



Book Review

A recipe for gentrification: Food, power, and resistance in the city

Edited by Alison Hope Alkon, Yuki Kato, Joshua Sbicca
NYU Press, 2020: 384 pages

Review by Rachel Engler-Stringer

The book, *A Recipe for Gentrification: Food, Power, and Resistance in the City* is a well-crafted and useful contribution to the food environment, food access and food justice literatures. The premise of this edited book is to take a close look at the intersections between gentrification, increased property values, displacement and food justice and race in urban contexts. The book is primarily US-focused with one chapter on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and the rest case studies of American cities of various sizes. The three editors of the book are Alison Hope Alkon (who has previously co-edited an excellent volume on food justice to which this is an interesting follow-up), Yuki Kato and Joshua Sbicca, all of whom are sociologists.

One of the book's strengths is that it does not simply focus on large cities, where most gentrification literature already exists, but also on mid-sized cities (Denver and Oklahoma City for example) where the gentrification process has slightly different characteristics. It was interesting to note in reading all of these chapters together, how resistance to gentrification and displacement appears more challenging in these smaller cities. In cities like Los Angeles and New York, for example, gentrification has been happening in waves for decades and the organizing structures to both manage and resist it appear to be much more significant. I would argue that this plays out in the Canadian context as well and could see a follow-up to this book from Canadian researchers, examining this phenomenon by comparing Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, to smaller cities such as Edmonton, Halifax and Ottawa.

The chapters in the book focus on not only restaurants and grocery stores, but also on various types of urban agriculture (community gardens, food forests, urban farms) and how these may draw gentrifying investments into neighbourhoods.

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This is a unique contribution given that rarely is urban agriculture problematized in this way within the literature. The authors are able to illustrate the limitations of alternative food systems as they are understood today in that they can contribute to displacement of long-term, often racialized, communities, if not carefully constructed. What is especially interesting is that some of the latter chapters show how food justice organizing—leadership by communities at risk of displacement as one example—can be used to counter gentrifying forces.

Overall, this book covers a lot of ground and does an excellent job of balancing depth and theoretical connections, and breadth by examining various examples and issues in different sized cities. As a Canadian food researcher, however, I was a bit disappointed to find only one Canadian example included (and probably already the most researched example). One thought that kept occurring as I read the book was wondering if some of the issues around displacement of racialized communities might play out slightly differently in Canada, where cities and neighbourhoods are not as segregated along racial lines.

The book is relatively dense, but not overly so, and I would expect would be best suited for upper undergraduate and graduate students, but the case studies could serve as excellent examples for teaching purposes. Personally, as someone who has spent quite a bit of time studying food environments, I found this edited volume to be refreshing in its analysis and it helped me to make connections between concepts like gentrification and alternative food systems in ways I had not considered. I would recommend this book particularly to anyone who is interested in improving food access in urban environments.

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