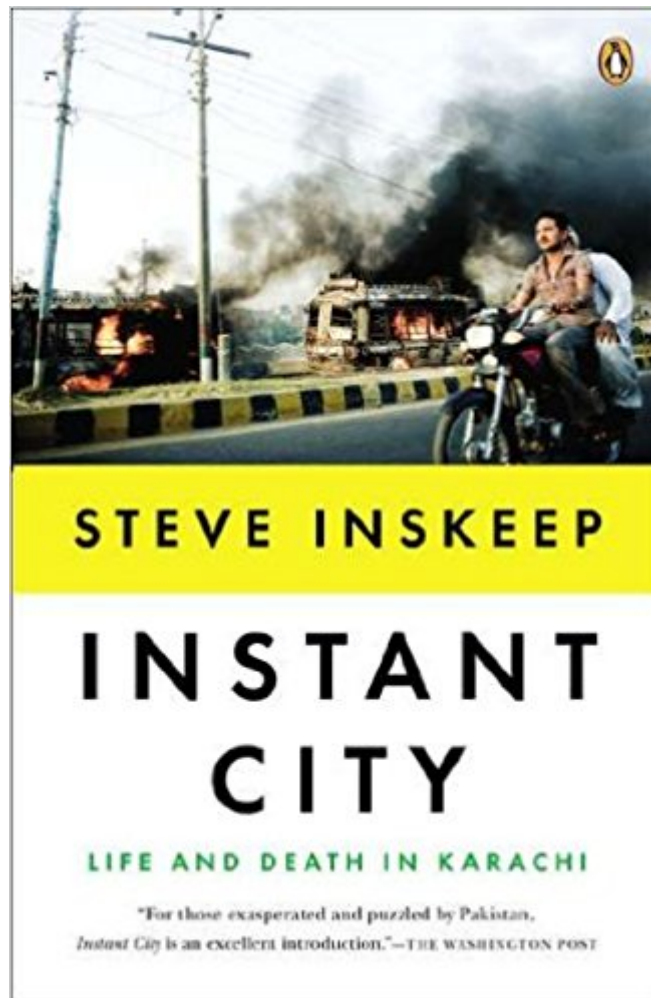




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# Instant City: Life And Death In Karachi



## Synopsis

Morning Edition cohost Steve Inskeep presents a riveting account of a single harrowing day in December 2009 that sheds light on the constant tensions in Karachi, Pakistan—when a bomb blast ripped through a Shia religious procession, followed by the torching of hundreds of businesses in Karachi’s commercial district. Through interviews with a broad cross section of Karachi residents, Inskeep peels back the layers of that terrible day. It is the beginning, and a constant touchstone, in a journey across the city’s epic history and its troubled present. Thrilling and deeply researched, *Instant City* tells the story of one of the world’s fastest-growing metropolises and the forces competing to shape its future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“It is an act of courage for Inskeep to write a book about Karachi based on interviews in that city. As the well-known host of NPR’s Morning Edition, he must have been aware of the possible dangers he faced. A tribute to Karachi is long overdue, and Inskeep provides one. “If this book succeeds at all,” he writes, “it lets the city speak for itself and be judged on its own terms.” For those exasperated and puzzled by Pakistan, *Instant City* is an excellent introduction. THE WASHINGTON POST “Informative, ambitious, chaotic, and sometimes glorious.” CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR “Absorbing” reads like a sophisticated thriller as the author traces the movements of a number of people—he keeps his narrative well paced and full of small surprises. The book sparkles when Inskeep takes an unexpected turn and follows a

stranger, or when he tracks down a new trend to illuminate a new facet of the city. The old man he encounters outside a liquor shop, the slum under construction, the upscale leisure park tell us more about the city than any bomb blast.

Not many politicians read books in Karachi, but if they were to read one, let it be *Instant City*. • PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“Steve Inskeep has written a magnificent, engrossing book about one of the world’s most vivid and fascinating cities. His subject is urban Pakistan, its struggles and zig-zagging achievements is of deep and timely importance. His voice reflects the best traditions of politically alert travel writing, endowed with calm wisdom and curious empathy.”

• Steve Coll, author of *GHOST WARS* and *THE BIN LADENS*

“Urbanity is our certain and fixed future. How human beings live together or fail to live together compacted into great cities where a world’s races, religions and ancestries share ever-tighter quarters this is the fundamental question for the new century. With *Instant City*, Steve Inskeep tells the story of a single violent and volatile day in the teeming streets of Karachi, Pakistan. In doing so, he reveals what is now at stake not just for Pakistan, or Asia, but for the human species. This is thoughtful, important work.”

• David Simon, creator of HBO’s “*The Wire*,” author of *HOMICIDE*

STEVE INSKEEP is a co-host of *Morning Edition*, the most widely heard radio news program in the United States. After the September 11 attacks, he covered the war in Afghanistan, the hunt for al-Qaeda suspects in Pakistan, and the war in Iraq. He won a National Headliner Award for investigating a military raid that went wrong in Afghanistan; the Robert F. Kennedy journalism award for “The Price of African Oil,” about conflict in Nigeria; and shared an Alfred I. Dupont award for The York Project, a groundbreaking series of conversations on race in America. This is his first book.

