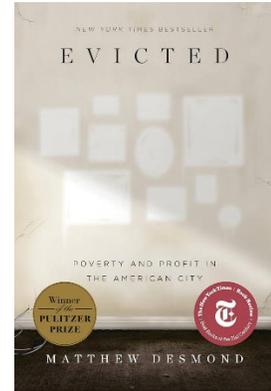
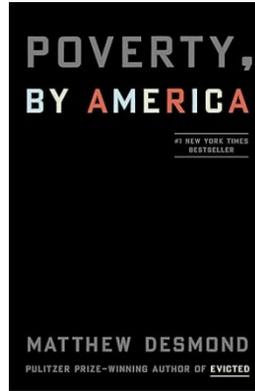


# FROM POVERTY TO POSSIBILITIES 2025



Theme: **The Urgency of Now: Mobilizing Community Power to End Poverty.**



**Keynote Speaker: Dr. Matthew Desmond Pulitzer Prize-winning author Matthew Desmond of *Evicted* fame.** Dr. Matthew Desmond, MacArthur “Genius” and Princeton sociologist, has reshaped our understanding of poverty in America. His Pulitzer Prize–winning *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* and #1 New York Times bestseller *Poverty, by America* reveal the human toll of eviction and challenge us to confront how poverty persists because society benefits from it. Founder of Princeton’s Eviction Lab, Desmond is also a contributing writer for the New York Times Magazine, with work appearing in the Washington Post, New Yorker, and Chicago Tribune.

*“Ending poverty in America will require new policies and renewed political movements. . . but it will also require that each of us, in our own way, become poverty abolitionists, unwinding ourselves from our neighbors’ deprivation and refusing to live as unwitting enemies of the poor.”*

*- Dr. Matthew Desmond, Author of *Poverty by America**

## Key Themes from this year’s From Poverty to Possibilities:

1. Poverty Abolitionism: Ending poverty requires both systemic reform and personal commitment—each of us must act as “poverty abolitionists,” refusing to benefit from exploitation.
2. Narrative Shift: The story of poverty must change. Stop blaming the poor and instead, confront the systems, policies, and exploitation that create poverty.
3. Exploitation & Inequality: Poverty persists because of labor market failures, housing segregation, and financial exploitation (fees, predatory lending, zoning laws).
4. Solutions & Responsibility: Rebalancing the safety net, enforcing tax justice, reforming housing policy, and empowering communities are key to tackling poverty at its roots.
5. Collective & Political Action: Grassroots movements, philanthropy, and political will, are essential. Citizens, institutions, and young people must demand justice and systemic change.

6. Human Dignity & Potential: Poverty is not just economic—it robs people of safety, dignity, and opportunity. Ending it is a moral imperative for the richest nation in the world.



### **Main Speaker and Fireside Chat Notes:**

*Speaker: Dr. Matthew Desmond. Moderator: Carol C. Mitchell, JD Founder, Institute for Black Justice*

### **Poverty in America: Causes and Extent**

- Dr. Desmond discusses the prevalence of poverty in America, noting that 38 million people are officially poor by government standards, which is equivalent to the population of Ukraine or Australia.
- He highlights the hard bottom layer of poverty; where people experience chronic pain, debt collector harassment, and the fear of eviction.
- Poverty is described as a tight knot of humiliation and agonies, denying safety, security, and dignity to millions in the richest country in the world.
- The war on poverty was not lost but misrepresented. Citing evidence that government programs like food stamps and housing assistance, lift millions above the poverty line.

### **Government Spending and Poverty Reduction**

- He explains that spending on the 13 biggest means-tested programs increased from \$1,000 per person in the first year of Ronald Reagan's presidency to \$3,400 under Donald Trump's first term.
- Despite increased spending, poverty persists. With metrics like evictions, food pantry usage, and homelessness among public school kids rising significantly since 2000.
- Dr. Desmond pointed out that measuring poverty is hard. The data shows that poverty continues to increase while spending on poverty reduction programs also increases.
- He argues that the labor market is not pulling weight, citing the example of Julio, who worked multiple jobs and still felt like a zombie.

