

# AP Seminar Summer Reading Assignment

**Directions:** Read the four sources carefully, focusing on a theme or issue that connects them and the different perspectives each represents. Then, write a logically organized, well-reasoned, **argumentative essay**. Where you take a position on an issue presented within the sources. Your essay should be **4-5 paragraphs** long. You must incorporate **at least two** of the sources provided and link the claims in your argument to supporting evidence. Be sure to address counterclaims. In your response, refer to the provided sources as Source A, Source B, Source C or Source D, or by the author's name.

## **Source A From “Here Comes the Neighborhood” *The New York Times* By David L. Kirp (2013)**

Suburbia beckons many poor and working-class families with the promise of better schools, access to non-dead-end jobs and sanctuary from the looming threat of urban violence. But many suburbanites balk at the prospect of affordable housing in their midst.

They fear that when poor people move next door crime, drugs, blight, bad public schools and higher taxes inevitably follow. They worry that the value of their homes will fall and the image of their town will suffer. It does not help that the poor are disproportionately Black and Latino. The added racial element adds to the opposition that often emerges in response to initiatives designed to help poor families move to suburbs from inner cities.

Are the fears supported by facts? A comprehensive new analysis of what has transpired in Mount Laurel, N.J., since 140 units of affordable housing were built in that verdant suburb in 2000, answers with a resounding “no.”

Families with incomes as low as \$8,150 — one-third of the poverty level — have been living in a town where the median income is 10 times higher for a family of four. “Climbing Mount Laurel,” co-written by the Princeton sociologist Douglas S. Massey and several colleagues, concludes that this affordable housing has had zero impact on the affluent residents of that

community — crime rates, property values and taxes have moved in step with nearby suburbs — while the lives of the poor and working-class families who moved there have been transformed.

In suburbs across America, the houses, schools, swimming pools and golf courses look just like those in Mount Laurel. The socioeconomic backgrounds of their residents are similar as well. Even the names of the subdivisions in Mount Laurel — the Lakes, Laurel Knoll, Tricia Meadows — are familiar in suburbia. So there is reason to believe that what's happening in Mount Laurel can be readily repeated.

The Mount Laurel story begins on a Sunday morning in October 1970, when 60 black residents gathered in Jacob's Chapel, a Methodist church. The parishioners were deeply troubled by the fact that their sleepy farm town was being quickly transformed into a wealthy suburb in which many parishioners could no longer afford to live. They gathered in the chapel to await word on a proposal from a community group to build 36 affordable garden apartments in the center of town.

According to those present, the news was not good. "If you people can't afford to live in our town," a township official told the congregation, "then you'll just have to leave." The blunt announcement turned a modest request into a movement that spanned several decades.

For 30 years, local officials waged a battle against affordable housing, as "Mount Laurel" came to symbolize the struggle over the socioeconomic integration of suburbia. In "Our Town: Race, Housing, and the Soul of Suburbia," which my Berkeley colleagues John P. Dwyer and Larry A. Rosenthal and I published in 1995, we chronicled the controversy. It wasn't pretty.

Jose A. Alvarez, who was mayor in 1975 when the New Jersey Supreme Court sided with the parishioners in one of the most important civil rights decisions since *Brown v. Board of Education*, regarded the proposed housing units as a deathly threat. "It's like grafting a good healthy skin so you can graft in cancer skin and blend it in," he told me. As Judge Edward V. Martino, who presided over the first trial in the case in 1971, said to me,

township officials “were treating these people like cattle, even calling them the scum of the earth.”

With the town finding one excuse after another to keep out affordable housing, the New Jersey Supreme Court issued a second landmark ruling in 1983. In the decision, known as Mount Laurel II, the justices ordered all New Jersey suburbs to rewrite their zoning laws and allow a “fair share” of affordable housing. But that was hardly the end of it. Not until 1997, after endless planning board hearings, council meetings, and multiple attempts to reach a legislative solution, was the housing development finally approved. In 1999, construction started on the affordable housing complex. A year later, the first tenants moved into the Ethel R. Lawrence Homes, town houses whose clean, contemporary exteriors and manicured lawns blended in with nearby market-rate developments. Many came from disadvantaged communities like Camden, just 15 miles away, which has the nation’s highest crime rate.

“A ghetto in the field” was how some townspeople envisioned the new housing. “Everyone was scared, apprehensive of the unknown,” recalls Mount Laurel’s former mayor, Peter McCaffrey, who had been booed by his constituents for supporting the venture. No one could predict whether life in and around the Mount Laurel complex would affirm or mock the ideals of faith, hope, tolerance and equality, names given to streets in the complex.

Thirteen years later the answer is at hand, and it is unambiguously positive. “Climbing Mount Laurel” shows that the well-off residents of the town have been unaffected by the new housing. There have been changes in life in Mount Laurel. But the changes are entirely consistent with those in demographically similar suburbs that surround the township. In all these communities, crime rates fell. Property values rose during the housing boom and dipped during the recession. Tax rates declined. Even in the Mount Laurel neighborhoods closest to the affordable housing, property values were unaffected. To most residents, the fact that poor families now live in Mount Laurel has proved entirely irrelevant. Today, many well-to-do Mount Laurel residents don’t even know that affordable housing exists there.

Where you live profoundly shapes who you are. “I would go as far as to argue that what is truly American is not so much the individual but neighborhood inequality,” concludes the Harvard sociologist Robert J. Sampson in his landmark 2012 book, “Great American City.” The families that migrated to Mount Laurel — earning from 10 to 60 percent of median income — obtained more than a nicer house. They secured a new lease on life, a pathway out of poverty for the adults and a solid education for the children.

