

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

Discussion Questions

1. 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. How did your perceptions change after reading the book, if at all?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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 or not?
5. 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?
6. What was your experience reading *Evicted*? Were you surprised by what you learned? Was any particular scene or character’s story emotionally painful for you to witness?
7. 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/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 chances of rehabilitation? What other major issues can you think of that eviction affects, whether in this book or in the world in general?
8. 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?
9. Many Americans still believe that the typical low-income family lives in public housing. Unfortunately, the opposite is true; only 1 in 4 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?
10. Do you think housing should be a right in America?