## **Labor Market Exploitation and Historical Context**

- Dr. Desmond discussed the historical context of poverty, noting that in the 1950s and 1960s, a third of Americans belonged to a union, wages were rising, and CEO pay was reined in.
- He explains that as unions lost strength, wages started falling, and the job market became less equitable.
- Noting the anti-poverty programs have become like “dialysis”, making poverty less lethal but not eliminating it.
- Dr. Desmond highlights the exploitation of the poor in both the labor and housing markets. Citing financial exploitation like overdraft and payday loan fees.

## **The Role of Exploitation and Segregation**

- Dr. Desmond discussed the role of exploitation in maintaining poverty, noting that the poor are exploited in both the labor and housing markets.
- He cites examples of financial exploitation, like billion-dollar overdraft fees and checking cashing fees, and the brutal rental market.
- He argues that the housing market is designed to be exclusive, with most residential land only allowing single-family homes, which also contributes to poverty.
- Dr. Desmond highlights the role of zoning laws in maintaining segregation and limiting affordable housing options.

## **Proposed Solutions and Personal Responsibility**

- He proposes solutions like rebalancing the safety net, empowering the poor by reining in exploitation, and turning away from segregation and opportunity hoarding.
- He suggests that it would cost about \$170 billion a year to bring everyone below the official poverty line, which is less than 1% of the GDP.
- The richest Americans could contribute significantly to reducing poverty by paying all the taxes they owe.
- Dr. Desmond calls for new policies and social movements to address the root causes of poverty, while also bringing power to communities that have been denied it.

## **The Role of Personal Actions and Political Will**

- Dr. Desmond emphasizes the importance of personal actions in ending poverty. Suggesting that individuals can make a difference by donating tax breaks to charities and demanding more justice from their institutions.
- He argues that political will is crucial, noting that most Americans support market justice policies like holding corporations accountable and taxing the rich higher.
- Dr. Desmond calls for a groundswell from people who have experienced poverty; to build political will and demand change.

- He highlights the importance of changing the narrative around poverty from focusing on the poor to focusing on the fire that causes poverty.

### **The Role of Philanthropy and Narrative Change**

- Dr. Desmond discusses the role of philanthropy in ending poverty; how it can help change the narrative by supporting media and advocacy efforts.
- Philanthropy helps with transparency and exposes power, which is crucial for changing the story of poverty.
- Philanthropy can support efforts to bring more diverse voices and perspectives into the conversation about poverty.
- Dr. Desmond emphasizes the importance of changing the way people think about poverty and the policies that address it.

### **The Importance of Regional and State-Level Solutions**

- Dr. Desmond highlights regional and state-level solutions. Noting that these levels often have the most underutilized opportunities for change.
- He cites examples of states like Montana, which have made significant progress in zoning reform, as evidence of this potential.
- He argues that regional and state-level solutions can address issues like zoning laws and tax structures that have a significant impact on poverty.
- He emphasizes the need for a broad and inclusive approach to addressing poverty, involving both national and local efforts.

### **The Role of Young People and Political Engagement**

- Dr. Desmond encourages young people to get involved in the poverty abolition movement and provided ways they can be effective. I.e; stopping fast fashion, volunteering, and engaging politically.
- Due to the youth having considerable influence in their schools and communities, he states they can use that influence to demand more justice.
- He emphasizes the importance of political engagement, noting that most Americans support market justice policies and that young people can help build political will.
- Dr. Desmond calls for a new generation of poverty abolitionists who are willing to act and demand change.



## The Importance of Changing Narrative

- Dr. Desmond emphasizes the importance of changing the narrative about poverty, suggesting that the focus should be on the root causes rather than just the symptoms.
- He argues that currently, the narrative often blames the poor for their own poverty, but the real problem lies within the systems and policies that perpetuate inequality.
- Dr. Desmond calls for a new way of thinking about poverty, that recognizes the role of exploitation and segregation in maintaining poverty.
- He emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses both the immediate needs of the poor and the root causes.



