

Review Essay

Douglas S. Massey *et al.*, *Climbing Mount Laurel: The Struggle for Affordable Housing and Social Mobility in an American Suburb*

Princeton University Press, 2013

by

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September 16, 2015

¹I am grateful to the editor, Steven N. Durlauf, for numerous insightful comments and editorial suggestions, and to Rachel G. Bratt for thoughtful reactions that helped me improve the essay. I am solely responsible for the content.

1 Introduction

Affordable housing and, more generally, the housing options that different demographic groups of the US population can avail of, and especially disadvantaged minority groups, have attracted huge interest by economists, sociologists, urban planners, and of course politicians, policy analysts, lawyers and other professionals. Since housing is such an important part of individuals' lives, and owner-occupied housing the single most important asset in the wealth portfolios of US households, housing affordability policies touch many cords. Housing policy, and housing affordability in particular, are also matters of great concern across the world [McKinsey Global Institute (2014)].

The institutional context of the US poses special challenges. Institutionalized racism until not so long ago (and arguably lingering into the present) and the painful experience with the civil rights and fair housing legislation efforts (starting with the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and beyond) pose special problems for policy design and implementation. Housing becomes unaffordable to poor people for many reasons. High urban land values make housing too expensive in US central cities. At the same time, the fact that low-skill jobs are often located in central cities, and better jobs in suburban areas require either access to transportation or living in suburban areas. Yet, exclusionary zoning and land use restrictions, due to local control of land use, make living near better jobs expensive. Thus, the income distribution along with expensive housing reinforce income segregation patterns, with poor people living near low-paying jobs. The local political process itself may, because of local control of schools, produce feedbacks reinforcing income and racial segregation which in turn may sustain underinvestment in human capital by minority groups [Durlauf (1996)]. Furthermore, affordable housing almost always involves non-price rationing, which itself involves political considerations.

Regardless of whether lower income groups are more likely to live in areas close to downtowns, as it is the pattern in major US cities, or in outlying areas, as it is the case of many European countries and in the developing world, market forces are crucial in determining those outcomes. But how crucial could targeted interventions by means of specific projects

be in making housing affordable? And, how far could affordable housing interventions, like the one examined by the book under review, go in having sizeable impacts perhaps through demonstration effects?

The quest for affordable housing in the US is, in part, about how to make it possible for minority households to live in neighborhoods and communities that are more equal in quality to those in which white households with similar socioeconomic characteristics typically live, by leveling up rather than leveling down, and which, in turn, accords them access to good schools and other community-based resources. Affordable housing policies in the US may be enacted at the federal, state or local level. For example, Massachusetts enacted in 1969 legislation, known as *Chapter 40B*, in order to make it easier for real estate developers to supply affordable housing in any municipality where less than 10% of its housing stock qualifies as such under the law.²

Mount Laurel, New Jersey (NJ), was the town at the center of key court decisions about local governments' obligation to accommodate affordable housing projects. As Bratt and Vladeck (2014) argue, the NJ legislation that followed from the Mount Laurel legal rulings is the best known of the state-based interventions aimed at overcoming local exclusionary zoning in the United States. One of its key features is known as the "builder's remedy," which allows developers to build in communities with exclusionary zoning, provided that certain conditions are met. Communities in NJ can prevent state legal action, be "granted immunity", by submitting realistic plans for affordable housing to the NJ Council on Affordable Housing (COAH), including identification of suitable sites and designation of financial resources. This NJ state agency is trusted with enforcing the affordable housing legislation, by evaluating needs across the state and developing a rational "fair share" distribution. But even in NJ, the great majority of cases are not decided by courts and are settled by the parties involved. In 2011, the NJ legislature passed legislation that would institute an across-the-board goal of 10% of the housing stock for affordable housing (much like the 40B

²Chapter 40B [Government of Massachusetts] has reduced barriers erected by local municipal building permit approval processes and allows developers to build more densely than the municipal zoning bylaws would permit, provided that a certain fraction of the units are subject to long-term affordability restrictions. See Bratt and Vladeck (2014), 599–605, for details on the experience with *Chapter 40B* in Massachusetts.

