

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

WCER LUNCH & LEARN

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2016

Agenda

Introductions

Points of consideration when participating in a group discussion

Small group discussions*

Large group discussion*

Next steps

*Discussion questions were compiled from the Go Big Read Discussion Guide and the Penguin Random House Teacher's Guide.

Introductions



- Name
- Department
- What inspired you to join this discussion?

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/books/review/matthew-desmonds-evicted-poverty-and-profit-in-the-american-city.html?_r=0

Ideas to consider when participating in a discussion

1. Consider focusing on the book and the ideas it raises. Share your personal experiences as they relate to the book, but be brief.
2. Be open to new ways of looking at the issues that emerge from the book. Carefully listen to opinions other than your own, and ask clarifying questions.
3. Try to respond to the comments of others, rather than merely waiting for an opportunity to share your comments.
4. Be willing to discuss aspects of the book that did not appeal to you or that you found difficult to accept. It is helpful to express difficulties as questions, rather than statements.
5. Discuss with the group as a whole, rather than with someone next to you.
6. Most important of all, enjoy the discussion!

Small group discussion: The personal and social impact of eviction

Desmond points out that landlords are often unwilling to rent to tenants with children: “Children didn’t shield families from eviction; they exposed them to it” (p. 287).

- How do children “expose” families to eviction?
- Why do you think families with children were not considered a protected class when Congress passed the Fair Housing Act in 1968?
- What are the long-term consequences for children who don’t have stable housing?
 - Consider Arleen’s children, Doreen’s children and grandchildren, and Pam’s children.

Small group discussion: The social impact of eviction

Desmond describes the ways that neighbors are interconnected in both the North Milwaukee community and the College Mobile Home Park community.

- What role do neighbors play in both helping, and in some cases harming, each other?
- How did landlord decisions impact neighborhood characteristics in the book? How do landlord decisions impact neighborhood characteristics more broadly?
- How does the process of screening tenants lead to a “geography of advantage and disadvantage” (page 89)?

Small group discussion: The economic impact of eviction

Many Americans still believe that the typical low-income family lives in public housing. But only one in four families who qualify for housing assistance receive it.

In the epilogue, Desmond writes, “Decent, affordable housing should be a basic right for everybody in this country. The reason is simple: without stable shelter, everything falls apart” (p. 300).

- What are the policies and structures that impede realizing this goal? What are examples from the book?
- What were the economic implications for those going through the eviction process?
 - What affect did housing insecurity have on jobs and employment?
- How do different government policies affect access to low-income housing, and the affordability of low-cost housing in the U.S.?

Small group discussion



http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/books/review/matthew-desmonds-evicted-poverty-and-profit-in-the-american-city.html?_r=0

- What is one thing that has stayed with you from the book?
- Why do you think that was especially poignant for you?

Large group reflection

- As a researchers, how do we reconcile the recognition we receive for our work, with the realities of the communities we work with (or partner with)?
- Desmond's research brings light to the issue of eviction. Why is evidence based research necessary to call attention to social issues such as eviction?
- Why, as a society, does it take a book like *Eviction* to raise awareness to issues that our community members face every single day?



Large group discussion

After reading *Evicted* and learning about how poverty is affecting Wisconsin residents, are you compelled to take action to address the problem in your community, and if so, what would that action look like?

Next steps: Support those that ensure affordable housing

Just Shelter

- <http://justshelter.org/>

Bayview Foundation

- Providing housing, human service, arts appreciation, and cultural awareness in a multi-cultural setting.
601 Bayview
Madison, WI 53715
(608) 256-7808
www.bayviewfoundation.org

Common Wealth

- Building community through affordable housing, youth programs, small business development, job creation, and the arts.
1501 Williamson Street
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 256-3527
www.cwd.org

Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison

- Eradicating discrimination in the housing market through education and enforcement.
612 W. Main St., Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 257-0853
www.fairhousingwisconsin.com

Project Home

- Improving the quality and affordability of housing for low- to moderate-income residents in Dane and Green counties.
1966 S. Stoughton Road
Madison, WI 53716
(608) 246-3737
www.projecthomewi.org

Tenant Resource Center

- Offers free counseling, mediation, and other services for tenants and landlords interested in learning about their rental rights and responsibilities.
1202 Williamson Street, Suite 102
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 257-0143
www.tenantresourcecenter.org

Housing Initiatives

- Providing permanent housing solutions to homeless people with mental illnesses.
1110 Ruskin Street
Madison, WI 53704
(608) 277-8330
www.housinginit.org

References

Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. New York: Crown.

Hudak, R. (n.d.). *Evicted*: Study guide. Penguin Random House. Retrieved on November 20, 2016 from http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9780553447439.pdf.

UW Madison Common Book Program. (n.d.). Suggested discussion questions for Matthew Desmond's *Evicted*. Retrieved on November 20, 2016 from <https://gobigread.wisc.edu/resources/book-discussions/>.

Small group discussion: The personal impact of eviction

Desmond discusses the connection between sub-standard housing, the high cost of rent, and health issues (both physical and mental health) facing tenants and their families.

- How do housing conditions contribute to health issues?
- What are some examples of health-related issues facing tenants in the book?
- How do the landlords respond to these issues?

Go Big Read Synopsis

Approximately 20,000 people are homeless in Wisconsin on any given night and the number continues to rise, despite a decrease in homelessness nationwide (Wisconsin Coalition Against Homelessness, 2016).

