

THE HIDDEN CLIMATE DIVIDE IN AMERICAN CITIES:

Walk through any American city in the summer and you can feel the difference that money makes. In wealthier neighborhoods, the air moves. Trees cast shadows over sidewalks, homes sit back from the street with large porches and long rooflines. A few miles away, the temperature is ten degrees hotter. There's parking lots next to parking lots and no shade in sight and simple boxy buildings line the streets. The contrast isn't an accident. It's a design choice shaped by economic status and it's becoming a defining climate issue.

Urban heat is not being distributed evenly. Numerous studies have shown that lower-income neighborhoods can be up to 15 degrees hotter than wealthier ones during heat waves. A reality backed by [national research](#) revealing that poorer communities consistently face more extreme surface heat. That gap is both uncomfortable and dangerous. Heat is already one of the deadliest weather-related hazards in the United States, and as summers grow hotter, the places we live will determine who stays safe and who suffers. The built environment either protects people from extreme heat or amplifies it. Protection is a privilege and it needs to change.

Wealthier cities and neighborhoods tend to have various examples of “cooling architecture.” These are design features that work with the climate not against it. Wide eaves keep sun off exterior walls. The large porches create shaded outdoor spaces and help reduce indoor heat gain, and homes are spaced farther apart which allows breezes to move freely. Most importantly, tree coverage is abundant. A single tree can cool the air around it by several degrees, and entire canopies can transform a neighborhood's microclimate. These features shouldn't be luxuries, and yet they are.

Lower-income areas often lack these protections because they were never planned with climate in mind. Many of these neighborhoods were built quickly and cheaply, especially during periods of industrial expansion or postwar housing demand. Developers prioritized cost over comfort and cities allowed it. The result is a landscape dominated by heat-absorbing materials: asphalt, concrete, and brick. These materials intensify the urban heat island effect, which impacts low-income and minority communities across nearly all major U.S. cities. ([Nature](#)) Parking lots stretch across blocks, sidewalks bake in the sun, and trees are rare or nonexistent. These neighborhoods are turned into massive heat islands, and the people who live there pay the price.

This divide reflects decades of uneven investment, zoning decisions, and political choices about whose comfort and safety matter. Money talks and wealthier communities hold the power to demand trees, parks, and architectural standards that fit the climate. Lower-income communities don't have that privilege. They have to fight for basic infrastructure, let alone climate-conscious design. As temperatures rise, these old decisions are becoming climate emergencies, reinforcing patterns of heat inequity tied to race, class, and historical segregation. ([Nature](#))

Cities can easily fix this problem, but only if they treat heat as a planning issue, not its own individual problem. Planting trees is one of the most effective and affordable interventions, but it has to be done strategically and maintained over time. Replacing large asphalt lots with permeable surfaces can reduce heat and improve stormwater management. Updating building codes to encourage shading devices, reflective roofing, and better insulation can make homes

safer without raising costs dramatically. Smaller changes, like adding bus stop shelters or creating pocket parks, can make a huge difference. Some cities are already implementing these changes. [Los Angeles](#) has begun painting streets with reflective coatings to lower surface temperatures. [Phoenix](#) is expanding its urban forestry program to increase shade. [Louisville](#) has launched a citywide heat-mapping initiative to guide targeted interventions. These efforts show what's possible when cities take heat seriously. ([Nature](#))

The real challenge is ensuring that climate adaptation doesn't become another marker of inequality. Cooling architecture shouldn't be reserved for only people who can afford it, and shade shouldn't be a luxury. As heat waves become more frequent and more intense, the ability to stay cool will shape public health, economic stability, and overall quality of life. Cities that fail to address this divide will see the consequences in rising medical costs, declining productivity, and widening social gaps.

If there's one thing to take away, it's that climate resilience starts at street level. It's in the width of a roof's eaves, the presence of a tree canopy, and the materials used in a parking lot. These details add up to a city that either protects its residents or leaves them exposed. As we plan for a hotter future, we need to make sure that every neighborhood, not just the wealthy ones, have the ability to stay cool.

The next time you step outside on a hot day, pay attention to what's around you. Notice where the shade falls, where the air feels still, and where the pavement radiates heat. Those differences tell a story about who the cities are built for and call out the work that still needs to be done.

LOVE.

