Introduction

In his New York Times guest essay, “America Is in a Disgraced Class of Its Own” (2023), Matthew Desmond—a sociologist at Princeton University and director of the Eviction Lab—argues that poverty in the United States persists due to systemic inequality, policy failures, and societal complacency. His essay calls for a “poverty abolitionist” movement to eradicate poverty in the wealthiest nation on Earth, presenting this as both a moral and practical imperative. The topic is highly relevant given recent debates on inequality and the growing interest in policies like universal basic income and expanded tax credits. Targeting policymakers, advocates, and the general public, Desmond uses statistical evidence, policy critiques, and moral appeals to strengthen his case. While his credentials lend authority, and his rhetoric is compelling, some of his assumptions about the feasibility of systemic reform may be overly optimistic. This critique evaluates Desmond’s effectiveness in presenting his argument, the strength of his evidence, and the feasibility of his proposed solutions.

Matthew Desmond’s article, “America Is in a Disgraced Class of Its Own” (2023), offers a compelling and stark examination of the systemic poverty in the United States. Desmond, an acclaimed sociologist and author of Evicted, focuses on the multifaceted dimensions of inequality, poverty, and social injustice that continue to plague American society. This critique will evaluate Desmond’s key arguments, the strengths and weaknesses of his approach, the quality of his evidence, and the overall effectiveness of the article in communicating his message. By discussing these points, this review will provide a balanced assessment of the work, while considering the implications for policy and social change.

### **Introduction**

Matthew Desmond, a sociologist with extensive expertise in social inequality, is the author of Evicted and has contributed numerous scholarly articles on issues of poverty and housing. His article, “America Is in a Disgraced Class of Its Own”, was published in The New York Times in 2023. The central premise of the article is that America’s approach to poverty, particularly its focus on individual responsibility and criminalization, is a moral and social failure when compared to other nations. Desmond's critique, grounded in moral reasoning and empirical evidence, serves as a call to action, urging the U.S. to recognize poverty as a systemic issue that needs comprehensive reform. The article’s primary audience is likely policymakers, academics, and general readers concerned with social justice. Through his thought-provoking writing, Desmond aims to provoke change in both public opinion and political action.

**Introduction:**

Matthew Desmond’s guest essay, “America Is in a Disgraced Class of Its Own,” published in The New York Times on March 16, 2023, highlights the persistent and deeply rooted issue of poverty in the United States. In this piece, Desmond, a sociologist and director of the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, critiques America’s approach to poverty alleviation, contrasting it with the policies of other affluent democracies. His work draws from both his expertise and existing data to argue that poverty is not inevitable but rather a consequence of deliberate choices in public policy and societal priorities.

Poverty remains a pressing issue globally, but particularly in the United States, which stands out among wealthy nations for its high levels of economic inequality and inadequate social safety nets. While current scholarship frequently examines the structural and systemic causes of poverty, Desmond’s essay offers a timely exploration of how policy decisions, societal norms, and collective apathy sustain poverty, even when the resources and knowledge to end it are readily available.

The article’s primary audience is likely policymakers, academics, and general readers concerned with social justice. Desmond aims to persuade them that poverty abolitionism is both a moral imperative and an attainable goal. He presents his argument through a combination of statistical evidence, historical context, and moral appeals, ultimately suggesting that America’s persistent poverty is a failure of public virtue as much as it is of public policy.

Desmond’s essay is thought-provoking and urgent, using accessible language to engage readers while advancing powerful moral claims. However, while it successfully raises awareness of poverty’s multifaceted nature and the necessity of bold policy reforms, it occasionally oversimplifies the complexities of poverty eradication. This critique will assess the strengths and weaknesses of Desmond’s arguments, considering their evidence, logic, and broader implications.