

Ocejo, Richard E. *Sixty Miles Upriver: Gentrification and Race in a Small American City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024. xxi + 319 pages.

In *Sixty Miles Upriver: Gentrification and Race in a Small American City*, sociologist Richard E. Ocejo takes a close look at the changing face of Newburgh, New York, and what its story tells us about gentrification in small American cities. This setting gives Ocejo a unique lens through which to explore how small cities are shaped by the same forces transforming America's urban landscape: wealth migration, redevelopment, and rising inequality. Through interviews, local observations, and data, he shows how gentrification in Newburgh is being shaped and explained by the people driving it.

Ocejo's main argument is that gentrification in Newburgh is not simply a matter of economics or aesthetics, it is a socially constructed and rationalized process shaped by those who benefit from it. He introduces the idea of "conditional gentrification," to describe how middle-class newcomers use the language of diversity, authenticity, and revitalization to justify change, often minimizing or ignoring the negative impacts on long-term, working-class, and predominantly people of color residents. The book begins with the history of Newburgh's economic decline and its struggles with racial inequality followed by the city's recent branding as a "creative" and affordable haven for urban professionals. These newcomers bring new energy—and money—but also raise questions about who really benefits from the changes. Ocejo walks the reader through key sites of transformation, like Liberty Street, and introduces the voices of stakeholders—new residents, long-time locals, business owners, and city officials—capturing the different ways people experience and interpret change. Drawing from interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, he presents both the optimism of newcomers and the anxieties of those at risk of displacement.

Ocejo's careful attention to how individuals frame their choices and actions is an important item of discussion. Ocejo explains how many gentrifiers do not see themselves as agents of harm. Instead, they believe they are helping—adding value, revitalizing space, or increasing diversity. But these changes impact the people who were already there and this belief, Ocejo argues, often masks power imbalances and silences the voices of those who lack resources or political capital.

Ocejo's writing is clear and thoughtful. The books' strengths lie in its engaging storytelling and grounding in theory. Ocejo backs up his arguments with strong evidence and gives readers a balanced view of a complicated issue, allowing readers to see both the complexity of people's motivations and the consequences of their actions. Unlike many accounts of urban change that focus only on either developers or protest movements, Ocejo situates gentrification in the everyday—what people say, how they live, and what they believe, placing Newburgh's story in the larger conversation about gentrification, race, and urban change.

Compared to other well-known books on the topic, like Sharon Zukin's *Naked City* or Lance Freeman's *There Goes the 'Hood*, Ocejo's book offers a fresh take by focusing on a smaller city and showing how these dynamics play out in close-knit communities where people know each other and cannot easily avoid one another. If the book has a limitation, it is that its focus on individual actors may understate the role of structural economic forces like investment patterns and municipal finance. While Ocejo does discuss policy and local government, these aspects are sometimes secondary to personal narrative and cultural framing.

Overall, *Sixty Miles Upriver* offers an important look at how gentrification is reshaping cities that don't often get much attention. It offers valuable insights for social scientists, urban planners, policymakers, and anyone interested in the dynamics of change in post-industrial

communities. By spotlighting a small city, Ocejo reminds us that gentrification is not confined to Brooklyn or San Francisco—it is happening everywhere, and its impact depends not only on economics, but also on whose voices shape the story.

Sarah Reiman
Adjunct Associate Professor of Behavioral & Social Sciences
University of Maryland Global Campus
Bel Air, Maryland