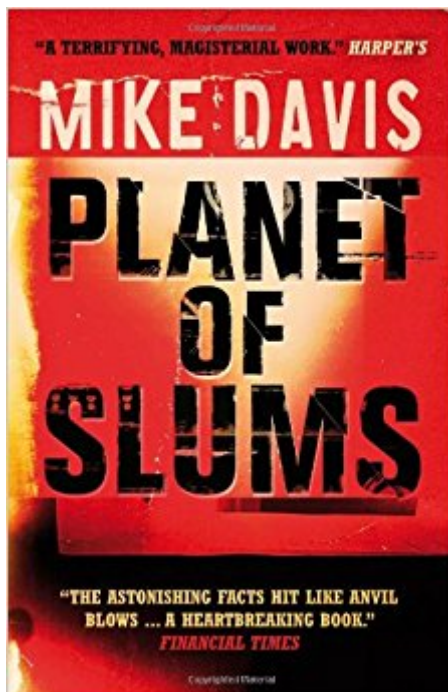


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Planet Of Slums



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

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. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

• "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

Planet of Slums has several arguments but I would distill the primary ones as follows:1. The end of the Cold War "liberated" capital to spread to all those portions of the world formerly dominated by the Soviet Union and its allies. Parallel to this economic theories known as "neoliberalism" arose in the 1970s and became dominant by the 1990s. Neoliberal ideology advocates deregulation of industry, the downsizing of government social programs, and a broken "truce" with labor that in the US had existed in fragile form since the New Deal.2. This spread of capitalism, often referred to as "globalization," has produced for the first time a truly global labor force. The competitive pressure is so intense, as any job is better than no job at all, that workers the world over are willing to take what they can. The world is teeming with an awful, terrible, "surplus humanity" living marginalized lives of poverty, misery, and violence.3. At the same time, the world's population keeps getting bigger, and more and more urban. This in turn continues to expand the potential labor pool, driving wages down even further. The wage gap between the rich and poor, both between nations *and* within nations, grows wider and deeper. The naked reality of this becomes more visible with each succeeding economic crisis.4. Rather than face the consequences of what neoliberal ideology was allowed to unleash global elites, led by the military might of the United States, whose corporations continue to amass enormous profits, have focused on expanding and developing their instruments of order-keeping, cleverly disguised under misleading umbrellas of "wars on ...". Terrorism, drugs, piracy, are just so many smokescreens.5. This process cannot continue permanently. There is a simmering anger beneath the surface that, for now, expresses itself only in isolated outbursts that high-tech campaigns of repression are capable of pacifying. Someday, however, the simmer may reach a boil and the eruption will be more than any nation can handle.

If one just looked at the figures over the last twenty or so years there has been a lot of economic growth in Asia and Latin America. Africa is still troubled with a lot of the sub Sahara countries having negative growth. On balance though one would expect the lot of people in poor countries to be improving. Not so according to this book. What has been happening is incredible increases in urbanisation. However this urbanisation is in the form of slums. Slums in poorer countries are portrayed as hell holes. People live in grossly overcrowded housing with no access to fresh water. In the slum cities of the third world there is no provision for removal of sewerage so that it runs into the fresh water supply (Sao Paulo) or simply is deposited on the ground. The failure to treat sewerage results in large numbers of deaths mainly to children through dysentery and cholera. The vast majority of those who live in the slums have the most marginal of jobs. Sitting beside a road

selling a few vegetables, cleaning shoes a few times a day. Driving taxis for a few dollars a day. (Apparently one in 7 cars in Lima is a taxi.) One of the tragedies of the slums is that the desperation of families leads to children below 14 being the bread winners of families. Working in Indian textile or carpet factories for minuscule wages for 12 hours a day, losing their childhood and any access to education. The book is a sustained attack on the Peruvian economist De Soto who posited a theory that the way to overcome the problem of slums is to give title to the slum dwellers of the land they squat on and to make available small loans for "business enterprises". What the book suggests is that in the last twenty or so years since the development of free market ideologies have led to the enforced retreat of the state in poorer countries from economic life there has only been disaster. Potentially the state could do something about water provision, housing or sewerage removal but the poorer countries are at the mercy of international institutions which prevent such anti market activity by tying conditions to loans. The life of slum dwellers is so marginalised that title to slum land will achieve nothing. The book rather resembles Engels' book on the condition of the English working class in 1844. It is full of rather depressing facts and figures with anecdotes to bring home the nature of the misery and the total degradation of life that exists in the slums. Not a pleasant read but something which is a sober reminder that growth rates alone do not translate automatically into the reduction of poverty or human misery.

Good to read for political science or urban studies students. I recommend reading "Triumph of the City" by Glaeser to compare the two.

Ok, this book is actually incredible. About half of it was assigned in a Development Studies class of mine, but I willingly read the whole thing. So much detail! So much information, and yet so well presented that I read it 6 months ago and still recall all the major points. I think it's a must read for anyone interested in the developing world, or really anyone who isn't boring.

Mike Davis obviously has great knowledge and understanding of the current state of failing megacities. His style of writing is superb and I thoroughly enjoyed his descriptions of the various megacities he described. He points out the problems of megacities and the potentialities involved in their future growth. This is a book that keeps the reader's interest while providing essential information.

This is an incredible collection of data about the crude reality of many urban citizens of the world,

and many more to come... unless we do something. Reading and knowing about it is the first step to change this cruel reality. A must at any urban planning or urban design school.

Davis's Planet of Slums is a must read for urban scholars as it gives a good depiction of the macro-forces at play that increase the amount and shape of slums globally. Furthermore, Davis was able to position increasing poverty and inequality that are visible through the Slum as a lens, as one of the major challenges our urban world faces.

A difficult read but necessary information to know! It paints a realistic picture of our world's slums and the growing epidemic of these living arrangements in developing countries.

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