Massachusetts legislation) and ordered the COAH to issue appropriate regulations, warning that it would stop protecting communities that do not comply with affordable housing rulings. Yet, the legislation was vetoed by the NJ governor and continued its journey through the NJ courts. It appears that as of the time of this writing a ruling on March 10, 2015 by the NJ Supreme Court removed from the NJ executive branch jurisdiction over low- and moderate-income housing and sent it back to the courts. The press regarded this ruling as a victory to housing advocates.

This review of *Climbing Mount Laurel* is not addressing US affordable housing policy per se. The review seeks instead to understand the lessons about affordable housing from a single intervention, in effect an experiment, in providing affordable rental housing in Mount Laurel Township, NJ, known as *Ethel Laurence Homes*, ELH for short. Having been started in 1969 [Massey *et al.* p. 2], ELH did not open its doors until November 2000. The extent of the political opposition to it has been remarkable; but how do arguments in its favor stand from an economics perspective?

Climbing Mount Laurel documents the impact of that project as of ten years after its opening. Bringing ELH to fruition involved persistent activities by advocacy groups, and extensive litigation in the NJ State Supreme Court and legislation at the local and state levels. Although there exist important legal and urban planning angles to ELH, this review will restrict itself to an economics viewpoint.

A number of features of ELH are noteworthy. Not all applicants for ELH housing were admitted as residents. The “Monitoring Mt. Laurel Study,” on which the book is based,³ relies on data on residents who were chosen administratively. In the absence of a full analysis of the selection process for residents, conclusions that may be drawn from a single project about affordable housing policy, more generally, are unreliable. Furthermore, this is not just any random project: neighbors within the community and the general public alike have been exposed to protracted publicity due to the extensive litigation. From its inception

³The web resource <http://opr.princeton.edu/archive/mmls/>, is an archive of the underlying data, which may also be accessed by other researchers. The study was funded by public (Department of Housing and Urban Development) and private (MacArthur Foundation) grants.

until its inaugural occupancy, litigation in the NJ state courts and advocacy at all levels of government made ELH a very public object of attention. It is not a random draw from the set of affordable housing projects for an additional reason: publicity can help the public confront how irrational and unethical are stereotypes and racist beliefs.

The book does an admirable job in assessing the impact of ELH, a small affordable housing project in a highly politically contentious environment. Its examination of the project, from its inception in local housing advocacy, through prolonged legal battles that its completion had to endure, and its potential impact on the community where it is located are thorough and persuasive. Yet, it is a small project and its performance to date may be a very special case. The analysis of the impact on neighboring communities fall short of a full examination of general equilibrium effects.

For these reasons, in order to help an economics audience assess the broader lessons from the ELH, and in spite of the thorough approach of Massey *et al.*, I find it useful to discuss in this review the book through the lens of a number of broadly related areas of economics research. One, is our understanding of what people are looking for precisely when they choose where to live, drawn from empirical analyses of location choice models, when social effects are recognized; a second is under what conditions housing policy interventions set in motion a sequence of moves by existing residents out of, or by new residents into, the neighborhood which could undo the aim of the original intervention.

2 Overview

Climbing Mount Laurel consists of nine chapters, with some more detailed technical material being relegated to appendices. Chapter 1 is about neighborhoods. While its title “Location Cubed” invokes the common saying that property values depend principally on location, the chapter aims at elucidating economics- and sociology-based arguments for why neighborhoods as such matter for the welfare and socioeconomic outcomes of their inhabitants. The chapter also invokes, under the subtitle “The Political Economy of Place,” a bit dramatically, the Marxist distinction between “use-value” and “exchange-value” of houses as

commodities, which is not so helpful to a modern reader. I will therefore ignore it from now on. The subtitle connotes links to the modern term “placed-based policies,” and the chapter touches on the scope for effectiveness of policies which are implemented at “places” but are really aimed at the general improvement of individuals’ welfare. The chapter also links with the close relationship between spatial location and social status and therefore economic status as well. The chapter credits William Julius Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged* [Wilson (1987)] for establishing the notion that growing up and living in a poor *neighborhood* adds to the disadvantages of growing and living in a poor *family*. Yet, this notion goes at least as far back as Kenneth Clark’s *Dark Ghetto*.⁴ The chapter then turns to the natural question of whether public policy could offset “spatial polarization” and its associated effects on economic inequality.

