



Invisible in Austin: Life and Labor in an American City

From University of Texas Press



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Austin, Texas, is renowned as a high-tech, fast-growing city for the young and creative, a cool place to live, and the scene of internationally famous events such as SXSW and Formula 1. But as in many American cities, poverty and penury are booming along with wealth and material abundance in contemporary Austin. Rich and poor residents lead increasingly separate lives as growing socioeconomic inequality underscores residential, class, racial, and ethnic segregation.

In *Invisible in Austin*, the award-winning sociologist Javier Auyero and a team of graduate students explore the lives of those working at the bottom of the social order: house cleaners, office-machine repairers, cab drivers, restaurant cooks and dishwashers, exotic dancers, musicians, and roofers, among others. Recounting their subjects' life stories with empathy and sociological insight, the authors show us how these lives are driven by a complex mix of individual and social forces. These poignant stories compel us to see how poor people who provide indispensable services for all city residents struggle daily with substandard housing, inadequate public services and schools, and environmental risks. Timely and essential reading, *Invisible in Austin* makes visible the growing gap between rich and poor that is reconfiguring the cityscape of one of America's most dynamic places, as low-wage workers are forced to the social and symbolic margins.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Sociologist Auyero and his graduate students at the University of Texas at Austin deliver exceptional in-depth longitudinal studies of 11 people living in precarious social and economic conditions in their city...Lucid and empathetic, these insightful portraits reveal how life histories are intertwined with political and economic forces beyond any individual's control." (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review 2015-06-15)

"Engaging and accessible, the essays dovetail with today's debates on social inequality and immigration. A scholarly study conducted with dignity and thoroughness." (*Kirkus Reviews* 2015-05-20)

"These intimate, uniformly affecting profiles reveal how thoroughly Texas's historic disregard for fair labor practices and basic social services pervades the lives of today's working poor." (*Texas Monthly*)

"A captivating study of urban life for the disadvantaged. Poignant portraits of inequality and social exclusion are provided through the eyes of the dispossessed, portraits of survival in a brutal social environment. And Javier Auyero and his colleagues expertly illuminate the conditions that foster such economic instability and social insecurity. This unique book is a must-read for individuals and policy makers seeking a deeper understanding of the growing inequality in urban America." (William Julius Wilson, Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor, Harvard University)

"Who does the hard work that keeps groovy Austin going, and what does it feel like? These multidimensional life stories show us that it's a diverse group, but almost everyone has come from elsewhere to chase the Austin Dream, with its glimmers of postindustrial pleasure and promise. From the chicken-processing plant to the strip club, from the delight of intoxication and the simulation of aspirational class ascendency in the glamour zone of glitzy hotels, to the mundane daily routines and bodily brutality of addiction, accidents and injuries, it's a hard fall and a revolving door of disappointments. Kudos to Javier Auyero and the talented group at the UT Austin sociology ethnography lab for bringing back from margin to center the life story method and workers' everyday struggles and for keeping alive the promise of the sociological imagination." (Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, author of *Paradise Transplanted: Migration and the Making of California Gardens*)

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About the Author

Javier Auyero is the Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Professor in Latin American Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, where he directs the Urban Ethnography Lab. He is the author of five previous books, including the award-winning *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown* (with Débora Swistun).

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