### Panel Discussion Notes:

**Moderator - Carol C. Mitchell, JD Founder, Institute for Black Justice**

**Panelists – Marcy Bowers (Executive Director, Poverty Action), Korbett Mosesly (Transforming Systems Advancing | Building Thriving Communities), Kathi Littmann President & CEO, (Greater Tacoma Community Foundation), Marcy Boulet Communities of Focus Coordinator (Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department), Aimee Khuu Executive Director, (Tacoma Community House and The Reach Center)**

### Community Engagement and Co-Creation in Poverty Reduction

- Korbett stresses the importance of community engagement in the plan to end poverty. By highlighting the 10-year plan and the role of co-creation and system redesigning.
- The Community Reinvestment Project (CRP) is credited for distributing \$200 million, with over 400 contracts across various funding categories, primarily economic development.
- He acknowledges the contributions of United Way of Pierce County, the Center for Strong Families, and other local organizations in the CRP's success.
- The CRP's implementation plan and recent report highlight the importance of co-creation models with partners like the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation and local advisory teams.

## **Leadership and Philanthropy in Addressing Poverty**

- Carol introduces the topic of leadership and the role of the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation in the CRP.
- Kathi discusses the need for professional philanthropy to address systemic issues and the importance of empowering community voices.
- The concept of philanthropy serving or solving is debated, with a focus on addressing the root causes of poverty rather than just providing temporary relief.
- She highlights the role of local advisory teams and the importance of not recreating bad practices in philanthropy.

## **Public Health Perspectives on Community Needs**

- Marcy Boulet shares her insights from the public health perspective, and the challenges people face in meeting basic needs like transportation, childcare, and healthy food.
- The impact of fear and stress on immigrant and refugee communities, particularly those facing potential detention, is discussed.
- The role of public health in convener, facilitator, and co-creator roles is highlighted, along with specific examples of community-driven solutions for food access.
- She talks about the need for community-led solutions and the role of public health in supporting these initiatives.



## **Immigrant Communities and Family Separation**

- Aimee discusses the critical role of Tacoma Community House in providing legal immigration services and supporting pathways to citizenship.
- The impact of family separation on poverty and the need to keep families united is emphasized.
- The importance of supporting immigrant-owned businesses and the role of immigrants in creating jobs is highlighted.

- She calls for better narratives around immigrant workers and the need to support small businesses owned by immigrants.

### **Calls to Action for Ending Poverty**

- The importance of surroundings and amplifying the voices of people living in poverty and the need for collective action.
- The role of progressive revenue and the need for a more equitable tax system are discussed.
- There needs to be a call for advocacy to support state agencies in implementing federal legislation and mitigating its negative impacts.
- The importance of partnerships and collaboration in addressing poverty is mentioned.

### **Economic Development and Integration of Services**

- The importance of partnerships and the need to focus on economic development and income-generating activities.
- The need for better integration of services and the inefficiencies of isolated programs.
- The pivotal role of the United Way of Pierce County's Center for Strong Families is helping people increase their income, decrease their debt, and improve credit scores.
- Leveraging resources and working together to support community thriving is discussed.

### **Engaging Youth and Participatory Planning**

- The importance of engaging youth in community decision-making and participatory planning processes.
- The benefits of involving young people in designing and implementing projects, such as increased civic engagement and voting participation.
- Sharing power and decision-making with youth to harness their brilliant ideas and solutions.
- The role of youth in making their communities better and the importance of supporting their participation in civic processes are emphasized.

### **Advocacy and Community Support**

- Recognizing the power of individual voices while actively supporting neighbors.
- The importance of serving others and finding hope in community activities.
- The need for collaboration and advocacy to protect and support neighbors is highlighted.

### **Final Thoughts and Call to Action**

- Carol summarizes the key points discussed by the panelists and emphasizes the importance of collective action and advocacy.
- The role of community partnerships and collaboration in addressing poverty is reiterated.
- She calls for participants to act and engage in community efforts to amplify the voices of those living in poverty.

