

POVERTY:
**THROUGH THE LENS OF URBAN
ANTHROPOLOGY**

Exploring the structures, stories,
and survival strategies of urban
poverty.

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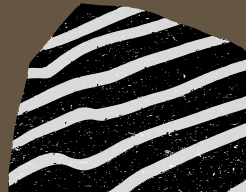


WHAT IS URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY?



Urban anthropology studies how people live, adapt, and create meaning in city environments. It reveals how cities are not just physical spaces, but also shaped by power, inequality, and survival.

In studying poverty, urban anthropologists ask:

- Who gets left out of development?
 - What invisible systems keep poverty in place?
 - How do people resist, cope, or thrive in spite of hardship?
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SYSTEMS THAT SHAPE POVERTY

Urban poverty isn't just about individual struggle—it's built into city systems.

Key contributors:

- Housing inequality: Gentrification, eviction, redlining
- Labor precarity: Informal economies, unstable wages, underemployment
- Policing & surveillance: Disproportionate targeting in poor communities
- Access gaps: Health care, transit, education, and digital divides

These systems interact, compounding disadvantage across generations.

These structures often operate invisibly. What looks like “personal failure” is usually systemic neglect. Zoning laws, funding cuts, and development policies often favor the wealthy while displacing or criminalizing the poor. Poverty in cities is not accidental; it's produced and maintained by design.



EVERYDAY SURVIVAL

URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES DEVELOP
POWERFUL STRATEGIES TO SURVIVE AND
SUPPORT EACH OTHER.

EXAMPLES FROM STUDIES:

- MUTUAL AID NETWORKS — NEIGHBORS
SHARING FOOD, CARE, OR HOUSING
- SHADOW ECONOMIES — RECYCLING, STREET
VENDING, INFORMAL LABOR
- SPATIAL CREATIVITY — USING ABANDONED
LOTS, SQUATTING, DIY INFRASTRUCTURE

THESE ACTS ARE NOT JUST COPING—THEY'RE
RESISTANCE.





VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

Urban anthropologists prioritize lived experience.

Ethnographic studies center stories like:

- A single mother navigating housing insecurity while working two jobs
- Youth forming community through art collectives in neglected neighborhoods
- Immigrants negotiating legal status and survival in gig economies

Poverty is never faceless. It is personal, political, and profoundly human.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Understanding is the first step. Action must follow.

Anthropology teaches us to:

- Listen deeply to communities
- Challenge narratives that blame individuals for systemic issues
- Support local knowledge and grassroots solutions
- Push for policy change in housing, healthcare, and labor rights

Poverty is made by systems. Systems can be remade.