame of our cities urgently clear."

—**Michael Sorkin**

"The Raymond Chandler of urban geography ... In *Planet of Slums*, Davis's genre is the global disaster movie, as directed by the chroniclers of Victorian poverty: Engels, Booth and Dickens. The scale of modern squalor revealed in his brilliant survey dwarfs its predecessors ... a coruscating tragedy."

—**Independent**

"The astonishing facts hit like anvil blows ... Davis has produced a heartbreaking book that hammers the reader a little further into the ground with the blow of each new and shocking statistic."

—**Financial Times**

"A terrifying, magisterial work."

—**Harper's**

"There can be no doubt about the achievement of *Planet of Slums* ... it forces us, angrily, to confront the deplorable realities of slum existence and the limitations of slum policies in many developing countries."

—**Times (London)**

"While many case studies have described what it means to reside in a *favela*, *basti*, *kampung*, *gecekondu* or

bidonville, Davis provides a properly global portrait ... And whereas urban specialists have focused on questions of space and land use in their discussions of slums, and developmentalists on the issue of their 'informal economies', *Planet of Slums* commands our attention as a broader historical synthesis of the two.”
—*New Left Review*

“Davis’s descriptions of the conditions endured by slum-dwellers provide reason enough to read this book. His analysis is full of gripping stories from globalization’s frontline.”
—*New Statesman*

“Packed with rigorous analysis and heart-stopping facts, this is a brilliant exploration of how millions of poor city-dwellers worldwide are being driven to the squalid periurban shadowlands of today’s megaslums ... Davis’s book is absolutely vital reading.”
—*Big Issue*

About the Author

Mike Davis is the author of several books including *Planet of Slums*, *City of Quartz*, *Ecology of Fear*, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, and *Magical Urbanism*. He was recently awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. He lives in Papa’aloo, Hawaii.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Florence Lentz:

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