- The importance of self-care and finding ways to support each other in the process of community advocacy is encouraged.

### Action Items

- Leverage your voice, buying power, and actions to advocate, serve, and protect your neighbors.
- Find "soulmates" in the community to collaborate on issues you care about and get involved in civic processes like census outreach.
- Urge the governor to provide funding to state agencies to help implement federal legislation and minimize harm to benefits access.
- Advocate for the governor to pursue progressive revenue measures to address the state's regressive tax system.
- Ensure you have a support system to take care of yourself while doing this important work.



## **How to Be a Poverty Abolitionist Table Exercise**



***Individuals: What can I personally do to challenge assumptions about poverty and act in solidarity with ALICE families? What is one personal behavior or choice I can change to help abolish poverty?***

### **1. Personal Reflection & Education**

- Take personal inventory.
- Educate yourself where you invest to go back to community.
- Educating self about organizations that can help.
- Finding organization aligned with passion.
- Share Desmond's book.
- Have braver conversations with middle-class white friends about welfare and racial segregation (zoning laws).

### **2. Financial Choices & Consumer Habits**

- Look at where my money is going, consume products from places that support my values.
- Choose products and services that pay living wages and that align with your beliefs.
- Invest collaboratively in property—avoid stock market.
- Look at businesses—where they buy, their wages, and who owns.
- Support small businesses run by marginalized communities and purchase from there.
- Support businesses that pay living wages.

### **3. Advocacy & Civic Engagement**

- Using your voice to influence change and stand on business. Talk about it.
- Advocate for what we want to see in community (share voices in support).

- Advocate for access for families.
- Get politically involved to make informed votes.
- Keep a critical eye on zoning and other policies that prevent thriving.
- Highlight benefits people receive from the government.

#### **4. Community Involvement & Action**

- Invest your time and volunteer.
- Stay involved with community politics.
- Persist—showing up in difficult or uncomfortable situations.

***Communities: What can a community do to challenge assumptions about poverty and act in solidarity with ALICE families? What is one personal behavior or choice I can change to help abolish poverty?***

#### **1. Personal Commitment & Support**

- Persist. Support those in our own lives.
- Talk about it.
- Welcome differing and outside voices and perspectives.
- Work better with outsiders and new ideas.
- Get better at perspective-taking to avoid getting stuck.

#### **2. Community Building & Collaboration**

- Mobilize together. Mutual Aid.
- Build relationships with traditional and non-traditional partners.
- Community gardens.
- Gather friends in food action with food banks.
- Organize food or clothing drives.
- Donate food/clothing.

#### **3. Advocacy & Civic Engagement**

- Vote/support progressive revenue.
- Grassroots lobbying.
- 4. Economic & Resource Support
- Support businesses.
- Emergency services—gifts.



***Companies/Employees: What can my company/employees do to challenge assumptions about poverty and act in solidarity with ALICE families? What is one personal behavior or choice I can change to help abolish poverty?***

**1. Fair Wages & Employment Practices**

- Pay wages above average.
- Pay higher based on lived experience and less on traditional education.
- Attempt to raise wages.
- Pay philosophy into policy.
- Flexible hours at work. Extended time off. Extend PTO, family leave.
- Managers take a pay cut and give to employees; CEO and owners receive less so employees earn more.
- Having ways to earn raises.
- Top workers put more money into their employees.
- Unions.

**2. Education & Youth Engagement**

- How do we put more people into schools?
- Spend an hour with lunch buddies at a local school.
- Increase presence from businesses/agencies/programs into schools.

**3. Community Investment & Partnerships**

- Attend community events.
- Business incubator—sharing of business, thought partners, first customer, document/details.
- Partnering with the right people.
- Partnering with local agencies that are trustworthy.
- Reach out. Build trust. Show up.
- Know what role you can play.

**4. Policy & Systems Change**

- Educate on the benefits of investing in people in terms of wages and policies.
- Abundance vs. Deficit (long-term vs. short-term).
- Auto-enrollment in assistance programs in income-eligible properties.
- Pierce County YAB's 100-day challenge; preventing youth/young adult homelessness.
- Stay involved after project ends in Jan 2026.
- Let your representative speak for yourself.
- 211 and Access Pierce.