**Source B “Humans Are Becoming City-Dwelling ‘Metro-Sapiens’”  
Interview with Jason Vargo *Smithsonian Magazine* By Sarah Zielinski  
(2014)**

Cities have been around for thousands of years, since the first were settled in Mesopotamia between 4000 and 3000 B.C. But only over the last several centuries have humans moved into cities en masse. Now more than half the world's population can be found in urban areas. "Cities are very much the dominant habitat of our species," writes Jason Vargo in the *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*.

Vargo, a public health scientist and urban planner at the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Global Health Institute, argues that humans, at least in current population numbers, can no longer survive in solely rural lifestyles. To live sustainably, people need to embrace their inner urbanites—and recognize our species not as *Homo sapiens*, but "*Metro sapiens*". Vargo spoke with *Smithsonian.com* about this audacious proposal and what it means for our future on Earth:

**Are city dwellers—*Metro sapiens*—fundamentally different from people living in the country?** No. I don't think so. But the reason I use that term is that it embraces this idea that to make it on this planet we're going to have to adopt urbanism to help us minimize our environmental impact on the planet. We're only going to do that if we become *Metro sapiens*. *Homo sapiens*, the way that we're doing it right now, probably won't survive.

Though we don't see cities as natural, part of my reasoning behind putting "metro" into our species name is to get us to think about how humans have been living in settlements of some kind for a long time now, and maybe that is part of what's natural for us.

**Why are cities, which are the source of many environmental problems, our future?** It's easy to look at cities and think, well, that's a real scar on the natural landscape. But if we're talking about how a million people are organizing, you can't have everyone living on a single plot of a land with a yard and a tree. You need some sort of denser organization, to conserve the land outside of the cities and also reduce energy use inside cities.

Those demand-side benefits are important, because those strategies are not talked about very much. When we hear about national energy policy, it's often about increasing efficiency of devices or supply of energy. But people that live in New York City, for example, drive less because they don't have cars. This is something that David Owen talks about in the book *Green Metropolis*. He calls it "embodied efficiency". The vertical living of New York City actually has this embodied efficiency that makes energy use in our daily lives less.

**Not every city is like that, though, and even New York has its downsides. Which characteristics of urban life should we be adopting?**

It's not just density but intensity, not just quantity but quality, not just location but connectivity. So it's not only having a service nearby, but it's being able to get to that service and access that service. Places need to be high quality. They need to be thoughtful and be places where people want to take ownership and spend time in. If they're not, people disregard them and allow criminal activities to go on. We want people to be outside and socializing, creating communities, being neighbors.

**Are there any cities that others should be emulating?** Although there's no perfect model, from a gestalt perspective, I've really enjoyed spending time in ... Vancouver. I thought it was really impressive the way the city related to its surrounding environment. Vancouver seemed to have embraced urban strategies, like vegetation on roofs and in right-of-ways to minimize water pollution and maintain water quality.

But there are other parts beyond just what you see, such as the way that the government works and the way neighbors are engaged in decision-making, that also matter. If you look at the best examples of sustainable cities, you'll see that there have been communities that expressed the values of environmental sustainability or mobility or equity decades ago, and you can chronicle the legislation and the actions and then the physical construction that have been in line with those values.

**What does placing even more of the population in urban environments do for nature?** It gets easier to preserve the land outside of urban spaces if more people are living more urban lives. So higher degrees of urbanism, because each person is consuming less land, can be really crucial for preserving wild places. The metabolism of cities demands resources from those areas.

With half the population now living in cities and much more expected, that is something we should all be thinking about. Much of the urban development that will exist in 100 years hasn't happened yet, so there is great opportunity, especially in fields like urban ecology. If we can figure out characteristics or components of cities that not only improve our daily quality of life but also improve the maintenance of these more natural areas, then I think we'll be better off.

**Source C “The real value of urban farming. (Hint: It’s not always the food.)” By Brad Plumer (2016)**

<https://www.vox.com/2016/5/15/11660304/urban-farming-benefits>

**Source D From “‘Whitewashed’ How Gentrification Continues to Erase L.A.’s Bold Murals” *The Guardian* By Andrew Gumbel (2020)**

Kathy Gallegos remembers the first time she saw John “Zender” Estrada’s striking mural of an Aztec warrior flanked by two eagles. She was parking behind a music venue in Highland Park, a heavily Latino working-class

neighborhood northeast of downtown Los Angeles, and couldn't help noticing the bold imagery of a piece that Zender had painted in the wake of the 1992 riots to urge ordinary Angelenos to "resist violence with peace". "I remember thinking, that's a really nice mural," Gallegos recalled. "Next thing I knew, the place was bought and it was gone."

It was the same pattern a couple of years later, when Gallegos – who owns a local gallery promoting Latino and Chicano art – stopped to admire a graffiti-strewn parking lot wall on the other side of Figueroa Boulevard, where for years young artists had been given free rein to practice and invent at will. She particularly liked a heart image reminiscent of a veteran LA muralist named Frank Romero and made a note to photograph it. "Next thing I know," she said, "the whole wall was whitewashed."

Urban murals are fragile artworks at the best of times, subject to the whims of taggers who may deface them, and of property owners who often want to paint over them or knock down the walls. But Gallegos and many others in Highland Park recognized that these new erasures were different: the result of dizzying change in one of the most rapidly gentrifying parts of LA and, it seemed, a failure by the newcomers to understand the culture of the neighborhood they were starting to call their own.

Now, the consternation that Gallegos and others once felt has degenerated into a full-blown conflict, with the murals of Highland Park acting as a proxy battleground for a variety of other tensions – over property prices, the pace of gentrification, tenant evictions, the integrity of once-venerated local artists, and the ability of local city officials to act as honest brokers between the competing interest groups.