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Community invited to read "Evicted," discuss inequality in housing: A Greater Cleveland

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 A community-wide reading event of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book

A community-wide reading event of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City" will be the centerpiece of an effort by the City Club of Cleveland and nine local library systems to bring to the forefront issues faced by many families in Cleveland's poorest neighborhoods. The book deals with some the same issues being explored by A Greater Cleveland, a project launched four months ago by cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer to identify and remove barriers to success faced by Cleveland children in poverty. The shared-reading experience will conclude on March 15 with an appearance by the book's author, Harvard sociologist Matthew Desmond. (Brenda Cain, cleveland.com)

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By **Brenda Cain, cleveland.com, bcain@cleveland.com**

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Starting next month, Northeast Ohio residents will be invited to tackle the subject of eviction and its impact on the community by participating in programs presented by the City Club of Cleveland, Playhouse Square and nine library systems.

The series will include film screenings and panel discussions about economic exploitation and inequality in housing. The centerpiece will be a community-wide reading of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City."

The shared-reading experience will conclude on March 15 with an appearance by the book's author, Harvard sociologist Matthew Desmond. (See below for a list of events and dates. Some events have yet to be scheduled.)

"Evicted" deals with some the same issues being explored by [A Greater Cleveland](#), a project launched four months ago by cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer to identify and remove barriers to success faced by Cleveland children in poverty.

Reporters and editors involved with A Greater Cleveland have been stunned by the similarities between the families highlighted in their series and the families Desmond reported on in Milwaukee.

The book follows eight families living in Milwaukee's poorest neighborhoods, struggling to work their way out of debt, overcome addiction or raise children - all while making the heartbreaking decision between putting food on



the table or paying the rent. As each becomes ensnared in the eviction process, the upheaval proves profoundly destabilizing, and families find it increasingly difficult to secure affordable, safe and decent housing with the stigma of an eviction to their name.

The shortage of affordable housing also is an underpinning of the lives of many families featured in A Greater Cleveland. Families who live amidst the violence, social problems and low quality of life in public housing often are fearful to leave the financial security of that housing arrangement because of the horror stories which abound in the private rental market, similar to those explored in Desmond's book.

Single mother Juanita Lake, for example, was forced to search for a new place in recent months when she learned that the property managers of her Garfield Heights apartment would be increasing the monthly rent by \$40. ¹ Juanita is raising her 6-year-old daughter, Yvonne, on about \$1,000 a month in disability benefits. Most months, she has less than a \$100 left after paying for rent, bills and



necessities. Paying an extra \$40 wasn't feasible. So, Juanita settled on a one-story, two-bedroom in Cleveland's Union-Miles neighborhood. When she moved in, a neighbor pointed out a vacant lot a few streets away -- the scene of a shooting just a few days earlier.

In Garfield Heights, Denise Anton's modest salary as a customer-service representative limits her family's housing options, too. So currently, she and her 7-year-old daughter, Mary, and 12-year-old son, Tristan, live in a neighborhood that is also home to at least four sex offenders within blocks of them. The single mother said that if she could afford to live somewhere safer, she would move.

Dan Molthrup, chief executive officer of the City Club of Cleveland, hopes the communitywide reading of the book and Desmond's appearance will generate interest in addressing the issues facing Cleveland's impoverished families.



"We do not pay enough attention to this end of our community - those families that are living on the edge of homelessness," Molthrup said in a telephone interview. "We

are not going to be the kind of great community we want to be until we understand these issues."

Of all the recent requests for speakers that the City Club has received, Molthrop said, Desmond's name kept coming up over and over again. When Desmond agreed to come, Molthrop said, the decision was made to make this a community event.

For a complete list of book discussions and events, [click here](#).

The discussions at the libraries will be based on "Evicted," but reading the book is not required to attend the events.

A Greater Cleveland is a project of cleveland.com and The Plain Dealer. See the entirety of our project [by clicking here](#).

A Greater Cleveland is a call to action to the community to help identify and remove the barriers to success faced by Cleveland children in poverty. For those moved to make donations, we ask that you consider [a gift to the United Way of Greater Cleveland](#), which is focusing on issues of multigenerational poverty that this series will examine. Because of the sensitive family matters discussed in this series, we have provided the people we write about anonymity and are using pseudonyms to identify them.

