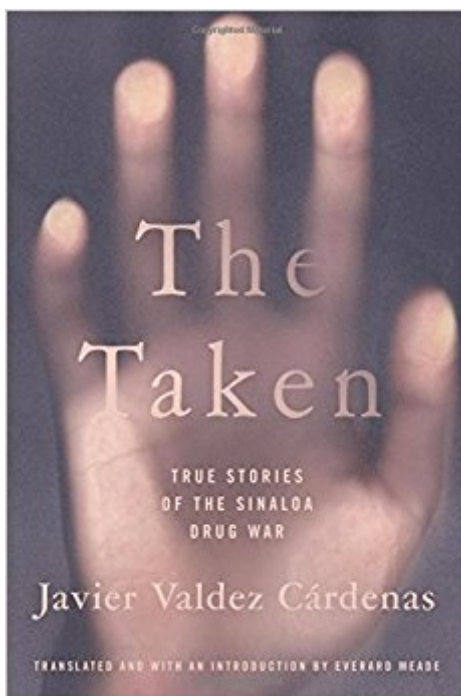


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The Taken: True Stories Of The Sinaloa Drug War



Synopsis

A massive wave of violence has rippled across Mexico over the past decade. In the western state of Sinaloa, the birthplace of modern drug trafficking, ordinary citizens live in constant fear of being "kidnapped or held against their will by armed men, whether criminals, police, or both. This remarkable collection of firsthand accounts by prize-winning journalist Javier Valdez Cárdenas provides a uniquely human perspective on life in Sinaloa during the drug war. The reality of the Mexican drug war, a conflict fueled by uncertainty and fear, is far more complex than the images conjured in popular imagination. Often missing from news reports is the perspective of ordinary people—migrant workers, schoolteachers, single mothers, businessmen, teenagers, petty criminals, police officers, and local journalists—people whose worlds center not on drugs or illegal activity but on survival and resilience, truth and reconciliation. Building on a rich tradition of testimonial literature, Valdez Cárdenas recounts in gripping detail how people deal not only with the constant threat of physical violence but also with the fear, uncertainty, and guilt that afflict survivors and witnesses. Mexican journalists who dare expose the drug war's inconvenient political and social realities are censored and smeared, murdered, and "disappeared." This is precisely why we need to hear from seasoned local reporters like Valdez Cárdenas who write about the places where they live, rely on a network of trusted sources built over decades, and tell the stories behind the headline-grabbing massacres and scandals. In his informative introduction to the volume, translator Everard Meade orients the reader to the broader armed conflict in Mexico and explains the unique role of Sinaloa as its epicenter. Reports on border politics and infamous drug traffickers may obscure the victims' suffering. *The Taken* helps ensure that their stories will not be forgotten or suppressed.

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Customer Reviews

“Over the past decade, Javier Valdez Cardenas has shown himself to be one of Mexico’s bravest and most awesomely steadfast reporters, eyeball to eyeball with a menace most of us in the United States cannot conceive of. We should welcome that his work is now finally available in English and consume it as though we’re famished.” —Sam Quinones, journalist and author of *Dream Land: The True Tale of America’s Opiate Epidemic*

Everard Meade is Director of the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego’s Kroc School of Peace Studies and its certificate programs in Applied Peace Education in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico. Javier Valdez Cardenas was an award-winning journalist and author who covered drug trafficking and organized crime in Mexico. His numerous articles have been published throughout Mexico and in such periodicals as *National Geographic*. His many published books include *Miss Narco*. Valdez Cardenas became the sixth reporter to be murdered in Mexico thus far in 2017 when, on May 15, he was fatally shot near the offices of the newspaper he founded, *Ríodoce*, in Sinaloa.

Up until his vile murder on May 15, 2017, Javier Valdez Cardenas was one of Mexico’s most important provincial journalists. With several other journalists he founded an independent newspaper, *Ríodoce*, in the capital of the state of Sinaloa, Culiacán. That newspaper provided and continues to provide stable employment to critical voices in a state ravaged by the drug war. He also wrote nine books, of which *The Taken* is the first to appear in English, having previously appeared as *Levantones* in Spanish. *The Taken* appears in a loving and felicitous translation by Ev Meade, somebody who has mastered Sinaloa street slang to make Valdez’s words sparkle in English. Sinaloa, of course, is infamous for being home to El Chapo Guzmán, but it really should be better known for being the beloved home of Javier Valdez Cardenas, a journalist and writer who documented the triumphs, tragedies, and traumas of Sinaloa’s residents, all of whom had to live “under the narco”, as he put it. Valdez’s work did not glorify the narco (drug lords), nor was he really even interested in them. He was interested in the smaller people, the ordinary people, the people from all walks of life who have still to deal with living in a state of terror. So if you are looking for the

literary version of Netflix's *Narcos* or *El Chapo*, this work is not it. It's more real than that. It's better than exposés of drug war corruption and strife because it deals with these real people, people Valdez knew well. *The Taken* brings you life as it is really lived in Sinaloa, by the people who have to suffer the consequences of the narco and the Mexican state that tolerates or facilitates the drug lords' existence. If you don't know Valdez's work, you should. It deals with Mexico's most enduring contemporary tragedy: the fate of disappeared people. It is highly readable prose and you won't be able to put the book down.

Great, eye opening book

Javier Valdez Cárdenas was a singular journalistic voice. Unlike many observers of Mexico's drug violence, Valdez cared little for sensationalized accounts of larger-than-life drug lords, devoting his life instead to telling the stories of those who suffered because of them. His writing finds the humanity and dignity in the victims, allowing readers to understand the drug war at its most elemental. *The Taken* is vital reading - it is the only English-language examination of the effects of chronic violence on a society that still finds small ways to resist, told by the only journalist capable of providing the necessary nuance. Only Valdez could describe how a confused high schooler, seduced by the lure of narcoculture, does his first "job," only to be consumed by fear and end up a victim himself. As a classroom text, *The Taken* is superb. It helped a classroom of sometimes disengaged college students realize that drug violence in Mexico was not some Netflix miniseries but that something that affected real people, that it was something nuanced, that it was something they actually could care about on a human level. The stories make empathy possible. When Valdez was murdered on May 15, 2017, we lost one of the most important advocates and voices for peace and reconciliation in Mexico. For those who would carry on the work, this translation is essential. We must preserve Valdez's memory by seeking to understand the violence as he did in his writing, as something wicked and pervasive, yes, but also as something that was not monolithic, not invincible.

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