You know what I've noticed. That when you fall in love with a person it can start out as a joke. A silly crush on the cute boy in school, in which you freak out every time you see him and you gossip to your besties about. But what your friends don't necessarily see is when that silly crush changes from a joke to a real thing. It's when you start noticing the small things they do that most people don't quite see. And because you're so fixed on them, that you steal every glimpse you possibly can, you notice. You start to notice the things they do when they're nervous, like scrunching up their nose or playing with their hoodie strings or fiddling with the loose string hanging from their shirt. Or when you notice how their whole aura changes when they start talking about something that makes them uncomfortable. You can see their eyes grow large when someone brings up something they adore and they get to tell everyone all about how much they know. You notice when they stop talking as much as they were earlier and move away from the group, even when other people don't. You notice their cute little giggle accompanied by the slight shoulder shake they do when somebody cracks a joke. Which is then usually followed by you now finding these jokes funny, though sometimes, no amount of admiration can make a joke funny. Then you can see their eyes change when they do something they deeply regret or when they are hurt by something that was just said or by seeing someone that broke them. You listen to them talk about something and make it seem like it doesn't bother them and even if nobody really notices, you hear the tone in their voice change from their usual tone. You can hear the slight voice cracks here and there when they make a

joke with their friends about a sensitive topic that they'd rather forget about. Then you see and hear the relief in their eyes and voice, when the topic of conversation finally gets changed to something else. And these things you start to notice, make you slowly fall in love, with everything they do, and whether it's their cute little quirks or their little mess-ups or their super bad qualities that they're trying to fix, you admire them all, and you crave for them to notice how much you care or how YOUR voice changes when they're around or the giggle YOU make when they crack a stupid joke or the way YOUR eyes change when you see them walk into the room. Falling in love brings a new type of lust for a person, not a sexual one, just a desire to be around someone as much as you can. It won't necessarily happen quickly and sometimes you'll do everything to try and stop it from happening. In the end, you'll realize you can't prevent this type of love for someone from weaving its way through your brain until all you can think about is them.

OBSESSION OR LOVE?

Is it possible to be in love with someone without ever having a romantic relationship? Is it possible to love someone who you haven't really gotten to know deep down but you know enough that you want that person. You want to get to know them and you want to know everything about them, good and bad. Who decides whether you're In Love with someone? Imagine you telling your best friend that you love someone and then having her tell you that you don't love him, you're just obsessed. Is she right? Are you obsessed? How do you tell the difference? How could anyone possibly decipher the difference between love and obsession because shouldn't everyone be a little obsessed when they're in love?

HOW COVID IMPACTED ME:

If someone came to me at the beginning of my freshmen year and told me that the last year of my life on easy mode would be ruined by a global pandemic, I genuinely would have thought that they were crazy. When we first heard about the Covid-19 virus, I was in a really bad mental space. The day the letter was placed on our desks, I felt a huge wave of relief cross me.

Thinking of where we are in the world right now, it sounds pretty messed up to say, but two weeks off of classwork and the time to get back to feeling like myself felt like a gift. Eventually the two weeks turned into four, which then turned to six and that grew into the rest of my school year being compiled into online assignments, confusion, and almost no social interaction outside of my immediate family. From March 13 to the beginning of May, I didn't leave the house at all except the occasional hike with my family and quick trips to the store. The beginning of May was the first time I had seen my cousins, who I would normally see at least twice a week, in 2 months. We started seeing them more often after that point, but that was it. By the end of May I finally got to see my best friend, who I hadn't seen in 3 months. The months following that were filled with days and nights spent at our family pond and cautious reintroductions to family members we hadn't seen in months.

One memory that stays engraved in my memory was clearing out my locker in June. A place that was once a lively atmosphere filled of students and teachers was now empty and

lifeless. This moment sparked the realization that the world isn't the same and it probably wouldn't go back to the way it worked before for a long time.

By the end of the summer, I had started spending more time with my family and a few of my close friends. Even though I was around small amounts of family and friends, I missed being social and talking to people. I missed school. I missed going to the mall. I missed doing everyday things without fear of getting sick. There were countless circumstances where nothing felt real and I thought I was in a fever dream. The biggest thing to break me from this feeling was going back to school. Even though things were very obviously different than before we left, there was a weird sense of normalcy. I saw people I hadn't seen in 6 months, heard familiar voices and sounds, and my days started to regain structure. These things gave me hope. Hope that things were going to get better eventually, and I would start feeling like I was actually in control of my own life instead of just floating around aimlessly.

School continued on, everyone wore masks, hand sanitizer stations were installed around the building, and big purple dots were placed six feet apart in the lunch room. A strange new feeling was created when you would watch your classmates and friends get pulled out of class due to contact tracing.

As we have just recently moved past the year mark of everything shutting down, you hope things would have changed by now. As much as I, along with the rest of the world, would have liked the world to be back to normal by now, it isn't, but there is a hint of hope. Moving into the month of April, more vaccines are being produced and distributed, and some states have started lifted restrictions.

Although Covid-19 ruined many things for me, such as my prom and senior trip, it won't ruin my future.

