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## **Book Review "Evicted" by Matthew Desmond**

*Abstract.* This article is a review of the book *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond. The author examines and highlights themes from the book as well as its implications on stable housing and its importance in education.

*Evicted* written by Matthew Desmond is an ethnography based off of several years of research and fieldwork. A Harvard sociologist and MacArthur Genius Award Winner in 2015, Desmond currently runs the eviction laboratory at Princeton University.

### *Takeaways*

– Housing is a basic human need and when that need is not met, it is incredibly difficult to have be able to do anything, let alone succeed in school.

– Cyclical poverty and housing have a strong relationship with one another.

Renters who were unable to pay rent were evicted, this eviction is then marked on a credit report which further bars them from access to loans or mortgages that could get them out of a rental situation.

People renting are not able to capitalize on generational wealth that homeowners have.

People renting in poor neighborhoods in Milwaukee had a disproportionate cost of living. At one point Desmond mentions in the book the difference in renting a cheap apartment versus one that has a much higher quality of living in a better neighborhood is around \$300 a month.

### *– People in the Book*

All of the people renting have fallen on hard times that are largely out of their control.

Here are the people the story revolves around.

– Arleen, a single mother with 2 boys. In the first chapter of the book the boys throw a snowball at a car and the driver gets out, chases them and kicks in the door to their home. When the landlord finds out about the damage to the home they are evicted and forced to move.

– Desmond reports on a wide range of things that can result in a housing eviction from landlords. Despite not being in control of the damage to their house, Arleen is forced to move elsewhere.

– Scott, a nurse who becomes addicted to heroin after prescription drug use. Scott loses his license for stealing opioids from his job. He then has several bouts with addiction. His addiction leads to homelessness. He eventually is able to stay sober and finds a support group that helps him find a home.

– Lamar, a veteran who lost both his legs in the Vietnam war. Lamar is handicapped and has a hard time living off his welfare and food stamps (Government programs designed to support people in need). He has two boys and does his best to feed them. However, after rent he has very little money left over. Lamar often will not eat so that his boys can.

– Vanetta, a 20-year-old mother of three. Vanetta falls behind on her rent and in fear of losing her apartment she commits an armed robbery. She is caught and convicted of robbery and is then sentenced to 81 months in prison. Furthermore, she is fired from her job and evicted.

– Pam and Ned, residents of a mobile home park in Milwaukee. When Pam and Ned apply for housing they are frequently turned away because Pam has 4 children. Ned does not have steady income, and both are unemployed.

– Sherrena Tarver, a landlord and former schoolteacher who rents to the people in the story. Sherrena goes through the in and outs of being a landlord and markets herself as someone who is able to sell the inner-city of Milwaukee to other landlords.

*What did I find surprising?*

– I was moved by how well written and raw the book was. Following reading the book I learned Desmond lived in the trailer park and had lived with the residents in the story for a couple months while he was writing. The research in the book was recorded over multiple years of fieldwork. The book is an ethnography.

– I think the book says a lot about housing insecurity and its importance on every aspect of life. If you sign up for a job somewhere and you are homeless or have no mailing address how are employers supposed to send you work documents, checks, etc...? I was always drawn to housing insecurity as a social justice issue, but this book cracked it wide open for me.

– I also enjoyed Desmond's inclusion of the landlords or the people renting out their property. He doesn't immediately villainize Sherrna Tarver and Tobin Charney. I began to understand the landlords are not necessarily bad people, but they are people who are playing a game with their hands somewhat tied. They don't want to evict tenants, but they also need tenants to pay on time.

– A question that kept coming back to me throughout the reading was if the landlords were inherently bad or were just working the system for themselves.

– I thought a lot about capitalism and how it strips people of something that should be a human right.

– Housing is not a guaranteed item in America.

– The gap between middleclass housing and poor housing in Milwaukee at sometimes was a difference in \$50 a month.

– Renters in Milwaukee are very segregated.

– People who are renting fall victim to their environments.

– Many of the cheap rental areas were home to people with drug addiction or families trying to make ends meet.

– People with drug addiction did not have an easy time in these environments because they were surrounded by drugs that were readily available and accessible.

After reading *Evicted*, I thought about the importance of a home and how that related to academic success. We have discussed many times in class how important the "Least Restrictive Environment" is to student success and in *Evicted* this environment is far from the reality of what people were living in. Many of the renters in this story have children. By constantly moving it diminishes student learning. For example, Arleen's children attended 5 different middle schools over a year. This is unfathomable. In addition, if we are to consider Maslow's Hierarchy, it is impossible for students to self-actualize before they have their basic needs met. The impact of not having a home has a tremendous impact on mental health. All in all, housing has a large impact on student health and wellbeing. When other books like *Ghosts in the Schoolyard* by Eve Ewing and *Dream Keepers* by Gloria Ladson-Billing are added into this narrative, the clear answer is housing and cultural identity play a large role in a student's perception of themselves. If students are unable to learn in a healthy and stable environment, this puts students at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder even more at risk for being caught in cyclical poverty.