



New from The MIT Press

BIG HUNGER

THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE BETWEEN CORPORATE AMERICA AND ANTI-HUNGER GROUPS

ANDREW FISHER

Book Club Discussion Guide

1. Fisher talks about how the word “hunger” means different things to different people and also has multiple levels of meaning in our society. Talk about how the complexity of the word impacts the perception of the issue in our society. What is your understanding of the terms “food insecurity” and “the right to food?” Do they deepen your understanding of the issue or confuse it? How do you think the media and the public’s understanding of these terms and what it means to be hungry impact the debate?
2. Does hunger affect your life or anyone you know? How do you think hunger affects us as a culture? As a nation?
3. Fisher argues that hunger is a highly complex issue. He says it exists in America because “individuals do not have the resources to acquire sufficient food,” and that “the availability of these resources is shaped by broader economic and social factors such as unemployment rates, wage levels, and government benefits, as well as by the presence of prejudices such as racism or sexism.” Did this framing of the issue as part of a web of interconnected societal issues surprise you? What sorts of political implications does framing the issue in this way present for you personally?
4. One of Fisher’s main objectives in the book is to describe the “hunger industrial complex.” Did you find this notion controversial? Do you think the anti-hunger world has a responsibility to focus on the root causes of hunger? To what extent do you think we should be trying to tackle these underlying causes of hunger vs. increasing our capacity to feed people through emergency food services?
5. After reading *Big Hunger* do you think the government has an obligation to create the conditions by which individuals can feed themselves? Put another way, do you think government bears most of the responsibility for preventing hunger? In our current political moment, how do you think food justice ranks on the priority list of our leaders?
6. Fisher provides some examples (Snickers, Walmart) of how corporate America’s entry into, “cause marketing,” has created some conflicts of interest for anti-hunger groups. Is it ethical for corporations to use cause marketing to increase their bottom line? What role do you think corporate America can and should play in preventing hunger?
7. “‘Undignified. Racist. Classist. Toxic. Stigmatizing. A slow death of the soul. Humiliating.’ Observers have used these phrases to describe the experience of being a client at a food pantry.” Fisher paints a vivid picture of what it’s like to require emergency food services to feed yourself or your family. What do you think it would be like to rely on food pantries for groceries or to be a SNAP recipient? What kind of choice do you think SNAP recipients should have in using their benefits to choose what to buy?
8. Talk about specific passages, stories or examples in the book that you found interesting.
9. In chapter 8, Fisher provides some examples of innovation from within and outside the anti-hunger movement. Which of those did you find most compelling or instructive?
10. Which of the recommendations Fisher proposes did you think would be most effective? If you were president, which of the recommendations would you seek to tackle first? Which of the recommendations are actionable for an individual citizen or local community?