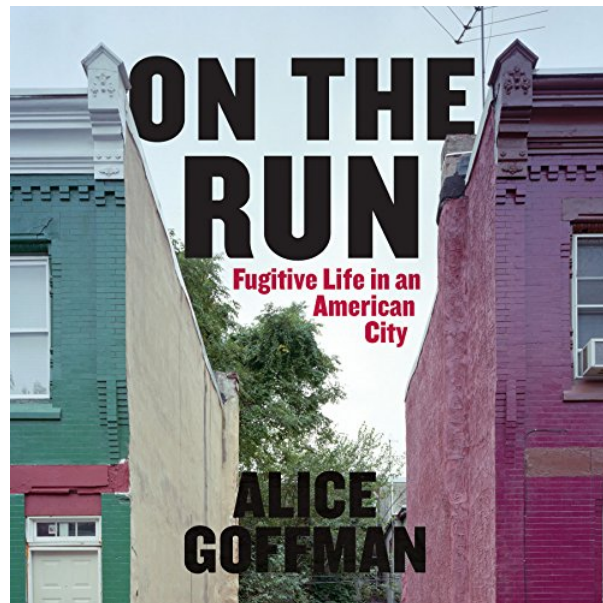
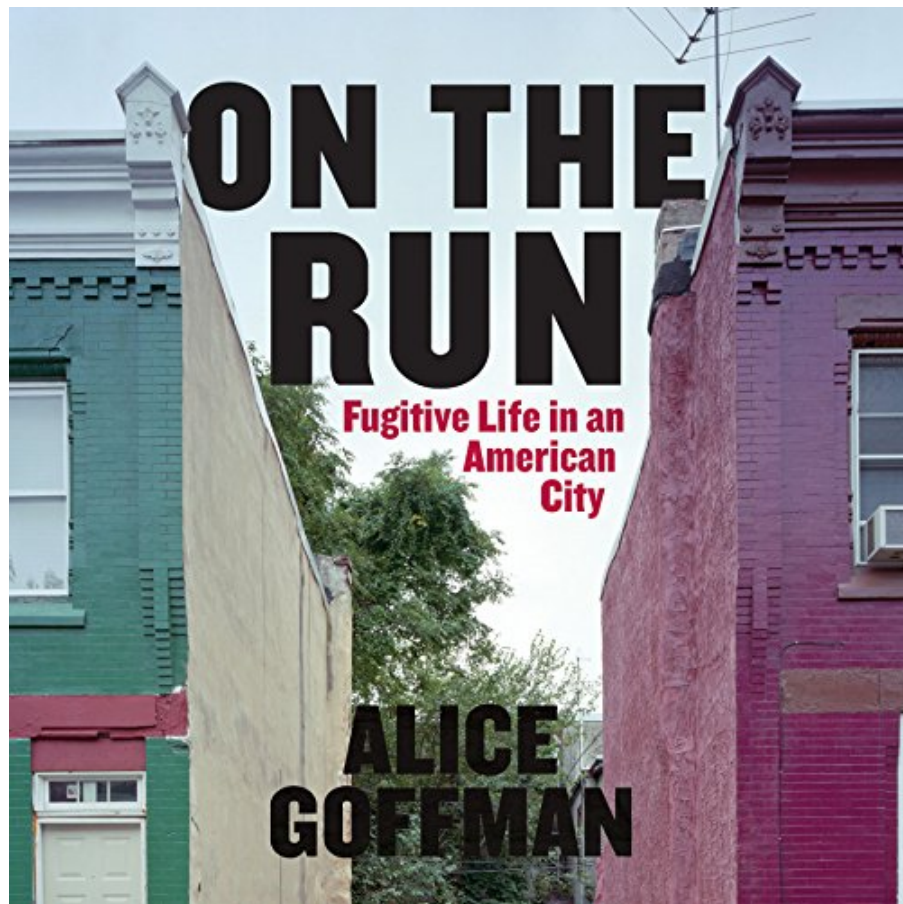


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ON THE RUN: FUGITIVE LIFE IN AN AMERICAN CITY BY ALICE GOFFMAN PDF

A riveting, groundbreaking account of how the war on crime has torn apart inner-city communities. Forty years in, the tough-on-crime turn in American politics has spurred a prison boom of historic proportions that disproportionately affects black communities. It has also torn at the lives of those on the outside. As arrest quotas and high-tech surveillance criminalize entire blocks, a climate of fear and suspicion pervades daily life, not only for young men entangled in the legal system but for their family members and working neighbors. Alice Goffman spent six years in one Philadelphia neighborhood, documenting the routine stops, searches, raids, and beatings that young men navigate as they come of age. In the course of her research, she became roommates with Mike and Chuck, two friends trying to make ends meet between low-wage jobs and the drug trade. Like many in the neighborhood, Mike and Chuck were caught up in a cycle of court cases, probation sentences, and low-level warrants, with no clear way out. We observe their girlfriends and mothers enduring raids and interrogations, "clean" residents struggling to go to school and work every day as the cops chase down neighbors in the streets, and others eking out livings by providing clean urine, fake documents, and off-the-books medical care. This fugitive world is the hidden counterpoint to mass incarceration, the grim underside of our nation's social experiment in punishing black men and their families. While recognizing the drug trade's damage, *On the Run* reveals a justice system gone awry: It is an exemplary work of scholarship highlighting the failures of the war on crime and a compassionate chronicle of the families caught in the midst of it.

