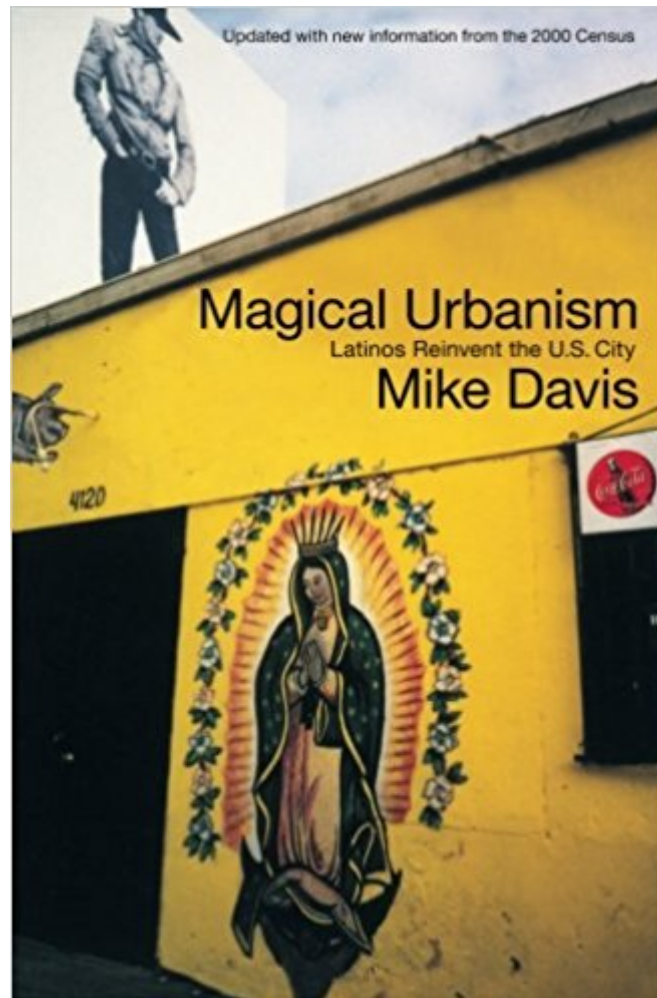




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# Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent The U.S. Big City



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2001 Carey McWilliams Award Is the capital of Latin America a small island at the mouth of the Hudson River? Will California soon hold the balance of power in Mexican national politics? Will Latinos reinvigorate the US labor movement? These are some of the provocative questions that Mike Davis explores in this fascinating account of the Latinization of the US urban landscape. As he forefully shows, this is a demographic and cultural revolution with extraordinary implications. With Spanish surnames increasing five times faster than the general population, salsa is becoming the predominant ethnic rhythm (and flavor) of contemporary city life. In Los Angeles, Houston, San Antonio, and (shortly) Dallas, Latinos outnumber non-Hispanic whites; in New York, San Diego and Phoenix they outnumber Blacks. According to the Bureau of the Census, Latinos will supply fully two-thirds of the nation's population growth between now and the middle of the 21st century when nearly 100 millions Americans will boast Latin American ancestry. Davis focuses on the great drama of how Latinos are attempting to translate their urban demographic ascendancy into effective social power. Pundits are now unanimous that Spanish-surname voters are the sleeping giant of US politics. Yet electoral mobilization alone is unlikely to redress the increasing income and opportunity gaps between urban Latinos and suburban non-Hispanic whites. Thus in Los Angeles and elsewhere, the militant struggles of Latino workers and students are reinventing the American left. Fully updated throughout, and with new chapters on the urban Southwest and the exploding counter-migration of Anglos to Mexico, *Magical Urbanism* is essential reading for anyone who wants to grasp the future of urban America. This paperback edition of Mike Davis's investigation into the Latinization of America incorporates the extraordinary findings of the 2000 Census as well as new chapters on the militarization of the border and violence against immigrants.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hispanics are quickly transforming the United States both through sheer numbers and their culture, according to Mike Davis. "Salsa is becoming the predominant ethnic flavor--and rhythm--in major metropolitan areas," he writes, and Spanish surnames are growing at five times the rate of the general population (José is now the most popular name for baby boys in California and Texas). Davis, the author of *City of Quartz* and *Ecology of Fear*, says the United States is undergoing what he calls "Latin Americanization." In *Magical Urbanism*, which is short by comparison, he doesn't traffic in tired rhetoric about the magic of multiculturalism or the wonders of ethnic diversity--but he does come down hard against those who resist Latin Americanization. He writes of "an INS police state with sweeping powers away from the border," blasts the opponents of bilingual education, and hopes that Latino immigrants will rejuvenate the American labor movement. The book lacks a strong central thesis; it's more a collection of 15 essays, rich with anecdotes, on topics such as U.S. demographic trends, transnational neighborhoods, and "the Dickensian underworld of day labor." Old fans of Davis will definitely want to check out this latest offering, as will readers interested in a quick look at the face of America's future. --John J. Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