Chapter 2 takes up the details of this highly contested affordable housing project, whose location in Mount Laurel, NJ, a prosperous suburban community, was initiated by Ethel Laurence in 1967 via the formation of the Springfield Community Action Committee. Ethel Laurence sought to assist a small African American community to remain in Mount Laurel amidst rapidly increasing housing prices, as new transportation links brought that community within commuting distance to Philadelphia. Acquisition of options to a land parcel in 1968 for a 36-unit affordable rental housing development was rejected by the Mount Laurel Township authorities. That led in turn to the first round of court cases, and then on to the NJ Supreme Court *Mount Laurel I* decision of 1975. That decision boldly ruled that NJ municipalities had to end their exclusionary zoning practices. The proponents of the affordable housing development sought another ruling challenging Mount Laurel Township’s noncompliance, which led in turn to the so-called *Mount Laurel II* decision of the NJ Supreme Court

⁴Clark (1965), whose paperback second edition in 1989 comes with an introduction by Wilson himself and a foreword by Gunnar Myrdal, emphasizes that although some of the problems poor blacks face in urban slums are similar to those faced by all poor people in the slums, racism takes a particular toll by reinforcing a feeling that they are unable to rise economically. The perceived absence of prospects of change one’s status and Clark’s general description of the personal and social consequences of ghetto life have made it a classic in understanding the consequences of US segregation. I thank Steven Durlauf for bringing this work to my attention.

in 1983 that ordered all NJ communities to rewrite their zoning laws and allow a “fair share” of affordable housing. A final consent order established the Faire Share Housing Development as the developer of ELH in 1986. The subsequent approval of the ELH plans by the Mount Laurel planning board in 1997 allowed the construction of ELH Phase I to begin in 1999. Phase I, which was completed in 2000, involved the construction of 100 units. This was followed by the completion of ELH Phase II with 40 additional units in 2004. The chapter ends with the lingering political consequences of the *Mount Laurel I* and *II* decisions and observations about the 2009 NJ gubernatorial campaign, where certain candidates sought to outdo one another in opposing the legal doctrine establishing the COAH. Such contentious politics raise genuine questions about why is it that that project raised so much political opposition.

Chapter 4 reports on the ELH’s impact on the community where it is located, Mount Laurel itself. The chapter recognizes widespread criticism of public housing projects as contributing to racial and economic segregation rather than promoting economic mobility of their residents. It highlights how physical attributes of the ELH were deliberately designed to help assuage fears about the project’s becoming a stigma both on the community and the project’s residents. The analysis is based on interviews with current and prospective residents and neighbors and data collection. Chapter 5 assesses the potential impact from ELH on communities surrounding Mount Laurel. The chapter’s findings depend critically on which particular ones from among surrounding communities were selected to compare in terms of data on crime rates, property values and tax rates, for the time preceding the inauguration of the ELH as well as following it. Chapter 6 focuses on how residents of the surrounding neighborhoods perceive the consequences of the project a decade later. The chapter also compares the demographics of ELH residents and neighbors, reporting a variety of metrics, ranging from the level of awareness of different attributes of ELH in different dimensions, including what comes to neighbors’ minds in describing the ELH, extent of contact with ELH residents and whether residents’ fears had been realized. Notably though not surprisingly, the very vocal opposition to ELH that was responsible for the extensive litigation appears to have been hardly representative of the Mount Laurel community.

Chapter 7 tracks how the dispute over the ELH moved from a local effort to protect local residents with keeping their homes in a booming local housing market, to state-wide struggles over exclusionary zoning, to whether affordable housing developments can provide a path out of poverty for the urban poor and at what costs to suburban communities that might be accomplished. It argues that ELH had few negative consequences for Mount Laurel itself and for its own residents. It finds that, not unlike the experience with the Gautreaux and MTO programs, project residents' environments improved by reduced exposure to social disorder and violence.