CREATIVE WRITING

INFECTED:

(coincidentally written before quarantine ever started)

"You're infected"

I never realized two words could change my life so much. It was a regular day. I was in line at *Beans*, my regular coffee shop, when I was hit with a wave of dizziness. I tried grabbing onto the counter for stability but I missed and teetered in place. I hit something in front of me and fell hard onto the ground. My vision went black and the last thing I remember was the smell of coffee.

"Sophia-"

My head is pounding, I hear sirens.

"-hear me, my name is-"

Who's talking, what's going on?

“-we’re almost there, do you know what’s go-“

Where am I? Am I in a car? Why can’t I move?

“What happened?”

My vision was black and everything around me seemed muffled, almost like I was underwater. I tried opening my eyes. No, it’s too bright. Where am I going? I tried to move but everything was weak.

“Hi Sophia, can you hear me? My name is Rose.”

I opened my eyes slightly. I was moving down a white hallway, where I was going? I had no idea. I felt someone’s hand on my shoulder and could just barely feel a hand down near my ankle. People were talking but I couldn’t quite hear them, and I couldn’t speak to tell them to slow down.

“What’s her name? How’s she doing?”

I looked to my left and saw someone in a white suit and a mask on. I looked to my right and there was a blue hand on the guard rail attached to a body covered in another white protective suit. What the hell is going on? We stopped and suddenly i was being hooked up to a bunch of monitors and had an IV placed in my hand. I heard a door shut and everything was quiet. The lights dimmed which made is easier to open my eyes. I saw a woman in front of me, she had on a full body protective suit and blue gloves attached to the sleeves. She spoke softly

“Hi Sophia, my name is Maria, do you remember what happened?”

I tried my hardest to speak coherently.

“I fainted? At the coffee shop, right? I don’t remember what happened after it’s all foggy. What’s wrong with me? What happened?”

Maria looked at me with comfort but I could tell there was a hint of concern and discomfort. When she finally spoke it felt like the whole world was spinning again.

“You’re infected,” she said and nothing was ever the same after that.

THE MIX-MATCH DISASTER (8TH GRADE)

In the trash. What a great way to start my story! You are probably wondering why I, Rebecca, am in the trash stuffed like a sardine next to Lars, my evil second cousin. Considering, we used to have a fantastic owner who took care of us like we were her own children. Until one dark rainy day, no, I'm serious it was like the middle of a monsoon, everything changed.

My brother, Liam and I are a pair of charcoal black, perfectly kept, low-rise converse. Every night we were placed perfectly in line, like the last piece of a puzzle, next to our mom and pop, Rhonda and Lou. Our owner, Kameron, followed through with her routine like always. We always fit perfectly in our spot, lined up next to all our relatives, and please don't tell the others, but Liam and I are definitely her favorite. We all slowly drifted asleep as we watched Kameron proceed through her perfectly put-together routine.

When we awoke the next morning, at the same time like always, I thought everything was the same. That was until I noticed one extremely major thing, Kameron's alarm wasn't going off! Finally, after ten minutes of hoping and praying, Kameron bolted upright and threw on her clothes faster than ever, picked up her book bag, and grabbed me, but not my brother. Instead, she grabbed my annoying second cousin, Lars, who is half of Kameron's pair of perfectly kept, ruby red, low-rise converse. She threw her hair in a very messy bun, and flew out the door, just in time for her bus, which ironically ran a little behind schedule today. After the agonizing bus ride with Lars, we pulled into the parking lot of West Point Middle School, my favorite place in the world.

Once we stepped off the bus Lars and I were still arguing non-stop. He thought it would be hilarious to trip Kameron by tying our laces together. I obviously told him absolutely not, and started counting down the minutes until I was back with my brother. Oh and by the way Lars doesn't stop when he gets told no. Instead, he decided to make Kameron's day worse by taking a power nap, which caused her to trip in front of the whole class, including her crush. After that

incident, the rest of the day was filled with constant bickering between Lars and me, he tormented both Kameron and myself. Fourth block is when things really went downhill.

Fourth block, also known as PE, had just begun. This was the only time during the school day that we were off of Kameron's feet. She got changed and went to class while Lars and I were stuck in the locker room, which by the way smells disgusting. During the twenty minutes before the incident happened, I was giving Lars a lecture which he definitely did not listen to. During this tangent I was going on, we started to hear footsteps. I've been on Kameron's feet long enough times that I just knew they weren't hers, so naturally I started to get suspicious. Very abruptly, an unknown figure ran in, opened Kameron's locker and grabbed Lars, me, and all of Kameron's possessions. This unknown figure, very harshly, threw all of Kameron's belongings in the trash. Which brings me to where I'm at now, sitting in the trash can outside the gym, covered in homework assignments and confiscated paper airplanes. I cannot imagine what my brother was thinking when Kameron returned home without me, and I guess I'll never find out...