



Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors, and the Drug Company that Addicted America

By Beth Macy

Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Summary

An instant *New York Times* bestseller, *Dopesick* is the only book to tell the full story of the opioid crisis, from the boardroom to the courtroom and into the living rooms of Americans struggling to save themselves and their families: “masterfully interlaces stories of communities in crisis with dark histories of corporate greed and regulatory indifference” (*New York Times*) from a journalist who has lived through it.

In this extraordinary work, Beth Macy takes us into the epicenter of a national drama that has unfolded over two decades. From the labs and marketing departments of big pharma to local doctor’s offices; wealthy suburbs to distressed small communities in Central Appalachia; from distant cities to once-idyllic farm towns; the spread of opioid addiction follows a tortuous trajectory that illustrates how this crisis has persisted for so long and become so firmly entrenched.

Beginning with a single dealer who lands in a small Virginia town and sets about turning high school football stars into heroin overdose statistics, Macy sets out to answer a grieving mother’s question-why her only son died-and comes away with a gripping, unputdownable story of greed and need. From the introduction of OxyContin in 1996, Macy investigates the powerful forces that led America’s doctors and patients to embrace a medical culture where overtreatment with painkillers became the norm. In some of the same communities featured in her bestselling book *Factory Man*, the unemployed use painkillers both to numb the pain of joblessness and pay their bills, while privileged teens trade pills in cul-de-sacs, and even high school standouts fall prey to prostitution, jail, and death.

Through unsparing, compelling, and unforgettably humane portraits of families and first responders determined to ameliorate this epidemic, each facet of the crisis comes into focus. In these politically fragmented times, Beth Macy shows that one thing uniting Americans across geographic, partisan, and class lines is opioid drug abuse. But even in the midst of twin crises in

drug abuse and healthcare, Macy finds reason to hope and ample signs of the spirit and tenacity that are helping the countless ordinary people ensnared by addiction build a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

“An impressive feat of journalism, monumental in scope and urgent in its implications.” – Jennifer Latson, *The Boston Globe*

(from the publisher)

About the Author

Beth Macy is the author of the widely acclaimed and bestselling books *Truevine* and *Factory Man*. Based in Roanoke, Virginia for three decades, her reporting has won more than a dozen national awards, including a Nieman Fellowship for Journalism at Harvard. *(from the publisher)*

Discussion Questions

1. The thrust of Beth Macy's exposition on the nation's opioid crisis is her belief that it didn't have to happen: it was a human-made disaster. What according to Macy is responsible for creating the epidemic. Talk, too, about why it has never been fully addressed by the country-at-large.
2. Macy shines a hard light in particular on Perdue Pharma. Why does she take aim at the company? Talk about the sales incentives and marketing tactics Perdue used to sell Oxycontin.
3. Macy assembles a large cast of real people in her book, people like Kristi Fernandez, Ed Bisch, Lee Nuss, and many, many more. Which story of loss and grief, or fighting in the face of apathy, do you find most inspiring, most wrenching, most admirable. Did you find yourself at times confused trying to keep track of everyone?
4. Turning the discussion to recovery, what did you know before reading *Dopesick*—and what have you learned since—about the methods and realities of treatment. What are some of the treatment protocols? Which ones are controversial and why?
5. Once users get into treatment, how successful is it? What makes recovery so difficult.
6. Despite the growing alarm of the public, to say nothing of the 10s of 1,000s of deaths, too many users have difficulty finding help. Why is getting into treatment so hard?
7. Does *Dopesick* end on a note of hope — or on a note of despair? What about you? Are you optimistic ... or pessimistic about society's ability to find solutions to the opioid and heroine epidemic?

(Questions by Litlovers)