SUNY sociologist Davis (*Ecology of Fear*, etc.) predicts that the many national origins denoted by the term "Latino" will become less distinct as U.S. Latino identity undergoes its own melting pot process through intermarriages between different Latino nationalities. The "cosmopolitan result is a rich, constantly evolving" Latino culture that may become a "new American counter-culture" or a "new hegemonic global culture." Because U.S. cities boast the most "diverse blendings of Latin American culture in the entire hemisphere," Davis foresees these metropolises reshaping "hemispheric as well as national U.S. identities." Much of this concise and insightful book explores not only cultural syncretism, but the practical aspects of a huge shift in American identity. Even if all immigration stopped short, Latinos would still be destined to become the largest "ethnic" group in the U.S. by mid-century because of their high fertility rate (for women born in Mexico, it is twice that of North American Anglo women) and the younger median age of the U.S. Latino population. Davis examines the "Dickensian underworld of day labor" in New York, the "interpenetration... of national

temporalities, settlement forms, ecologies and levels of development" along la frontera (the borderlands), as well as the shifting realities of labor and lifestyles in the Midwest. He portrays all of this as an unfolding epic drama leading toward a "Latino metropolis that will... wear a proud union label," one in which equal opportunity in education and affirmative action policies will become myths of a long-gone 20th century. No matter the ethnicity of the reader, this is a disquieting book, not because of the demographic shifts Davis envisions, but because of the social upheaval that seems inevitable. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Needed to have this book for my History class. This was the first one we read. I enjoyed the true life stories however reading about how society and human beings treat one another was a little disturbing. Great book and very insightful! Thanks.

I got it for my son since he took a class which he need it this book and it looks like it's helping him

Controversial and eye opening

Good read

- as usually well researched and elegantly stated- for a more substantiated read I recommend City of Quartz or Ecology of Fear

Mike Davis is our premier bare-knuckled Marxist-savant polemicist, doing prodigious amounts of research on important topics and writing in a molten style that literally pulls your eyes down the page. For these reasons alone, attention must be paid. (This is difficult advice to a nation of "comfort readers," who--far from being provoked by their nighttime reading--love to curl up with a good Danielle Steele until the Sandman comes.) Whatever other functions a Davis book serves, it's an in-your-face test of the reader's mettle. ...Davis paints what seems to me a more than plausible vision of a Hispanic/Latino future that I'll bet you haven't given much thought to (unless you live in SoCal or along the southern border). One useful thing about demography is that a simple extrapolation will get the analyst to several plausible hypotheses about things to come. This is one service Davis has performed. One of the useful mental exercises Davis sends you off on once he makes his preliminary case (of a Latino/Hispanic plurality by 2050) prompts you to contemplate the

coming contours of national level politics, immigration policy, relations with Central and Latin America--in other words, this book can rattle your mental universe. And his chapter on "transnational suburbs"--in which he analyzes bilocated Latino communities that, in our internet and cheap-transportation age, retain a deep involvement in both their native and immigrant communities--is, for me, worth the price of the book. This is a useful tutorial about the drift of our demographic destiny in a "globalized" world, but the picture Davis paints is by no means inevitable. Second and third generation immigrant communities tend to assimilate to the dominant culture through a variety of means (although Davis tends to argue that contemporary immigrant communities are driven by walls of discrimination back upon themselves in ways earlier immigrants in the second and third generations were not). The future is seldom, in any significant respect, a straight-line extrapolation of any trend. And Davis's great hope for the mobilization of the heretofore inchoate political might of the new immigrant communities--a revived labor movement--seems, at best, a pipe dream, but one that more than a few commentators see well within the realm of possibility, as income differentials widen and a pronounced underclass sentiment proliferates among the have-nots. In all, a quick, stimulating, worthy read. And for those parents who wonder which language little Johnny should study in high school, or in his language immersion pre-school, David would probably say--and I'd have to agree--Spanish is a good choice. Venceremos!

Davis' prose certainly lives up to the hype, keeping me turning the pages. Unfortunately, I never quite found what I was looking for. The book has little to say about Latinos reinventing the U.S. big city, and more to say about how Latinos are being systematically victimized by U.S. big cities (all three of 'em). It deals almost exclusively with the Latino experience in Los Angeles and, to a lesser extent, in Chicago and New York. Although cursory mention is made of other cities with large Latino populations (Houston, San Antonio, Denver, Miami), they are given no in depth treatment. I expected some discussion of how Latinos are influencing urban forms and the built environment in the U.S. The closest Davis comes is in noting that L.A. doesn't have enough public space to meet the needs of the Latino Community. There were some high points, the chapter on 'Transnational Suburbs' was fascinating. I also enjoyed the chapter on 'Tropicalizing Cold Urban Space', although its 6 pages seemed too brief. In short, if you're looking for an unabashedly pro-immigration polemic about the social ills associated with Latino immigration in the U.S., you will love this book. If you want to know about how Latinos will reinvent the U.S. big city, you're sure to be disappointed as only ~25% of this book deals directly with that topic.

Davis dedicates precious little space to the cultural dynamism that the monograph's title suggests is so important. How has the American city changed how Latinos approach their own cultural memories in a new place, and how have American cities changed accordingly? Davis briefly mentions "the great community murals of [East Los Angeles]," (Davis, 55) glosses over the use of tropical colors on homes, and mentions that the North American metropolis leaves no physical space for the survival economy of the poor." In other words, he hints at issues that deserve attention but doesn't expand on them. The fusion of music brought over from la patria and how it melds with music from other Hispanic nations and with American urban music, or how Latinos have superimposed their ideas about urban space on the American city, would have been interesting topics. This "tropicalization" and "genius for transforming dead urban spaces into convivial social places," (Davis, 55) is central to his argument but is not adequately explained. His treatment of the border is also unsatisfying. The paradox of increased security and increased trans-border economic fluidity, and the relationship between Mexican corporations and Asian corporations in border cities, both challenge the assumptions of the reader. Evidence shows that the current form of border policing is in place to "assure voters that the threat of alien invasion is being contained," (Davis 27) and only encourages more criminal and complex ways of finding paths across the border. However, being published in the year 2000, Davis escapes thorough assessment of the potential of the border as a means for trafficking biological, chemical or nuclear weapons into the United States that would have been essential if published post 9/11. Overall, the book has shortcomings in important areas but sheds light on the Latino-American experience and stresses important role this population will play in shaping the future of the United States.

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