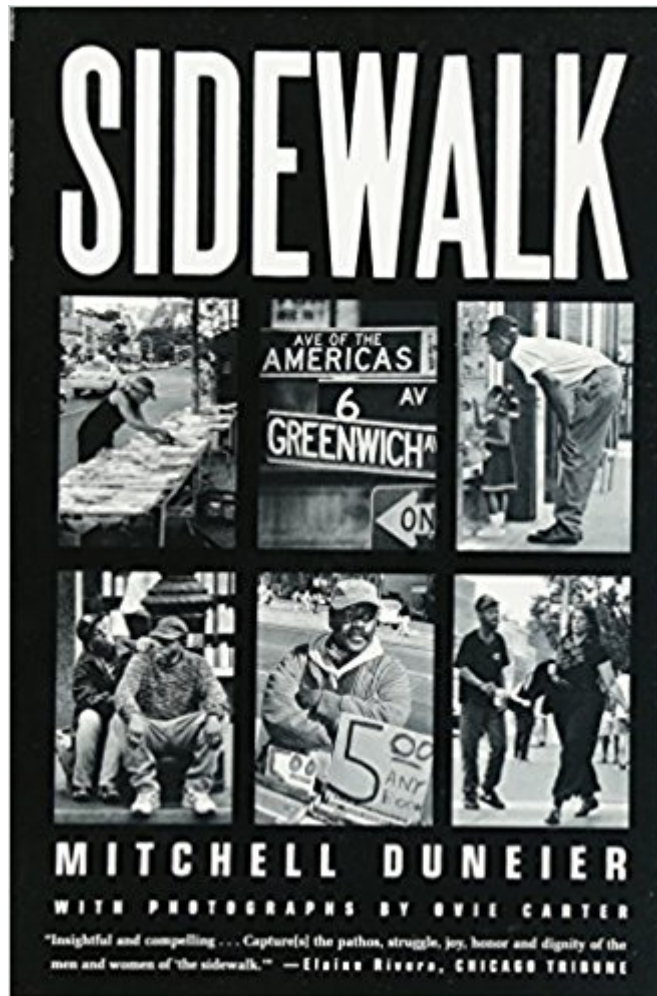




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# Sidewalk



## 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

"I've had the luxury--if you can call it the luxury," says Hakim Hasan, "of working in the formal economy, and of working at certain companies that required a certain level of training, however rudimentary, and a certain level of education." Instead, he chooses to sell books from a table on the sidewalk in New York's Greenwich Village. Soon after he met sociologist Mitchell Duneier, Hakim described himself as a "public character," and sent Duneier scurrying to reread Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* to find out what he meant. That moment was one of Duneier's inspirations to spend years studying--getting to know, really--Hakim and other book and magazine vendors on his patch of Sixth Avenue. *Sidewalk* explains much about the street vendors: How did this become legal? Where do vendors obtain their merchandise? How do they interact with potential customers? When do they find time to go to the bathroom (and, for that matter, where do they go)? But it's ultimately about the people themselves--quoted at length from Duneier's tape-recorded interviews and photographed by Ovie Carter--as they do their best to live successfully on their own terms, with all the good and bad consequences that entail. Some of these people (almost all men) are drug addicts, yes, and some of them choose to live as "unhoused" individuals. But many of them find a strong sense of purpose and identity in their work and choose to live in ways that best facilitate that work; they are as motivated--more, perhaps--as workers holding "respectable" office jobs. Nonacademic readers may glaze over at some of Duneier's longer explanations of his methodology, and he seems occasionally overapologetic when quoting the uncensored language of his subjects, but few books succeed at plunging the reader into a

community and delineating the character of its members as Sidewalk does. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Investigating the complex social ecology of a three-block span of New York's Greenwich Village (a neighborhood that helped shape pioneering urban critic Jane Jacobs's thinking on the structure of cities), Duneier offers a vibrant portrait of a community in the shadows of public life. A white, middle-class sociologist whose *Slim's Table* won plaudits for its nuanced portrait of urban black men, Duneier infiltrated a stretch of lower Sixth Avenue frequented by scavengers, panhandlers and vendors of used and discounted books and magazines. As participant-observer, he spent months working the vendors' tables, gaining impressive access and insight. He suggests, contrary to Christopher Jencks in *The Homeless*, that many choose to sleep on the sidewalk even if they have money for a room. He not only observes but experiences arbitrary displays of authority by the police, who tell him to stop selling books and magazines one Christmas. Duneier adroitly explains how disparate policies such as pressure on the homeless at Penn Station and a law that exempts vendors of written matter from licensing have redefined life and business conditions in the city streets. He further argues that, despite the apparent disorder created by the vendors, the sidewalk creates an opportunity for income, respect and social support. In a retort to the influential "broken windows" theory behind community policing, he concludes that policy makers must do better to distinguish between inanimate signs of decline, such as graffiti, and the vendors or panhandlers who strive for better lives. The dozens of photos interspersed throughout by Chicago Tribune photographer Carter, a previous collaborator with the author add depth to a book that achieves a remarkably intimate perspective on life on the margins of New York City. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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 though 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 love Duneier's work, going back to "Slim's Table." But this book captures something else; embedded within the text is Duneier's compassion for those he's working with, and who he is writing about. Almost like Vankatesh's accounts of the underground economy and Chicago gangs, this work explores how life on the streets, mostly through "legitimate" book selling, is just that: legitimate. Yet, Duneier delves into the complex nature of sponsorship and kinship in this work; how the men of the streets in Greenwich Village look out for one another and lead lives as meaningful as anyone with a "nine-to-five" job. Ethnographic accounts should always be approached with caution, in that they serve a purpose, usually the author's thesis or hypothesis. Duneier, however, really cares about the people with whom he works and is looking for change. His supplemental DVD with a lecture and video on this book really captures that. A must read for sociology students.

Interesting but confusing / wordy at times

This is among the best ethnographies I have ever read. Duneier's work will open your eyes to life on the sidewalk and make you feel as though you have actually encountered the people of whom he writes. You will never think about homelessness the same way again. Very well done.

Sidewalk takes you on an interesting adventure to a darker part of New York. Maybe not so dark if you visit, but the homeless there have another story to tell. Mitchell Duneier takes a trip to New York's Greenwich Village and dives into the lives of those less fortunate. Many of these men browsing the streets for items to sell at their tables gave up or even made the choice to be homeless. Check this book out and see for yourself what kind of society lives and breathes on the streets of this little part of town.

I can't say that I've ever had an interest in sociology; I happened across this book via a link on the This American Life homepage while looking for something completely unrelated. Wow, thank

goodness for circumstance. This is a fantastic book for anyone interested in urban life. Everyone -- urban dwellers, suburbanites, country folk -- has their own preconceived notions about the unhoused. Mr. Duneier spends years (on and off) with the "written materials" vendors in Greenwich Village and exposes a wealth of information that the rest of us would otherwise never imagine. Written in a style that's very readable considering its academic relevance, this is a book that can't be overlooked. Holiday shopping for your urban friends is complete; this book is it.

A sociological study that takes you through the day to day life and struggles of the homeless. Explaining different types of homelessness, different ways of life for the homeless, and more! Very interesting!

This is not only a great read...like you're sitting there in a casual conversation with the author...but it is a great "text book" of sorts for students who are studying Social Institutions of poverty, race, class, education, etc. It is one of my favorite books I've ever had to purchase for a class...and one of verrrrrry few that I've actually kept and enjoy returning to from time to time. But then again, I love Sociology.

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