**Faith Communities: What can my church/religious establishment do to challenge assumptions about poverty and act in solidarity with ALICE families? What is one personal behavior or choice I can change to help abolish poverty?**

### **1. Education & Empowerment**

- Educate and give them tasks to take on.
- Asking how the church is investing in community.
- Recruiting various members to help.
- Try new things.

### **2. Attitude & Mindset**

- Avoid savior complex.
- Don't be judgmental. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt.
- Be more acceptable and more trusting.
- Mental (focus on mental well-being and openness).

### **3. Direct Support & Action**

- Donate.

**Are there other areas or groups you are involved with?**

- Multiple boards
- Support people
- Create clubs
- Organizing meetings
- Reach out
- Fundraise





**Table Discussion:** *What was something you heard from either Dr. Desmond or the panel that resonated with you*

### 1. Awareness & Understanding

- We resonated with the panel’s conversation on supporting and empowering the people who are struggling.
- Ignorance is not innocence—be aware of the problems.
- The need to understand my complicity and how I benefit from poverty.
- Being aware that all of us benefit from poverty.
- Poverty is like chronic pain. It’s piling on.
- A wall is a wall no matter the intent of your decoration.
- Jumping out of the burning building—stop blaming the jumper and fight the fire. Look at the root issue.
- The cycle that keeps the poor, poor.
- Income discrepancies. Skip rent.
- Rent has outpaced renters by 300%.
- All the financial advantages are given to those who have the greatest resources.

### 2. Financial & Economic Realities

- 40% of Americans don’t have \$400 in savings.
- 175 billion unpaid taxes from the top 10% could eliminate poverty.
- Unpaid taxes can eliminate poverty.
- People with means: take what they have to help others.
- The amount the wealthy are receiving is tax breaks and government subsidies.
- The concept of giving back the tax breaks I receive and paying them forward to local organizations.

### **3. Action & Advocacy**

- Reframe conversations with legislators.
- Legislative advocacy: vote locally, state, and nationally.
- Reach out to your representatives for bills that make a difference.
- Testify (on Zoom/in person).
- Look out for your neighbors and challenge yourself to have uncomfortable conversations about taxes/tax breaks and overall spending.
- Abolition movement comparison—we must participate and spread the word.
- The power of narrative shaping outcomes for eliminating poverty and the way personal responsibility and narratives can have a ripple effect. We all can do something. This is everyone's fight.

### **4. Community Engagement & Support**

- Serve or solve; serve so you can be served.
- How we are contributing to poverty; look at ourselves.
- Important of having a network of support.
- Financial coaching and education (info about payday loans, home ownership, etc.) we live in a complicated system, on purpose.
- Make it out and inspire others to do the same—motivational speaking, encourage, create representation.
- Donated to local efforts—even \$5 helps. Encourage friends/family to do the same if they are able.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Built in community where brilliant lives.
- People with jobs and families still can't get by.
- People are speaking and staying in comfort zones.
- No matter the state of life you are in, you will still have issues in life.
- Time for change has passed, what can we do now? 'We are perhaps the ones we have been waiting for'.
- Educate yourself.
- Stop doing one thing. Still work is to be done.
- Looking out for neighbors, resources, policies, childcare, preparing meals, carpool.
- The slide presentation that represented those not living in poverty and the substantial support and tax breaks they receive.
- Previous administrations targeted the root cause versus handouts.
- We kind of need a literacy/education program for the top 20-30% wealthy households, to understand the role in perpetuating poverty. This whole thing reminds me of the white fragility cycle.
- How this isn't a numbers issue.

- The impact on children and the absence of parents.
- School to prison pipeline.
- Impact of processed food on our health.
- Turing to friends/family. When we get out of ALICE, families think we are 'Rich'.
- "We don't have to outsmart poverty; we just have to hate it more."
- No matter the age or political involvement level, everyone can be a poverty abolitionist.