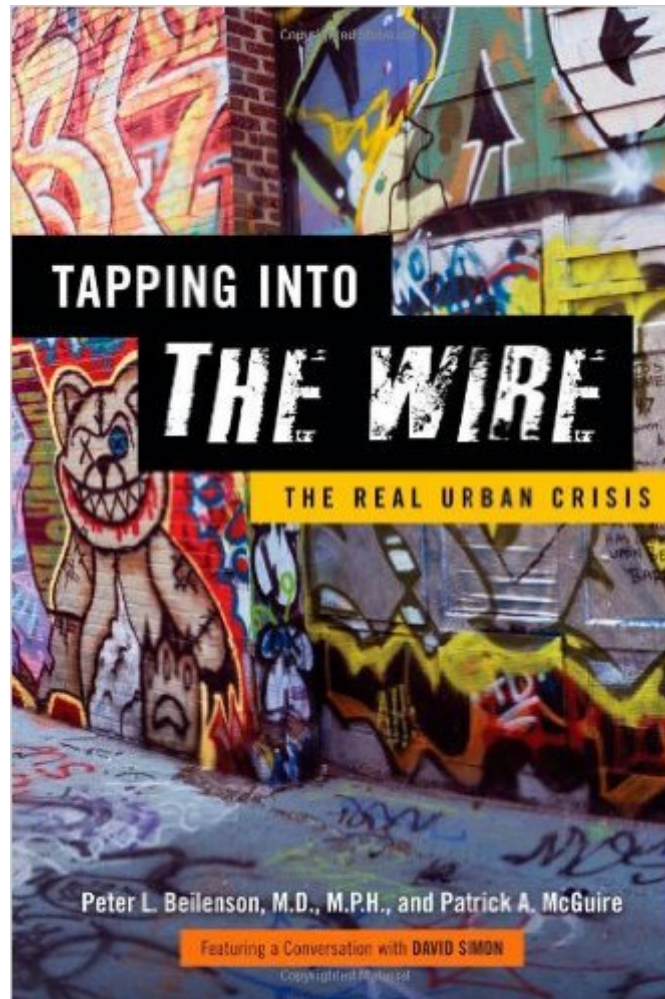


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Tapping Into The Wire: The Real Urban Crisis



Synopsis

Did Omar Little die of lead poisoning? Would a decriminalization strategy like the one in Hamsterdam end the War on Drugs? What will it take to save neglected kids like Wallace and Dukie? Tapping into 'The Wire' uses the acclaimed television series as a road map for exploring connections between inner-city poverty and drug-related violence. Past Baltimore City health commissioner Peter Beilenson teams up with former Baltimore Sun reporter Patrick A. McGuire to deliver a compelling, highly readable examination of urban policy and public health issues affecting cities across the nation. Each chapter recounts scenes from episodes of the HBO series, placing the characters' challenges into the broader context of public policy. A candid interview with the show's co-creator David Simon reveals that one of the intentions of the series is to expose gross failures of public institutions, including criminal justice, education, labor, the news media, and city government. Even if readers haven't seen the series, the book's detailed summaries of scenes and characters brings them up to speed and engages them in both the story and the issues. With a firm grasp on the hard truths of real-world problems, Tapping into 'The Wire' helps undo misconceptions and encourage a dialogue of understanding.

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Customer Reviews

The Wire has not only riveted legions of viewers with its brilliant storytelling, but has also offered sharp insights into the multifaceted, frequently overlooked problems of inner city America. The emotional depth and moral complexity of its characters--police, drug dealers, politicians, and

