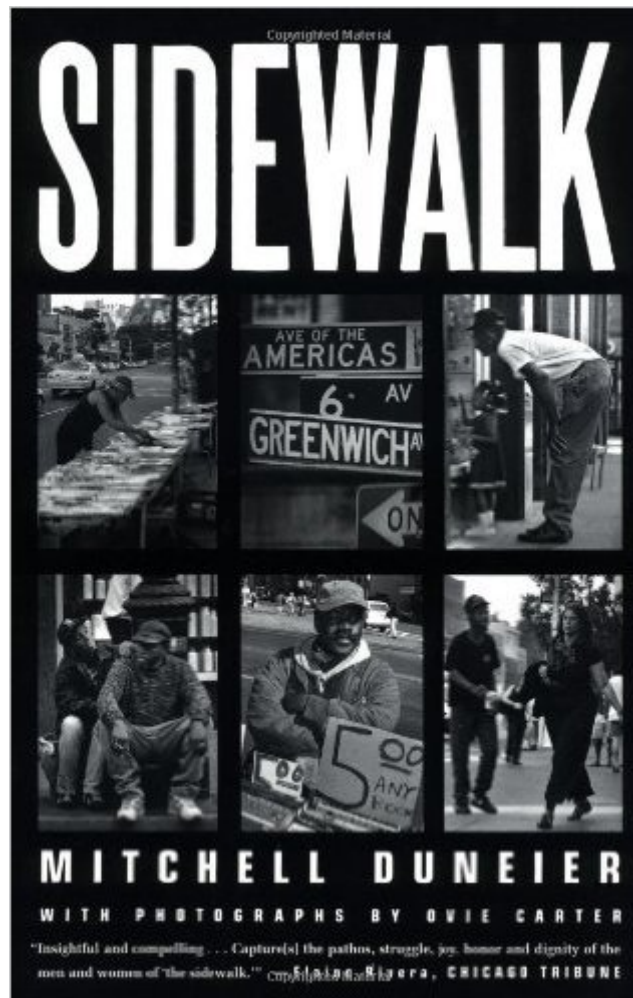


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# Sidewalk



## Synopsis

An exceptional ethnography marked by clarity and candor, *Sidewalk* takes us into the socio-cultural environment of those who, though often seen as threatening or unseemly, work day after day on "the blocks" of one of New York's most diverse neighborhoods. Sociologist Duneier, author of *Slim's Table*, offers an accessible and compelling group portrait of several poor black men who make their livelihoods on the sidewalks of Greenwich Village selling secondhand goods, panhandling, and scavenging books and magazines. Duneier spent five years with these individuals, and in *Sidewalk* he argues that, contrary to the opinion of various city officials, they actually contribute significantly to the order and well-being of the Village. An important study of the heart and mind of the street, *Sidewalk* also features an insightful afterword by longtime book vendor Hakim Hasan. This fascinating study reveals today's urban life in all its complexity: its vitality, its conflicts about class and race, and its surprising opportunities for empathy among strangers. *Sidewalk* is an excellent supplementary text for a range of courses: **INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY:** Shows how to make important links between micro and macro; how a research project works; how sociology can transform common sense. **RACE AND ETHNIC RELATIONS:** Untangles race, class, and gender as they work together on the street. **URBAN STUDIES:** Asks how public space is used and contested by men and women, blacks and whites, rich and poor, and how street life and political economy interact. **DEVIANCE:** Looks at labeling processes in treatment of the homeless; interrogates the "broken windows" theory of policing. **LAW AND SOCIETY:** Closely examines the connections between formal and informal systems of social control. **METHODS:** Shows how ethnography works; includes a detailed methodological appendix and an afterword by research subject Hakim Hasan. **CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY:** *Sidewalk* engages the rich terrain of recent developments regarding representation, writing, and authority; in the tradition of Elliot Liebow and Ulf Hannerz, it deals with age old problems of the social and cultural experience of inequality; this is a telling study of culture on the margins of American society. **CULTURAL STUDIES:** Breaking down disciplinary boundaries, *Sidewalk* shows how books and magazines are received and interpreted in discussions among working-class people on the sidewalk; it shows how cultural knowledge is deployed by vendors and scavengers to generate subsistence in public space. **SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE:** *Sidewalk* demonstrates the connections between culture and human agency and innovation; it interrogates distinctions between legitimate subcultures and deviant collectivities; it illustrates conflicts over cultural diversity in public space; and, ultimately, it shows how conflicts over meaning are central to social life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is the best and most readable work of sociology I have ever encountered, a completely unromantic look at poverty. Most impressive to me as an attorney is the way that the author, while arguing that these men are trying to live with standards of moral worth, is willing to look carefully at the evidence which would contradict his claims. Most authors only present the evidence which supports their view. Duneier spends whole chapters looking at behaviors such as urinating in public, sleeping on the sidewalk, talking to passing pedestrians, and selling stolen goods. These chapters make for fascinating reading. It is also great that this author gives so much space to the voices of residents of Greenwich Village. It is astounding to hear the people in positions of power who work for the business improvement districts, and what they -- especially the woman who runs the Village Alliance -- have to say about the homeless. I was shocked to hear her say that where she thinks there should be a change in the law is that the first amendment should not protect street people. Wow! These are the kinds of things that never get said publicly but which secretly motivate efforts to get marginal people off the streets. The book ends with a brilliant afterward by Hakim Hasan, one of the vendors. This alone is worth the price of an otherwise extraordinary book.

