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The richly documented history of Mexican South Chicago here yields a sophisticated, rounded, and compelling study of the evolution of an immigrant place. Attentive to structural factors shaping migration and assimilation, Innis-Jiménez also tells textured human stories of the work, play, and solidarity that created and recreated an enduring community, snatching life from discrimination and hardship."

David Roediger, University of Illinois

Since the early twentieth century, thousands of Mexican Americans have lived, worked, and formed communities in Chicago's steel mill neighborhoods. Drawing on individual stories and oral histories, Michael Innis-Jiménez tells the story of a vibrant, active community that continues to play a central role in American politics and society.

Examining how the fortunes of Mexicans in South Chicago were linked to the environment they helped to build, Steel Barrio offers new insights into how and why Mexican Americans created community. This book investigates the years between the World Wars, the period that witnessed the first, massive influx of Mexicans into Chicago. South Chicago Mexicans lived in a neighborhood whose literal and figurative boundaries were defined by steel mills, which dominated economic life for Mexican immigrants. Yet while the mills provided jobs for Mexican men, they were neither the center of community life nor the source of collective identity. Steel Barrio argues that the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American men and women who came to South Chicago created physical and imagined community not only to defend against the ever-present social, political, and economic harassment and discrimination, but to grow in a foreign, polluted environment.

Steel Barrio reconstructs the everyday strategies the working-class Mexican American community adopted to survive in areas from labor to sports to activism. This book links a particular community in South Chicago to broader issues in twentieth-century U.S. history, including race and labor, urban immigration, and the segregation of cities.

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