

AP Research Summer Reading Worksheet: Understanding the Gap

In AP Research, scholars don't just summarize what is known — they identify what's missing, misunderstood, or misleading in existing critical conversations. In AP Seminar, you might have described this scholarly discourse as a “dinner” conversation. Each of the following texts introduces a question, disrupts an assumption, and proposes a new way of thinking — a structure you'll use in your own research.

Read and annotate the introduction/preface of each book carefully. For each book, respond to the questions below. You can probably answer the questions in 2-4 sentences, but use your best judgment.

After you have completed the reading, [please complete this SNIC survey](#) so I can get to know you a little better before class begins.

Michelle Alexander is a civil rights lawyer, legal scholar, and author of [*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*](#) published in 2010. The book is widely attributed with reigniting conversations about police reform. Please read through the end of the Introduction (page 13).

1. How does Alexander connect the current system of mass incarceration to earlier forms of racial control like slavery and Jim Crow¹ laws?
 2. What rhetorical strategies does Alexander use to frame her argument as both urgent and morally compelling?
 3. How does Alexander anticipate and address potential skepticism or resistance from her audience?
 4. What are the consequences, according to Alexander, of failing to recognize mass incarceration as a system of racial caste?
 5. How does Alexander frame the stakes of her research — why should we care?
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1. What evidence, logic, or perspective does the author use to suggest the old belief is flawed or incomplete?
 2. What new insight, theory, or framework does the author propose instead?
 3. What are the implications of this new understanding? Why is it significant?
 4. How is the author positioning themselves in relation to other scholars or the general public?

¹ Please define any word or term you don't know in your annotations.

Jared Diamond was Professor of Geography at UCLA until his retirement in 2024. Published in 1999, his book [*Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*](#) would go on to win the Pulitzer Prize, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, the Rhone-Poulenc Prize, and the Commonwealth club of California's Gold Medal.

1. Diamond opens with a question from Yali. What is the question, and why is it important?
 2. What kinds of explanations for global inequality does Diamond reject early on?
 3. What specific examples does he use to show that simple explanations are inadequate?
 4. How does he introduce geography and ecology as alternative lenses? What kinds of evidence does he preview?
 5. What is his tone toward traditional historical narratives? How does that tone shape your reading of his argument?
 6. How does Diamond frame the stakes of his research — why should we care?
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Daniel Kahneman was professor emeritus of psychology and public affairs at Princeton University's Princeton School of Public and International Affairs. In 2002 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics. His book [*Thinking, Fast and Slow*](#) was published in 2011. Please read through page 17.

*Bonus Content: Listen to Kahneman on [Hidden Brain](#).

1. Kahneman introduces two “characters” in the mind: System 1 and System 2. What are they, and how do they differ?
2. What assumptions about human thinking is Kahneman challenging?
3. What role does intuition play in his critique of rational decision-making?
4. How does he use real-world examples to support his claims? (Be specific)
5. What does Kahneman say about the practical consequences of misunderstanding how we think? In other words, why should we care about these two systems?

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Steven Pinker is the Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology at Harvard University. He has won the CNS George Miller Prize (2010), the Richard Dawkins Award (2013), the Carl Sagan Award for Public Appreciation of Science (2018) and the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award (2022). His 2011 book [*The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*](#) was one of the *New York Times* notable books of the year.

1. What popular belief about violence and modernity does Pinker say most people hold?
 2. What kinds of evidence does he preview to challenge that belief?
 3. How does he anticipate and respond to the reader's likely skepticism?
 4. What explanations does he hint at for why violence has declined?
 5. What does the title suggest about his thesis? How does he use metaphor and tone in his framing?
 6. What makes his claim surprising — and why might some readers resist it?
 7. How does Pinker frame the stakes of his research — why should we care?
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