I've rarely read a "participant-observer's" book in which the observer, in this case an already-recognized scholar/sociologist is so manifestly a true participant, and in which the subjects being observed are so alive and active contributors to the book. Moreover, Duneier is a sociologist who can write, and the photographic illustrations not only works of art in themselves but truly

illustrative of the community the author describes so comprehensively and positively. (It rings absolutely true to my sense of the street and its people in a neighborhood where I lived for 15 years, including the period covered). Book, I'm sure, will be controversial, but the depth of concern, strength of research, and humanity make SIDEWALK an exceptional work even if one disagrees with its conclusions (although after having read it dispassionately, I can't imagine disagreeing in any significant way). NY Times called it "magnificent" and I concur.

This is an excellent book -- a page turner. Mitch Duneier allows us a look at the corporate structure of the street vending business through his living and working among the street vendors as well as taped conversations and quotes from the various vendors. We are allowed to meet the vendors and peek into some of the reasons they have become vendors. I have always seen street vendors -- but was unaware of the complexities of the business. The research for this book was thorough and complete. Mitch is an excellent researcher and writer. Ovie Carter brings us superior photos allowing us to see the vendors we have met through Mitch's words. Having read "Slim's Table," Mitch Duneier and Ovie Carter's first venture, I can say that "Sidewalk" is equal in every way. I look forward to a third book collaborating the talents of Mitch Duneier and Ovie Carter.

This was a very interesting book. I purchased it for a Community Studies class at my college. Honestly I was not expecting anything interesting and was prepared to bear my way through it for the sake of the class and my grade. I was very pleasantly surprised about how interesting this book actually is. It is written in a way that is very conversational, almost story teller like, yet it is still packed with interesting information. This book shows aspects and connections within society that most people will never see or understand. It is a window into a society within our society. You become attached to people this book writes about, you want to read more so you can find out what choice they made, and why. Duneier is an outsider submerging himself into a society unlike anything he has known for the sake of information and exploration and there is something fascinating about how he perceives the people he encounters and their lifestyles. I feel like I learned a lot from this book and have really changed my perspective on things I would have never before considered. I am really glad my teacher chose this book out of all the books that could have worked because I really learned some valuable things through reading it. It was both captivating and informative. The book came very quickly, within a few days of purchase so that was great. Also this book was very reasonably priced for how good of a read it was.

I was halfway through reading *Sidewalk* in April this year when I suddenly remembered that my friend was vacationing in New York. In a desperate and pathetic attempt to live vicariously through her, I suggested she take a stroll down the streets of New York which Mitchell Duneier had featured in his book, particularly at the intersection where Hasan Hakim held his table and forums. (She didn't by the way.) While I was only a few pages into *Sidewalk*, I was touched by Duneier's deep sense of humanity and humility. He brought life to these people and showed us how, for many of them, living (and making a living) in the streets was a conscious decision, be it one which was made actively, or with resignation. He brought out their sense of self-worth in spite of living conditions which many would deem unliveable and intolerable. By the mere fact of their ability to make do with what they have, the sidewalk community have become much stronger and real than many of us, defined not by their material possessions but by their fighting spirit. Hasan Hakim embodies this virtue and more. He has made a meaningful life not only for himself and his fellow street dwellers, but also for the pedestrians who come into contact with him both intentionally and unintentionally. *Sidewalk* isn't merely a book about the human condition and its resilience and complexities. It is also a tribute to a man's passion about his craft and his humility - and the man is Mitchell Duneier. He spent years researching this gem not just by interviews and distant observation; he immersed himself in the street lives of his subjects with the constant awareness that he could've been treated partially because of the colour of his skin and his educational background etc. Still, he tried. And I applaud him.

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