Chapter 8 evaluates broader lifetime trajectories of ELH residents and possible pathways out of poverty that may be credited to living in ELH. It shows how moving into ELH allowed residents to reorient their lives towards better mental health and more economic independence than would otherwise have been possible. The assessment involves comparisons between ELH resident and nonresident children in terms of educational outcomes, time allocated to different activities in the household, and decreased exposure to disorder and violence.

Chapter 9 reviews the principal findings of the study. It underscores that, contrary to fears felt by some residents of Mount Laurel, there was no dramatic impact of ELH on property values: a decade later, most neighbors are either indifferent or positive about the existence of the project in Mount Laurel. The research finds no evidence of effects on crime rates, tax burdens and property values. For the ELH residents themselves, estimated advantageous direct and indirect causal effects are significant for adult mental health and economic independence and children's outcomes, especially since resident children had to perform in a more competitive and demanding school environment. The book concludes with thoughts about whether exposure to neighborhood conditions has a causal effect on individuals' life time outcomes, above and beyond what could be explained by those individuals' personal and family characteristics.

The book boasts that ELH's success "offers a proof of concept for the further development of affordable family housing, both as a social policy for promoting racial and class integration in metropolitan America and as a practical program for achieving poverty alleviation and

economic mobility in society at large” [Massey, *op. cit.*, 196]. Still, in spite of ELH’s success, I am not persuaded that the broader policy question could be adequately addressed by a single study, even as thorough as the one reviewed here. It is a compelling case study, but in order to understand better the policy lessons emerging from ELH, that may apply to affordable housing interventions anywhere, I think it is important to provide context from the economics literature. My reservations notwithstanding, *Climbing Mount Laurel* is superbly done, as far as it goes and given that it is about a single intervention.

3 The Context

In assessing *Climbing Mount Laurel*, I find it helpful to ponder the following interrelated questions. One, how significant is for affordable housing interventions anywhere the finding of positive social effects?⁵ Two, are the beneficial results to date likely to be maintained over time? The first question can be approached with help by the housing hedonics literature. The second requires predicting whether such an intervention may induce some existing residents to move out and/or new residents into the neighborhood, whose characteristics may be such that could undo the aim of the original intervention. If adverse neighborhood succession does occur, it would wipe out the benefits that have been experienced so far. It is important to bear in mind the long run dynamics of neighborhood succession. We can do this by appealing to our understanding of the determinants of residential moves and more generally neighborhood dynamics. I turn next to each of the topics that these questions usher in.

⁵Ethel Laurence, a sixth-generation African American resident of Mount Laurel, recognized that the increasing suburbanization of the area came with increasing housing costs, as new highways reduced the commuting costs to Philadelphia, thus threatening the ability of long-term African Americans to keep their homes. As substandard homes were being condemned and torn by Mount Laurel Township officials, while no efforts were made to assist their inhabitants to relocate elsewhere in the community, Ethel Laurence was motivated to join with other local residents to help individuals under threat of relocation. A successful example of affordable housing in Mount Laurel helped launch affordable housing advocacy in NJ.

3.1 View from Housing Hedonics

The impact of ELH may be assessed in terms of the hedonic analysis of housing markets. Housing hedonics address how property values reflect structural characteristics of dwelling units and of the attributes of their neighborhoods, such as geographical, structural, aesthetic and other characteristics of neighborhoods. Importantly, hedonic theory implies and hedonics empirics confirm [Ioannides (2013)] that if individuals care about the characteristics of their neighbors, those characteristics, too, function as neighborhood attributes and are capitalized accordingly in property values. Following the logic of hedonic analysis we can seek to predict the impact on property values from a change in neighborhood characteristics. An intervention that shocks the local partial equilibrium may be evaluated using hedonic price estimates, if its size and thus impact is small.

