

## Evicted – Part II: Discussion Points

### **Discussion Questions**

1. 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 out their property? What risks do they take? Do you sympathize with Sherrena? Why or why not?
2. Desmond writes, “No one thought the poor more undeserving than the poor themselves” (page 180). How do you see this attitude reflected in residents of the trailer park? Do you see it reflected in Arleen’s actions?
3. Desmond highlights how eviction impacts the lives of women. But, particularly, he talks about nuisance property ordinance and the relationship to women that specific aspect of eviction has. He describes the nuisance property ordinance which allows “police departments to penalize landlords for the behavior of their tenants.” The third most common nuisance activity is domestic violence and regardless of the reason for the call, landlords are encouraged to evict the tenant of a property designated a nuisance. What issue is the nuisance law trying to address and what is the impact of the law? Who benefits from the nuisance law? Does the nuisance law perpetuate the cycle of violence? How else are women impacted by eviction?
4. Desmond points out that, compared to wealthier areas, residents in poorer neighborhoods are much more likely to help their neighbors. Tenants support one another in times of dire need by helping with bills or buying groceries, but not without judgment or shaming. Desmond writes, “For such vital exchanges to take place, residents had to make their needs known and acknowledge their failures” (p. 181). Neighbors console and prevent a tenant from harming herself when Child Protective Services takes her children away, although one resident still remarks, “It ain’t nothing to be proud of... But the Lord took ‘em for some reason” (p. 181). Desmond notes that trailer park residents often feel “evictions were deserved, understood to be the outcome of individual failure” (p. 179). Why do you think this is? Why are those with less, more willing to give? And, even when they are being kind to one another, why do they continue to judge who they are helping?
5. Given that Sherrena and Tobin have approximately the same net worth (see p. 152, p. 175), it is notable that the ways Sherrena spends her money are carefully accounted for—gambling at a casino, hair braids in Jamaica, a matching purse and fur-lined Coach boots, her lipstick-red Camaro, while descriptions of how Tobin spends his wealth—beyond his Cadillac—are absent. How does Desmond’s portrayal of Sherrena—an African American, female landlord, contrast with his portrayal of Tobin—a white, male landlord?

How does the inclusion of these details influence the reader's assessment of these two landlords?

6. Use of Third Person in the Book. Desmond uses Third Person to attempt to minimize the role a narrator may have played, which would have taken away from the primary focus of the book: the rampant inequality in the US housing system. However, this could also give Desmond the opportunity to exclude certain and particular details. Even though you can see that he tried rather hard to create an impartial, and unbiased view of this issue. Do you ultimately think using third person was the correct decision for this book? Why or why not?

### **Other Aspects from Part One to Address if More Conversation Starters Needed**

#### *Pathos (Emotional Appeal)*

- Page 106-107: The interactions of Sherrena and Arleen after eviction court.
- Page 122-123: Interaction between Jayme and Lorraine.
- Page 145: The eviction process of Doreen, "All she [Doreen] could do was pray that Sherrena would change her mind before they met in eviction court."
- Page 159: Arleen having no family to help her when she is in need and describing her experience of never having anyone to fall back on.
- Page 163-166: Altercation between Arleen and Crystal.
- Page 181: Description of how people in poor neighborhoods often create stronger knit communities.
- Page 184-185: Description of Scott attempting to better himself with rehab but there not being enough spots for everyone, him not getting chosen for treatment, and retreating to further drug/alcohol abuse as a result.
- Page 187: Description of abuse of upstairs neighbor, police and landlord called and the tenants receiving no help.
- Page 193-196: Arleen's reaction to Crystal kicking her out after Sherrena told her to and the discussion they had afterwards.

#### *Logos (Logical Appeal)*

- 96-98: Explanation of Eviction Court and Statistics about eviction in black neighborhoods in Milwaukee, as well as statistics.
- Page 112: Explanation of Emergency Assistance for families at risk of impending homelessness and Homelessness Prevention Program.

- Page 125: Impact of Subprime Lending Industry on Hispanic and Black neighborhoods.
- Page 148: Explanation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development setting a Fair Market Rent.
- Page 149: The “rent certificate program” explanation.
- Page 190-192: The justice system discussion. Adapting abrasive policies that swell police forces and fuel the prison boom.