



Refinery Town: Big Oil, Big Money, and the Remaking of an American City

Steve Early

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The People vs. Big Oil—how a working-class company town harnessed the power of local politics to reclaim their community

Home to one of the largest oil refineries in the state, Richmond, California, was once a typical company town bankrolled by Chevron. This largely nonwhite, working-class city of a hundred thousand had experienced the by-products of decades' worth of poverty, substandard housing, and poorly funded public education. It had one of the highest homicide rates, per capita, in the country and a jobless rate often twice the national average.

But in 2012, when veteran labor reporter Steve Early moved from New England to Richmond, he witnessed a surprising transformation. In *Refinery Town*, Early chronicles the ten years of successful community organizing in Richmond that raised the minimum wage, defeated a casino development project, created a municipal ID to aid undocumented workers, reduced crime through “community policing,” challenged home foreclosures, and took on a big oil giant. This compelling story of a city remade provides a model for citizens engaged in local politics and community building anywhere.

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