A long experience of slow removal of legal or quasi-legal barriers affecting members of US minority groups as they pursue their housing options has not completely eliminated such barriers. For example, exclusionary zoning might not nowadays be intended as a deliberate barrier against particular ethnic groups but may still function as such. That is, as an institutional fact that constrains land use, it raises the “admission price” into a community that employs it. That is, the user cost of housing, in effect the admission price, includes community-based property taxes that are set to pay for local services (including notably education when it is locally provided) in addition to housing costs per se. Such taxes may also be reflected on rents, to the extent that they are shifted to tenants. Because housing prices help ration access to residential communities, market prices themselves will reflect and therefore may also proxy for all attributes that characterize communities, including *social effects*. Housing prices as hedonic prices are associated with a “social equilibrium” underlying the housing market equilibrium.⁶ An affordable housing project, like ELH, acts as a de facto removal of barriers, and the resulting realignment of the local equilibrium is reflected on property prices.

The extent in which individuals’ choices are hampered by institutional constraints is

⁶Accounting for social effects in empirical hedonic analyses of housing markets are relatively recent; see Ioannides (2013), Ch. 3.

important. The fact that housing outcomes reflect income inequality is important for social policy. If that would mean that poor people can afford only substandard housing, and substandard housing is not just inexpensive housing but is associated with an environment of social pathologies, then it is important to know whether poor neighborhood outcomes augur badly for poor life cycle outcomes. The neighborhood effects literature does, of course, go beyond that, by also probing that question. This follows if individuals sort themselves across neighborhoods being motivated by their perception of the distribution of individual characteristics within the neighborhoods where they wish to reside. Naturally, individuals' lifetime prospects are, in principle, reflected on hedonic values. This suggests, in particular, that those wishing to reside in ELH anticipate to benefit in the long run.

Ellen and Voicu (2006) and Ellen *et al.* (2007) offer direct if not somewhat mixed support that spillovers from federally subsidized rental housing interventions in New York City have been positive on property values in the surrounding neighborhoods. Ellen *et al.* (2007) estimate and compare the neighborhood impacts of a broad range of federally subsidized rental housing programs in New York City using a difference- in-difference specification of a hedonic regression model. Data for 430,000 property sales between 1974 and 2002 are linked to 77,000 federally subsidized rental housing units that were built between 1977 and 2000. Although the effects differ across communities, those authors find negative impacts for some of those communities in the short run, but positive impacts for others. The magnitudes depend on scale, suggesting no reductions in property values and increases in some cases.

The empirical hedonics literature has established that individuals' preferences for quality attributes of neighborhoods at several levels of aggregation register on the hedonics. Although socioeconomic characteristics at the different scales of aggregation that are used to define neighborhoods (such as census cluster, tract, and MSA) can be highly correlated, it is still the case that different small neighborhoods can have different character. In spite of extensive evidence, it would still be possible for ELH not to have significant impacts on property values in the immediate neighborhoods. Hedonic analyses apply to the "average" community, and Mount Laurel and its surrounding communities might not be such average communities, in the context of the literature. Furthermore, ELH might be too small to have

an impact. And, ELH is after all a sample of one.

3.2 Perspective from the Dynamics of Neighborhood Succession

Standard hedonic estimations do not of course tell us what would happen if the composition of a particular neighborhood undergoes unanticipated changes. They merely record the empirical relationship between property values and attributes of dwelling units and their neighborhoods as snapshots of what might likely prevail at equilibrium.⁷ It is thus reasonable to be able to predict whether an intervention like that of ELH might set in motion a sequence of moves in the immediate neighborhood. Anticipating the likely dynamics of residential transitions triggered by unanticipated changes in the racial composition of neighborhoods can be investigated theoretically by means of Thomas Schelling’s simple but powerful models of neighborhood location decisions and neighborhood tipping [Schelling (1971; 1978)]. Schelling’s models may help explain ultimate outcomes that may well be directly unintended by individuals, but at the aggregate they do reflect magnification of individual propensities. Schelling’s original insights about location decisions and associated aggregate segregation patterns have been modernized by the comparatively little research that revisited them [Zhang (2004; 2011)]. Still, there have been only relatively few empirical investigations along the lines of Schelling’s ideas, but they can be particularly helpful in predicting long run outcomes.

