



Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb

Douglas S. Massey, Len Albright, Rebecca Casciano, Elizabeth Derickson, David N. Kinsey

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Under the New Jersey State Constitution as interpreted by the State Supreme Court in 1975 and 1983, municipalities are required to use their zoning authority to create realistic opportunities for a fair share of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households. Mount Laurel was the town at the center of the court decisions. As a result, Mount Laurel has become synonymous with the debate over affordable housing policy designed to create economically integrated communities. What was the impact of the Mount Laurel decision on those most affected by it? What does the case tell us about economic inequality?

Climbing Mount Laurel undertakes a systematic evaluation of the Ethel Lawrence Homes--a housing development produced as a result of the Mount Laurel decision. Douglas Massey and his colleagues assess the consequences for the surrounding neighborhoods and their inhabitants, the township of Mount Laurel, and the residents of the Ethel Lawrence Homes. Their analysis reveals what social scientists call neighborhood effects--the notion that neighborhoods can shape the life trajectories of their inhabitants. *Climbing Mount Laurel* proves that the building of affordable housing projects is an efficacious, cost-effective approach to integration and improving the lives of the poor, with reasonable cost and no drawbacks for the community at large.

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