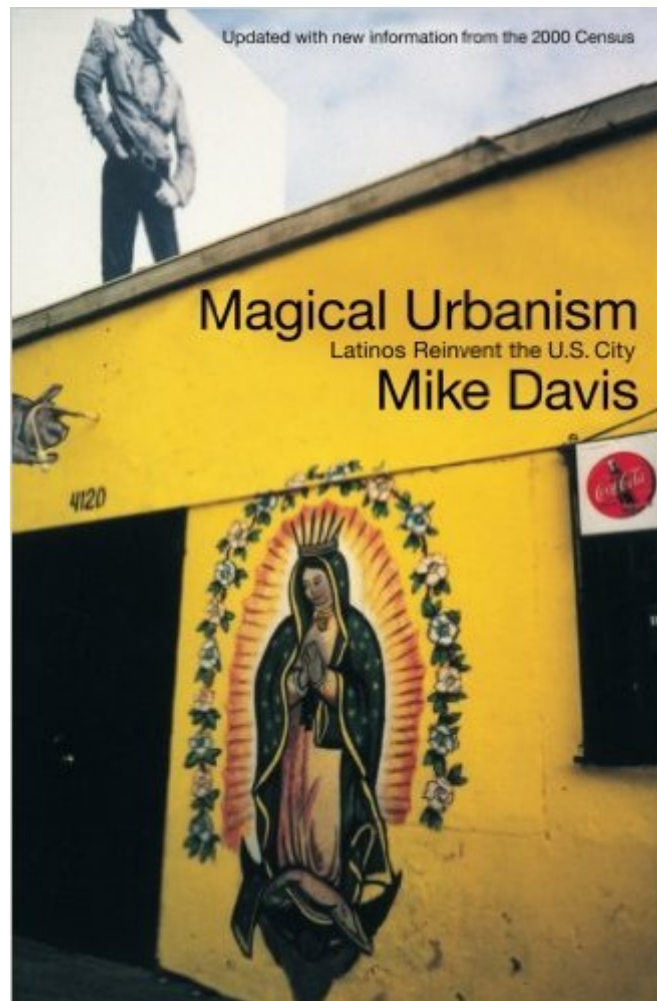


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# Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent The U.S. Big City



## 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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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