Noteworthy empirical works testing the Schelling model of neighborhood tipping that do find tipping points are by Card, Mas, and Rothstein (2008; 2011). Card *et al.* (2008) test for discontinuities in the dynamics of neighborhood racial composition by means of regression discontinuity methods with US Census tract-level data, 1970–2000. White population flows do exhibit tipping-like behavior in most cities, and tipping points are identified as ranging from 5% to 20% for the minority share. These estimates are robust to the inclusion of flexible controls for other neighborhood characteristics, including poverty and unemployment rates, and housing attributes. Similar tipping patterns are present in larger and smaller cities

⁷Nothing stops researchers from conducting hedonic analyses of changes in property values in relation to changes in the demographic composition of neighborhoods. However, I am unaware of any such studies.

in all regions of the US and in both suburban and central city neighborhoods, defined as Census tracts. The estimated tipping points are also highly correlated across the three decades in their sample. These authors regress the estimated tipping points against an index of the attitudes of white residents in different cities constructed with data from the General Social Survey.⁸ The cities with the highest index values, representing more “racist” attitudes are Memphis and Birmingham; the cities with the lowest values are San Diego and Rochester. Controlling for income slightly strengthens the racist attitude effect. These results are direct empirical evidence of the nonlinear dynamic behavior predicted by a social interactions models of the Schelling type. They support theoretical predictions that segregation is driven, at least in part, by preferences of white families over the (endogenous) racial and ethnic composition of neighborhoods.

Card, Mas, and Rothstein (2011) also examine the racial dynamics of Census tracts in major metropolitan areas over the period from 1970 to 2000. They aim at determining whether tipping is “two-sided” or “one-sided.” That is, two-sided tipping refers to situations where neighborhoods may move towards segregated equilibria, either due to white flight, or to minority flight. These correspond to Schelling’s original prediction and survive in contemporary adaptations of Schelling’s models [*c.f.* Zhang (2011)]. In those models, the “mixed” (integrated) equilibrium is unstable. In contrast, the term “one-sided” tipping model pertains to situations in which neighborhoods with a minority share below a critical threshold are potentially stable, but those that exceed the threshold rapidly shift to high minority composition and thus unstable. This corresponds to the instance of a Schelling-type

⁸The variables employed from the General Social Survey are: I. Do you think there should be laws against marriages between blacks and whites? II. In general, do you favor or oppose the busing of black and white school children from one school district to another? III. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement: “White people have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods if they want to, and blacks should respect that right?” IV. Suppose there is a community-wide vote on the general housing issue. Which (of the following two) laws would you vote for: a. One law says that a homeowner can decide for himself whom to sell his house to, even if he prefers not to sell to blacks; b. The second law says that a homeowner cannot refuse to sell to someone because of his or her race or color. The responses to these variables for different cities were recoded in a number of steps and aggregated into the racial attitude index. Card *et al.* (2008a), p. 215.

model with a single stable fixed point and a single unstable one [Ioannides (2013), 119–122]. Card *et al.* find that tipping behavior is one-sided, and that neighborhoods with minority shares below the tipping point attract both white and minority residents.

Li (2014) shows, in a model of location decisions with social interactions, that when allowing for preferences for ethnic mixing, stable ethnically mixed equilibria are possible, provided that preference for, or aversion to, certain minority groups is not too strong. He confirms these predictions using data for housing transactions and neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics in Vancouver, British Columbia. So, in principle the presence of a small minority community is not only feasible but also welfare enhancing.

This is some good news for the proponents of integration, as it shows that efforts to promote integration do not have to battle against market forces. Urban policies aiming at creating stable, economically and racially mixed neighborhoods, such as zoning and mandates of mixed income housing, must be studied not in terms of static assessments, but rather in terms of whether (and how) the dynamics of market forces work in favor of segregation. All in all, I take this evidence to imply that Massey *et al.* findings to date, namely that the ELH has not caused a white exodus, is not necessarily a fluke. Socioeconomic composition of communities could be such that an influx of a small nonwhite population does not necessarily destabilize a neighborhood.

