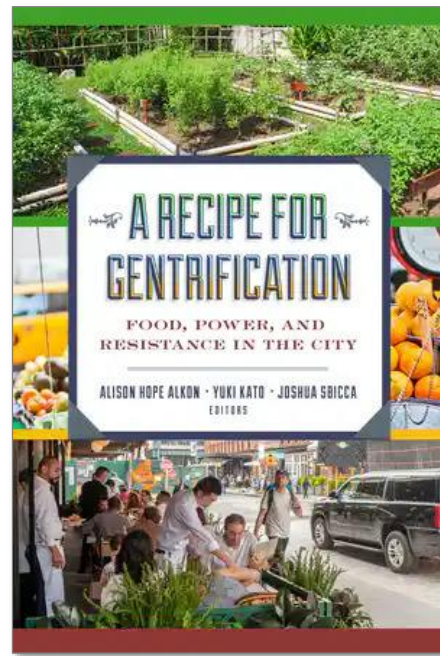


## Change is inevitable, but is gentrification?

Review by Megan Marshall \*  
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Review of *A Recipe for Gentrification: Food, Power, and Resistance in the City*, edited by Alison Hope Alkon, Yuki Kato, and Joshua Sbicca. (2021). Published by NYU Press. Available as hardcover, paperback, and eBook; 384 pages. Publisher's website: <https://nyupress.org/9781479811373/a-recipe-for-gentrification/>



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*A Recipe for Gentrification* is a masterful exploration of the complex relationship between intent and impact at the intersection of alternative food systems and urban development. The goal of this edited volume is to unpack the ways in which food systems can both drive and resist gentrification. The introduction lays out the many nuanced drivers of both processes. For instance, well-intentioned efforts to increase food access in a neighborhood can be an early initiator of gentrification. And urban agriculture and public

green spaces are frequently co-opted for development efforts. At its best, food empowers a strong cultural sense of self and fuels efforts for sovereignty in marginalized communities. This volume aids in exploring these entangled effects through what may be simplified as a study of impact vs. intent.

The volume is divided into four sections: food retail, alternative food systems, contesting gentrification, and community-based strategies. The 19 contributors include lifelong community activists and nonprofit leaders, and leading academics working in fields ranging from sociology to geography and agricultural economics.

The first chapter, “Dining Downtown,” lays out what is now a common argument in the food studies literature. Drawing on the work of the French sociologist and social theorist known for

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*A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu, this chapter explores how an individual's desire for authenticity and good taste can become a driver of gentrification. In the following chapter, Nina Marten builds upon this argument by looking critically at "savior entrepreneurs" who establish themselves in neighborhoods, dangerously believing there is "nothing there," thus erasing the history of a neighborhood and its independent businesses that might have met the needs of long-term residents for decades before gentrification begins. The "savior entrepreneurs" capitalize on the momentum new residents provide and open new businesses to meet their needs under the guise of generating equal opportunity and experiences for long-term residents. The second and third chapters in the opening section discuss the idea of a singular food item or type of food gentrifying in the evolution of taste, notably through a case study of the local food market in Oklahoma in the early 2000s.

The section "Ripe for Growth" presents a series of essential readings that analyze urban agriculture and community garden programs across the United States. Each chapter explores at least one set of competing interests—long-term residents and newcomers, organizers and city officials, developers and community-garden leaders—and how these interests either clash ideologically or use one another for political capital. These chapters contain valuable considerations for nonprofit program leaders working on food systems initiatives, by stressing the importance of centering long-term residents and reminding newcomers to support community-led change.

The chapters "Uneven Alliances" and "Growing Resistance" explore case studies of early gentrifying neighborhoods from across the U.S. and weaves together individual and community-led efforts to resist gentrification. Notable chapters in this section include an exploration of "ethical gentrification" and social enterprise claims with Save on Meats, a Downtown Eastside neighborhood business in Vancouver. Puerto Ricans in Chicago have flipped the script utilizing food to build a connection to culture, particularly amongst the

younger generation by teaching teens about the history of Puerto Rican cuisine. In "Community Gardens and Gentrification in New York City," the authors offer a key lesson: for community gardens to survive, and ultimately thrive in the hands of the neighborhood, civic connections beyond food systems, such as relationships with city officials, schools, and nonprofits not related to food, are essential.

In the book's conclusion, Alkon, Kato, and Sbicca present "development without displacement" and centering those first displaced in alternative food system development as critical principles for resisting gentrification. The authors also recognize a need for additional research to understand how food systems influence urban development strategies. Ultimately, this dense volume makes the case for food systems scholarship as an essential lens for the critique of urban development practices.

In my own scholarly networks, I frequently hear or speak the phrase "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." In reviewing this book, I hoped to find research that does not shy away from offering solutions. Urban agriculture and alternative food systems are essential as this country faces population growth, rapid economic and physical development of cities, and a climate crisis. Emily Becker and Nathan McClintock offer a key lesson in their case study of the Portland Fruit Tree Project (PFTP) in the chapter "The Cost of Low-Hanging Fruit." They offer an essential reminder to non-profit leaders and neighborhood newcomers alike: to be in community, fostering a genuine togetherness and sense of belonging, is a constant and essential negotiation. PFTP found success after turmoil and displacement by returning responsibility to long-term residents and away from the non-profit.

*A Recipe for Gentrification* should be foundational reading for any sociology or food studies scholar and anyone pursuing a career in urban development or real estate. The collection should also be required reading for anyone interested in urban agriculture or community gardens professionally or as a volunteer. 