

ESSENTIAL READING RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Nickel and Dimed: On (not) getting by in America, by Barbara Ehrenreich, 2011

Millions of Americans work full time, year round, for poverty-level wages. In 1998, Barbara Ehrenreich decided to join them. She was inspired in part by the rhetoric surrounding welfare reform, which promised that a job-any job-can be the ticket to a better life. To find out, Ehrenreich left her home, took the cheapest lodging she could find, and accepted whatever jobs she was offered. Moving from Florida to Maine to Minnesota, she worked as a waitress, a hotel maid, a cleaning woman, a nursing home aide, and a WalMart sales clerk. She lived in trailer parks and crumbling residential motels. Very quickly, she discovered that no job is truly 'unskilled', that even the lowliest occupations require exhausting mental and muscular effort. She also learned that one job is not enough: you need at least 2 if you want to live indoors. *Nickel and Dimed* reveals low rent America in all its tenacity, anxiety, and surprising generosity—a land of Big Boxes, fast food, and a thousand desperate stratagems for survival. Read it for the smoldering clarity of Ehrenreich's perspective and for a rare view of how "prosperity" looks from the bottom.

This is all I got: A new mothers search for home, by Lauren Sandler, 2020

100 Notable Books of 2020, the New York Times. In 2015, Sandler was volunteering at a homeless shelter when she met Camila, a pregnant resident who was determined to find a permanent, safe place to raise her child. This book charts her path through red tape, educational challenges, family crises and moments of joy amid unimaginable struggles.

Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City, by Matthew Desmond, 2016

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

In *Evicted*, Princeton sociologist and MacArthur "Genius" Matthew Desmond follows eight families in Milwaukee as they each struggle to keep a roof over their heads. Hailed as "wrenching and revelatory" (*The Nation*), "vivid and unsettling" (*New York Review of Books*), *Evicted* transforms our understanding of poverty and economic exploitation while providing fresh ideas for solving one of twenty-first-century America's most devastating problems. Its unforgettable scenes of hope and loss remind us of the centrality of home, without which nothing else is possible.

Stories from the Shadows: Reflections of a Street Doctor, by James O'Connell, 2015.

Dr. O'Connell's collection of stories and essays, written during thirty years of caring for homeless persons in Boston, gently illuminates the humanity and raw courage of those who struggle to survive and find meaning and hope while living on the streets.

Streets of Hope: The fall and rise of an urban neighborhood, by Peter Medoff & Holly Sklar, 1994

****Inspiration for what a Neighborhood Association can achieve!!!**

Using the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston's most impoverished neighborhood as a case study, the authors show how effective organizing reinforces neighborhood leadership, encourages grassroots power and leads to successful public-private partnerships and comprehensive community development.

The Color of Law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America, by Richard Rothstein, 2017

In this groundbreaking history of the modern American metropolis, Richard Rothstein, a leading authority on housing policy, explodes the myth that America's cities came to be racially divided through *de facto* segregation—that is, through individual prejudices, income differences, or the actions of private institutions like banks and real estate agencies. Rather, *The Color of Law* incontrovertibly makes clear that it was *de jure* segregation—the laws and policy decisions passed by local, state, and federal governments—that actually promoted the discriminatory patterns that continue to this day.

Race for Profit: How banks and the real estate industry undermined black homeownership, by Keeanga-Yamatta Taylor, 2019

Race for Profit uncovers how exploitative real estate practices continued well after housing discrimination was banned. The same racist structures and individuals remained intact after redlining's end, and close relationships between regulators and the industry created incentives to ignore improprieties. Meanwhile, new policies meant to encourage low-income homeownership created new methods to exploit Black homeowners. The federal government guaranteed urban mortgages in an attempt to overcome resistance to lending to Black buyers – as if unprofitability, rather than racism, was the cause of housing segregation. Bankers, investors, and real estate agents took advantage of the perverse incentives, targeting the Black women most likely to fail to keep up their home payments and slip into foreclosure, multiplying their profits. As a result, by the end of the 1970s, the nation's first programs to encourage Black homeownership ended with tens of thousands of foreclosures in Black communities across the country. The push to uplift Black homeownership had descended into a goldmine for realtors and mortgage lenders, and a ready-made cudgel for the champions of deregulation to wield against government intervention of any kind.

How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood, by PE Moskowitz, 2017

The term *gentrification* has become a buzzword to describe the changes in urban neighborhoods across the country, but we don't realize just how threatening it is. It means more than the arrival of trendy shops, much-maligned hipsters, and expensive lattes. The very future of American cities as vibrant, equitable spaces hangs in the balance. Peter Moskowitz's *How to Kill a City* takes readers from the kitchen tables of hurting families who can no longer afford their homes to the corporate boardrooms and political backrooms where destructive housing policies are devised. Along the way, Moskowitz uncovers the massive, systemic forces behind gentrification in New Orleans, Detroit, San Francisco, and New York. The deceptively simple question of who can and cannot afford to pay the rent goes to the heart of America's crises of race and inequality. In the fight for economic opportunity and racial justice, nothing could be more important than housing. A vigorous, hard-hitting expose, *How to Kill a City* reveals who holds power in our cities-and how we can get it back.

New Deal Ruins: Race, Economic Justice, and Public Housing, by Edward G. Goetz, 2013

Public housing was an integral part of the New Deal, as the federal government funded public works to generate economic activity and offer material support to families made destitute by the Great Depression, and it remained a major element of urban policy in subsequent decades. As chronicled in *New Deal Ruins*, however, housing policy since the 1990s has turned to the demolition of public housing in favor of subsidized units in mixed-income communities and the use of tenant-based vouchers rather than direct housing subsidies. While these policies aimed to improve the social and economic conditions of urban residents, the results have been quite different. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and there has been a loss of more than 250,000 permanently affordable residential units. Goetz convincingly refutes myths about the supposed failure of public housing, and offers an evidence-based argument for renewed investment in public housing to accompany housing choice initiatives as a model for innovative and equitable housing policy.

Also,

Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development, by Mel King, 1981

City Making: Building Communities without Building Walls, by Gerald E. Frug, 1999