‘*Instant City*’ captures the essence of Karachi. It takes the readers into the history and transformation of Karachi as it details the events of a horrendous day in the aftermath of a terrorist attack on a religious procession. Karachi is no ordinary city and it’s impossible to encapsulate its complexities in a mere 200 pages. However, Inskeep does justice to the subject matter. *Instant City* is a wonderful book and a must read for those who wish to broaden their understanding of the developing world. Karachi is the backbone and melting pot of Pakistan - a country riddled with uncertainties and one at the nexus of modern day geopolitics. Another aspect that renders credibility to this book is the authenticity and nonpartisan approach of Steve Inskeep. Inskeep’s fascination

and intrigue with Karachi is apparent and his outstanding ability to present facts objectively is ever present in his interviews with personalities from varied backgrounds. This is crucial to understanding Karachi's diversity and how its multilayered outlook shapes its destiny. In addition to delving into the historical, cultural and political transformation of Karachi, Instant City explores its mammoth growth. It is interesting to read how the city owes its sustenance to improvised mechanisms that somehow defy the conventional wisdom of urban planning. As a Karachite, I am extremely fascinated and excited about this book and feel sincerely indebted to Inskip for this wonderful effort. He is a wonderful reporter and has convincingly demonstrated his writing skills in Instant City. It is a fabulous read and highly recommended.

Instant city is about the real Karachi, its people and their local stories. The book begins with the bombing of the Ashura procession of 2009 and the author begins to explain through a historical story of how the city reached such levels of violence. It starts with Karachi as a religiously diverse city before partition. The founding of Pakistan, the expectations and dreams of the Muhajirs and the concerns of non-Muslim natives are made clear within the first few pages. The development of housing projects by a Greek architect and a diagram of these houses reminds one of homes which still stand in Karachi and parts of Sindh. After the Generals you get Bhutto and the secession of Bangladesh. The book does not go into detail about the wars with India or Pakistani political figures. Rather it focuses on people in the city. One segment highlights a local neighborhood organization which began digging its own sewers and putting up its own electrical poles because the government wouldn't do so. We also meet Tony Tufail an entrepreneur who constructed the biggest Casino in South Asia to attract Gulf Kings but was eventually shut down by Zia. The book also gives the story of Sattar Ehd through, from his humble beginnings of selling pan on the streets to owning a small pharmacy and eventually providing lifesaving services to the city. The stories are very personal as the author developed good relationships with people he interviews. Another account is of Dr. Seemin Jumali the woman in charge of the Jinnah Hospital ER which was bombed after receiving victims of the Arbaeen bombing. Dr. Jumali recounts how after the bombing she went home and wrote her will and explained to her children what to do if one day she doesn't return from work. Dr. Jumali also states her desire to stay in Karachi and sees it as a personal goal to serve the city. MQM is not left untouched by the author, not only does he develop a relationship with Mustapha Kamal but also victims targeted by MQM. One story being of Nasir Baloch a neighborhood activist

and volunteer tutor. Baloch was fighting to prevent the construction of houses in his neighborhood park and in the process explicitly blamed MQM for being behind the land grab. This eventually leads to his death. Amber Alibhai is another individual introduced as the private "parks and recreations" committee who was working with Baloch and works throughout the city to preserve parks. Overall this is a superb book on Karachi and its inhabitants. The author talks to a variety of real people, some being poor activist, some being doctors, some high ranking MQM officials, some working to better the city and some even calling for a constitutional edict labeling Shias Kafirs.

Steve Inskeep uses Karachi, Pakistan, as a stand-in for the rise of super "Instant" cities with populations exceeding 10 million since the end of WW II, particularly in Asia. He points out that many have grown without master planning and sensible government regulation in matters such as sanitation and public safety. In the Karachi example, population expansion increased government corruption and indifference as well as conflict between Hindus and Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Poor newcomers escaping dangerous regions were forced to illegally squat on government land. Moreover, They had to provide their own materials and build their own inferior and closely packed houses as well as dig their own sewers. The result was even more conflict and chaos. But the good news was private citizens emerged to provide needed medical, ambulance, and other critical civil services to compensate for Karachi government stalling. I rated this book four stars because the topic may not be of wide general interest. However, it should be of value to readers who want to understand this ongoing trend toward ever larger "Instant Cities" in places like China and India..

This book is a very readable review of the phenomenal growth experienced by Karachi following the 1947 creation of Pakistan. I found interesting both as a history of the city and the country. Inskeep is a great storyteller who manages to make vast political, demographic and sociological changes intensely personal by following the lives and experiences of a diverse group of Pakistanis. I highly recommend this book and look forward to learning more about Pakistan's complex history.

Steve Inskeep is an excellent reporter! I listen to him on NPR over WXXI Rochester. This is an account written by Inskeep of ONE day in Karachi. It captures the trauma, the influx of people, and is a fascinating account of what's going on in the Middle East.

I purchased this book because I am a fan of Steve Inskeep and I recall his Pakistan segments on

NPR a few years back. The book was very informative and an interesting read. I wasn't too familiar with Karachi before I read this and I feel as I have learned a lot.

This is an excellent book for readers who don't know much about Karachi.

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