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- Original language: English
- Running time: 680 minutes

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9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

I have mixed feelings about this book. ...

By David Ecale

The author takes us on a ride through some truly mean streets. Streets where the occupants are constantly in conflict with themselves and the police. She represents the presence of police in the hospitals, who run checks on incoming patients in the Emergency Room (ER), as a problem for the locals. Well, sad to say, she hit the nail on the head there. The police **are** running names & etc. in order to pull in folks on active warrants as well as to check on recent violent gang activity. (You don't come into the ER with a gunshot wound because you were working in a gun store and the doggone thing went off!) She also "hangs" with many of the residents of the area over an extended period of time and reports on both her and their plights and activities.

It's the rest of the story that makes me wonder. If you take the fact that she participated in the ride-a-longs that she reports, you end up with two distinct questions. To wit, 1) Precisely how many felonies did she commit in the process of participating in the ride-a-longs & 2) How on earth did a young white woman manage to do this in an almost totally black, gang infested, neighborhood for an extended period of time. And finally, to add to the problem, why didn't the police drag her in for some serious questioning? (if they did, it wasn't reported in this book!) She was, after all, riding in cars that were used in serious illegal activity. ... It just doesn't quite have the ring of truth to it.

I came away from the book pretty much believing that the activities reported in her story happened. I just couldn't believe her direct participation in them while getting away totally unmolested and un-arrested!

Disclaimer: This review is from the hardcover version of the book as checked out from my local library.

276 of 359 people found the following review helpful.

A Bizarre Work of Moral Blindness

By watch lover

This book is a sociologist's Ph.D thesis. It is endlessly repetitive and demonstrates the author's shocking moral blindness.

As a career criminal defense attorney in a crime-ridden American city,, I am well aware of police excesses and brutality. Philadelphia, about which this book is written has a police department that historically has many things to answer for in its treatment of the Black community.

That being said, the author's thesis is essentially that the neighborhood she studied, and the criminal she came to know and love, have their lives constantly interrupted by the police who use sophisticated techniques and relentless pursuit to track down and arrest its residents.

The author attended 19 funerals occasioned by violent death in the neighborhood, mentions in passing dozens of almost casual shootouts engaged in on public streets, her subjects (now friends) shooting into houses, she is present when robberies are planned, she hides a man in her apartment who is sought for attempted murder, she helps someone smuggle drugs into jail, and she exults when a teacher who is the victim of a violent crime by one of his students (one of her subjects) fails to come to court, and she believes that giving information to the police to help them apprehend violent felons ("snitching") is unforgivable.

Finally, after one of her armed friends is killed by someone who thought her friend was going to kill him, she sets out with an avenger with a Glock looking for the perpetrator. "I just wanted him dead" says Ms Goffman. Nice.

She describes without comment the FIRST children of teenagers and their "baby mamas" well after the fact, implying they've had more.

After describing a crackhead mother living in an apartment with all utilities cut off, the walls and floors alive with flies and roaches, and the bathtub used as a toilet, she confines her outrage to the fact that the police threaten to take the woman's children away unless she cooperates with them (they should take them away no matter what, but the author doesn't think so).

There are frankly unbelievable descriptions of devotion by young women in the neighborhood to their criminal boyfriends who spend most of the time in custody or running from the police. She describes them several times as feeling "a sacred duty" to love, honor and protect these men. She spent several years living in the neighborhood, describes dozens of relationships and doesn't mention the endemic and pervasive domestic violence surely present in that community even once.

The authors view is that her subjects have constructed meaningful lives full of tender emotion as they

commit crimes, elude the police, inform on each other, accuse innocent people of crimes to protect friends who actually committed them (all in the book) and that the remorseless presence of the police is disrupting this community in some inchoate racist way.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

A Compelling, if Flawed, View of an American Underclass.

By R. C Sheehy

I have to give Alice Goffman tremendous praise for writing about an underside of American society that we are mostly blind to. This examination of the permanent underclass is both depressing and frightening. Their reactions to society and the fact they live a life which is alien to most other people in the country.

I did find two issues with her conclusions. The first being the lack of accountability in the subjects she examines. While speaking of drugs, especially crack, Ms. Goffman seems to place most of the blame at the feet of the government and mostly the police. While she does conclude the police are forced to do a terrible job she, at no times, places any blame on the subjects she profiles. She does not absolve them but she also does not question if they share any blame for their conditions.

Secondly, Ms. Goffman seems to perpetuate the stereotype of African Americans as a criminal underclass. There are allusions to people who avoid this trap but they are seen as the exception and not the rule. It's unfortunate as it results in many successful blacks being seen as rare exceptions. Perhaps her next study can focus on them to provide a more balanced, or not, view.

Still this is compelling and heart breaking reading.

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