Neighborhoods in a free market economy are shaped by what do people look for when evaluating different neighborhoods as possible places to live and decide accordingly. Ioannides and Zanella (2008) study this question by relying on geocoded PSID panel data. They find that mean income and the share of the population belonging to one's own race-ethnic group who recently moved into a neighborhood (defined as the census tract to which their dwelling unit belongs) increase the propensity to move in for households with children but have no effect on households without children. The percentage of residents who are foreign-born or on public assistance decreases the propensity to move in for households with children but have no such effects for others. The share of children with poor linguistic skills in a neighborhood encourages leaving it and discourages entering it for households with children, but the corresponding effects are insignificant for those without children. The effect of the per-

centage of residents who recently moved into a neighborhood, which may be thought of as a proxy for neighborhood instability, are statistically significant, and encourage moving out of a neighborhood and encourage moving into it for households with children but not for those without children, respectively. These results do suggest that the demographic characteristics of white households are crucial for determining stability of neighborhoods.

4 What Does the Success of Ethel Laurence Homes Tells us?

Interestingly and ironically, the entire effort in favor of affordable housing in NJ, and the momentous opposition to it, started when a municipality opposed an effort by a small African American community to find a way to keep their homes as a booming local housing market developed and made it expensive for them to continue living there. According to Massey (2012), the “Mount Laurel doctrine’ and the implementation of the decision through the NJ’s Council on Affordable Housing, has led to the creation of 60,000 affordable housing units⁹ statewide,” with new units being in higher-median-income communities. Yet, Bratt and Vladeck (2014) argue that at least in NJ over 80% of NJ municipalities have not produced affordable housing at the targeted level,¹⁰ with municipalities with larger white populations building less of it. It can also be argued that once recognized, the total benefits to residents of developments like ELH, from the improvements in their lifetime prospects, may well outweigh the costs, even if they were to take the form of sustained decreases in property values. The principal benefits may thus well be that exclusionary practices based on prejudice are harder to survive politically and not just legally. Once victories inspire interventions elsewhere — and it has been argued that the so-called 40B legislation in Massachusetts [Bratt and

⁹According to Bratt and Vladeck (2012), from 1980 to 2010, the NJ housing stock grew from 2,691,313 to 3,544,909, of which the Council of Affordable Housing (COAH) accounted for 6.1%. See fn. 6, p. 27.

¹⁰Table 12, p. 618, Bratt and Vladeck (2014), presents a breakdown of the extent to which the 494 municipalities with a prior-round obligation attained the goal set by the state. Of these municipalities, nearly 41% built no new affordable units. Including these municipalities, over 80% did not produce affordable housing at the targeted level, and 68% attained less than 50% of their obligation.

Vladeck (2014)] has been directly influenced by Mount Laurel, and is in turn influencing many other efforts elsewhere in other communities — the effect can be extensive as hearts are won and minds are persuaded in the affected publics. Thus, there is an abundance of good news in favor of the efficacy of political advocacy when key legal steps are at stake which once won, they could have a wider influence.

At the same time, the overwhelming evidence in favor of the importance of the *enduring* neighborhood effects in sustaining neighborhood inequality [Sampson (2011)] make this reader of *Climbing Mount Laurel* wonder whether the “right” factors conspire to produce an outcome that at least so far is advantageous for such interventions to promote housing affordability without being potentially jeopardized by instabilities, a fear that cannot be dispelled by research discussed in this review. Perhaps, ELH is much too small to have noticeable negative effects. Although smallness might be an advantage, it risks (if it is aimed at as a policy that interventions must be small) posing ethical dilemmas.

This reviewer finds much good news about affordable housing projects in the evidence eloquently presented by *Climbing Mount Laurel*. Its evaluation extends into many dimensions and covers several social science viewpoints along with details on how advocacy works and succeeds! Such a multifaced and exhaustive assessment is a huge factor in its favor. It also delivers an additional achievement, namely that different social sciences can complement well one another in such an endeavor. In an era of widespread reliance on randomized field experiments as a tool of policy analysis, this reviewer only wishes that we could look more systematically at many affordable housing projects, which with a modicum of randomization could be very useful. A meta-analysis of affordable housing projects throughout the US from the lens of field experiments¹¹ deserves consideration.

¹¹See Harrison and List (2004) for a broad review and List and Rasul (2011) for field experiments in labor economics.

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