addicts--help the series weave urban crises into relatable stories. In *Tapping into the Wire*, former Baltimore health commissioner Peter Beilenson and veteran Sun journalist Patrick McGuire explore these stories from the perspective of public health. They cover an array of issues, including drug addiction, gun violence, malnutrition and obesity, sexual health, lead poisoning, and public education. Instead of merely presenting a litany of problems, though, the authors suggest pragmatic solutions. Chief among these is a proposed overhaul of the War on Drugs, which the authors deem a failed policy. They compellingly argue that while violent offenders should feel the full brunt of the law, addiction should be addressed as a health issue rather than a criminal one. America's prisons, they point out, are bursting with nonviolent offenders charged with small-scale drug possession. Though the U.S. contains less than 5 percent of the global population, it is home to one-quarter of the world's prison inmates (2.3 million, or one in every 100 American adults--the vast majority of them drug offenders). Equally disturbing is the racial makeup of U.S. prisons. While 1 in 30 American men ages 20-34 are imprisoned, for African Americans, that number is 1 in 9. The authors take pains to explain that they do not advocate legalizing drugs. They do, however, argue for the medicalization of drug use and for channeling our efforts toward providing addicts with treatment.

David Simon, creator of *THE WIRE*, worked at the Baltimore Sun for thirteen years as a police reporter. He produced evocative prose. Then he spent a year embedded with cops to write his book, *HOMICIDE: A YEAR ON THE KILLING STREETS*. Simon had a passion for telling a story well. He left the SUN in 1995, teaming up with Ed Burns to write *THE CORNER*. That book was adapted for a mini-series. Later there was the five year series, *THE WIRE*. This book begins with Patrick McGuire's interview with David Simon. Poverty, gun violence, and addiction are problems of public health. Arguably the war against drugs is intractable and ruins police work. *THE WIRE*, a work of fiction, covers things that can't be put in the newspaper Simon says. War is being waged on the underclass in this country. A lot of people are incarcerated. Gangsterism is related to the illegality of drugs, not their use. (Heroin users are docile.) In 2002 Baltimore had the highest juvenile homicide rate. When the statistics were analyzed, it was discovered that of the victims, four, the girls, had been by-standers, and the others, the boys, twenty-eight in number, had had multiple arrests for drug distribution and gun violations. In some of the neighborhoods of Baltimore there is a lowered life-expectancy of twenty years. One of the co-authors of this book has served as the Baltimore Commissioner of Health. The economic and social strength of cities depends upon the health of citizens. The authors suggest that nonviolent drug offenders be put in drug treatment programs as swiftly as possible and that violent offenders be incarcerated until age fifty or so, the

mid fifties being the age when violent propensities start to wane.

I discovered the HBO series, *The Wire*, about two years ago and it's one of the best television series ever produced. Because of this, I ordered *Tapping into The Wire: The Real Urban Crisis* through Vine. *Tapping Into The Wire* is co-written by Peter L. Beilenson, M.D. (Baltimore Commissioner of Health during the years *The Wire* was produced) and Patrick A. McGuire (a former journalist for the *Baltimore Sun*). While this is written about Baltimore, Maryland, the experiences here and lessons to be learned could apply to any big city. Yet despite the hopelessness and despair, this book also shows how it is possible to achieve positive results in an urban environment. *Tapping into The Wire* also has an interesting interview with David Simon, who helped create the series with Ed Burns. In each chapter, the authors use the stories shown in *The Wire* to make a point about urban life. They cover such topics as the war on drugs, whether to legalize drugs, drug treatments, teenage pregnancy and STDs, school performance and absentee parents, needle exchanges, AIDS, weapons, lead poisoning, obesity despite malnourishment, and politics. "Over its five seasons, *The Wire* examines policing and the War on Drugs, the lack of jobs for the working class, politics, the social welfare and school systems, and journalism. Each themed episode is populated by the good, the bad, and the seriously bad." Throughout the series, very few of the characters are all good or all bad. But what it does show is that the systems that were set in place to protect the citizens of Baltimore (the police, the school system, the social welfare system, the newspapers, the politicians, etc.) all failed them miserably. Yet, the authors show how the Department of Health did try to orchestrate change in real-life Baltimore.

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