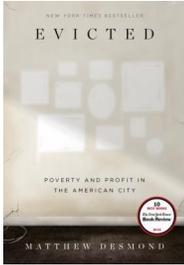


Books by the Stack



Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City by Matthew Desmond

A Harvard sociologist examines the under-represented challenge of eviction as a formidable cause of poverty in America, revealing how millions of people are wrongly forced from their homes and reduced to cycles of extreme disadvantage that are reinforced by dysfunctional legal systems.

Why you'll like it: *Society and culture. Moving. Sobering. Compelling.*

About the Author: Matthew Desmond received a bachelor's degree from Arizona State University and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 2010. He is a professor of social sciences at Harvard University. His books include *On the Fireline: Living and Dying with Wildland Firefighters*, *Race in America* written with Mustafa Emirbayer, *The Racial Order* written with Mustafa Emirbayer, and *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction in 2017. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever been evicted, or do you know anyone who has? If the answer is yes, what was your/their experience like, and how has it affected your/their life?
2. What was your experience reading *Evicted*? Were you surprised by what you learned? Was any particular scene or person's story emotionally painful for you to witness?
3. Many people have very codified perceptions of "people who get evicted" and suspect that those people are largely responsible-through bad decision making-for their circumstances. Did you feel this way before reading *Evicted*? Why or why not? Did your opinions change after reading the book? If so, how?
4. In *Evicted*, author Matthew Desmond takes a narrative approach to an important topic and follows the stories of several real people. Which person's story were you most drawn to and why?
5. Sherrena Tarver claimed to have found her calling as an inner-city entrepreneur, stating, "The 'hood is good. There's a lot of money there" (page 152). How did Sherrena profit from being a landlord in poor communities? Do you think her profits were justified? What responsibilities do landlords have when renting their property? What risks do they take? Do you sympathize with Sherrena?
6. On Lorraine and her late boyfriend Glen's anniversary, she spends her monthly allocation of food stamps on "two lobster tails, shrimp, king crab legs, salad and lemon meringue pie" (page 218). Can you relate to her decision? How might you have judged her differently without knowing the backstory that Desmond provides?

7. Because they have children, Arleen, Vanetta, and Pam and Ned frequently find themselves shut out of available housing and resort to lies in order to secure a place to live. Are these lies justified? If you have children, how far would you go to shelter your family?
8. Although eviction is the central issue in *Evicted*, affordable housing interacts intimately with many other social issues. For example: Do parents who have trouble finding and providing safe housing for their children deserve to have their children taken away and put in foster care? Would affordable housing make it easier for addicts and recovering addicts (such as Scott) to enroll in programs that increase their chances of rehabilitation? What other major issues that eviction affects can you think of, whether in this book or in this world in general?
9. How does race factor into the types of struggles faced by the individuals profiled in *Evicted*? What about being a woman? Or a single parent?
10. Did reading *Evicted* inspire you to want to help others in positions similar to those of the people in the book? If so, how do you think you might get involved?
11. Why do you think Crystal made the decision to let Arleen and her sons stay until they found another residence? How did tenants such as Crystal and Arleen rely on friends and extended kin networks to get by? What limitations do these short-term relationships have? Why do you think agencies such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children seek to limit kin dependence?
12. Landlords repeatedly turned down Pam and Ned's rental applications because they have children. Why? Do you think families with children should have any protection when seeking housing? Why do you think families with children were not considered a protected class when Congress passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968? Do you think it is fair for landlords to charge tenants with children monthly surcharges and children-damage deposits? Why or why not?
13. Why did Doreen choose not to call Sherrena when the house was in desperate need of repair? Do you agree that "The house failed the tenants, and the tenants failed the house" (page 256)? What effect does living in a home that is not decent or functional have on a person's psychological and emotional health?
14. Do you think housing should be a right in America?
15. Many Americans still believe that the typical low-income family lives in public housing. Unfortunately, the opposite is true; only one in four families who qualify for any kind of housing assistance receive it. In *Evicted*, Desmond proposes a universal housing voucher program. What do you think of that idea?
16. The government spends much more money on homeowner tax benefits for affluent families than on housing assistance to poor families. Is this situation justified? How would you address this issue?

(Questions issued by publisher)



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