

The Corner

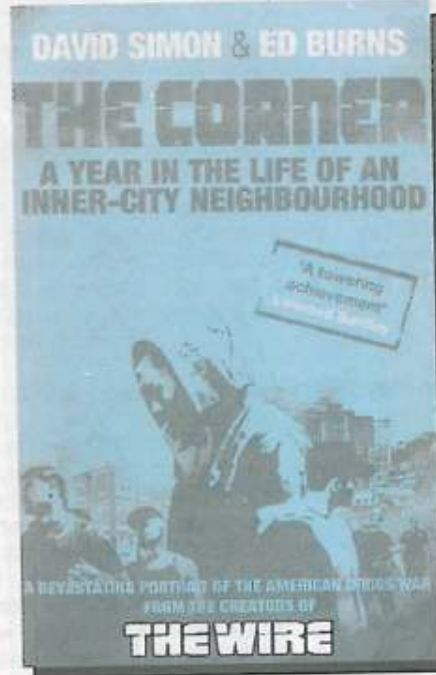
By David Simon and Ed Burns
(Canongate)

THE CORNER is the result of a 1993 research project conducted by former Baltimore Sun reporter David Simon (already well known for inspiring the TV series *Homicide: Life on the Street*) and ex-homicide detective Ed Burns, with the intent of exploring the life of a drug-infested inner-city area of Baltimore, Maryland.

Originally published in the US in 1997, the book is only now being released in Europe, riding on the wave of enthusiasm for Simon's cult television crime hit *The Wire* (currently being broadcast on BBC Two and TG4). Perhaps the authors had assumed the issues dealt with were so specifically American that they would not have found an audience over here. But whatever the reasons, I'm grateful that it's finally reached our shores.

Straddling the fences between fiction, academia and documentary, *The Corner* brings us the reality of a handful of families and individuals struggling to make sense of the life they're bound into – full of drug sellers, users, regular police intrusions, gun shots, abject poverty and everything that comes with it.

The people profiled allow us a generous look at how they have got to where they are, and how they're trying to improve their situations against all odds. What we find is a heartbreaking rendering of lives seemingly



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impossible to live. The cycle of poverty, crime and drugs spins so fast that any chances to break free are often barely glimpsed as they pass.

These accounts are divided by shorter dispatches of anger and frustration at the

political, educational and economical systems that feed the cycle of murder, addiction and despair.

At points the authors do come across as preachy in their soliloquies, but they are forgiven. They haven't simply stumbled onto an interesting idea from which they can make a buck. They really do care, and it shows in their humanised portrayal of inner city Baltimore.

Although the book offers no real answers, there are plenty of suggestions. However, the main task seems to be to highlight the uselessness of the so-called 'war on drugs' and look at the real reasons for the poverty among the city's downtrodden. In the process they manage to create something that speaks to people in many parts of the world, not just the US.

For all its weighty subject matter, this is not a difficult read. Quite the contrary – I found myself flying through all 628 pages at the sheer delight of finding a thought-provoking read.



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