(Reference for next 6 slides:
Go_Big_Read_Evicted_Discussion_Questions_08_2016.pdf)



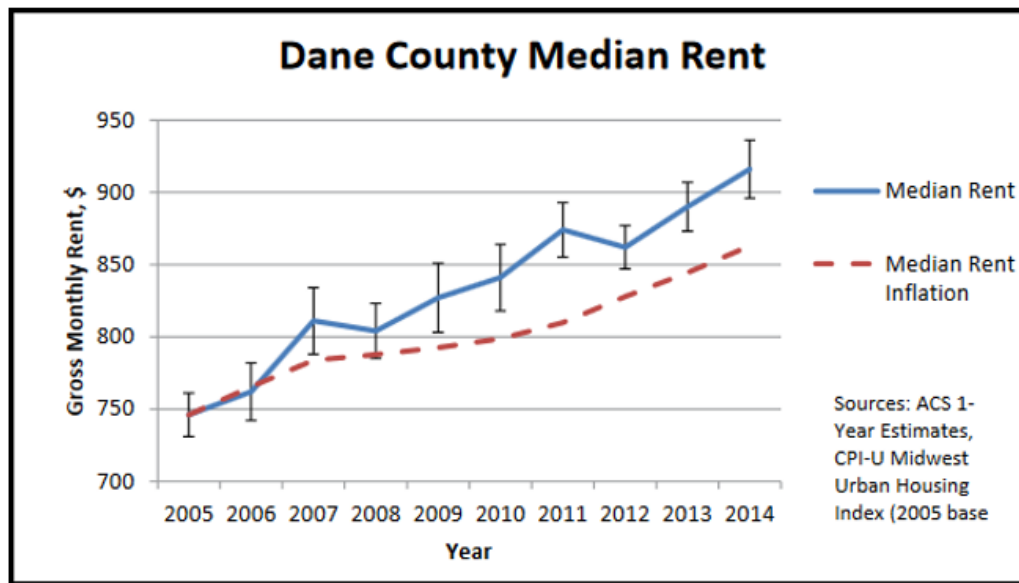
Go Big Read Synopsis

Furthermore, more than 12,000 low-income households able to secure housing in Dane County spend more than 50% of their income on rent.

Between 16,000 and 31,000 affordable housing units are currently needed, with a forecasted 648 to 1209 units needed each year for the next 26 years (Paulsen, 2015).

Go Big Read Synopsis

The figures below from the recently published *Regional Trends in Population and Housing* show that rent in the area is increasing faster than the rate of inflation (Figure 1) and that vacancy rates are decreasing (Figure 2).



“According to the American Community Survey, median rent [in Dane County] was around \$750 per month in 2005 and had risen to \$916 in 2014, much faster than the rate of average urban housing inflation in the Midwest.”
Regional Trends in Population and Housing, p.15

Figure 1. Increase in Dane County median rent, 2005-2014. Reprinted from *Regional Trends in Population and Housing*, May 2016, Capitol Area Regional Planning Commission, Dane County, WI.

Figure 2: Decrease in Madison vacancy rates

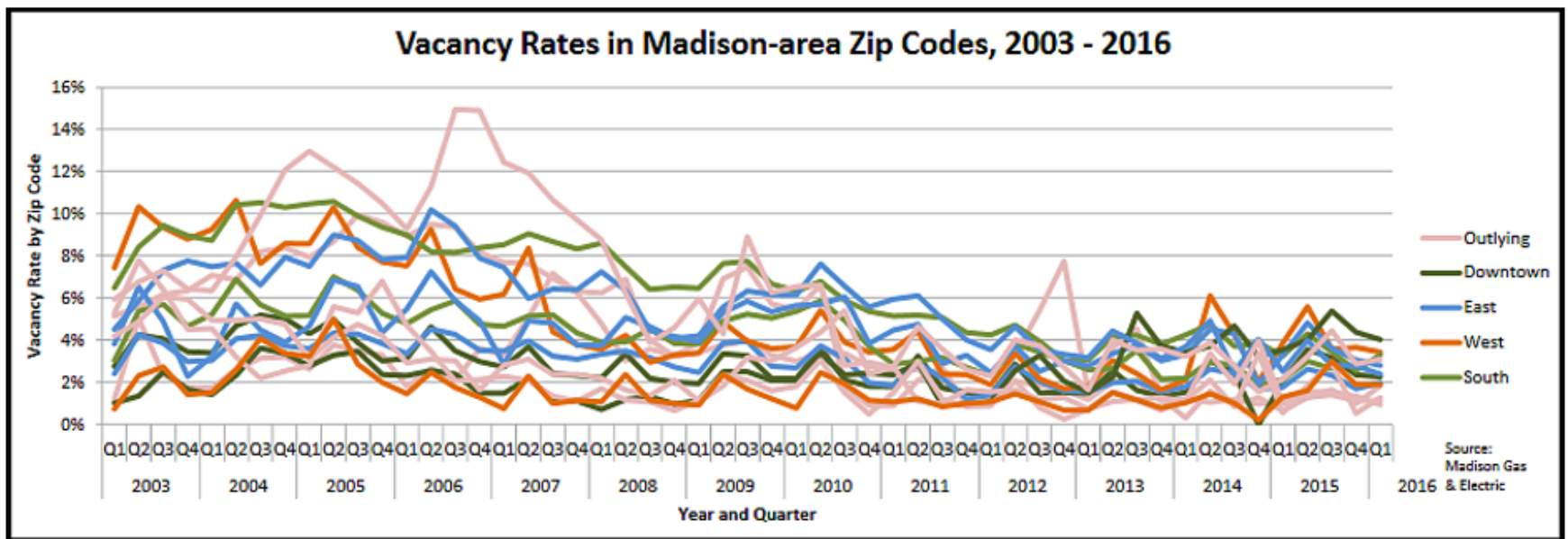


Figure 2. Decrease in Madison vacancy rates, 2003-2015. Reprinted from *Regional Trends in Population and Housing*, May 2016, Capitol Area Regional Planning Commission, Dane County, WI.