

Just Like Us: The True Story of Four Mexican Girls Coming of Age in America

Helen Thorpe

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Just Like Us: The True Story of Four Mexican Girls Coming of Age in America Helen Thorpe Just Like Us tells the story of four high school students whose parents entered this country illegally from Mexico. We meet the girls on the eve of their senior prom in Denver, Colorado. All four of the girls have grown up in the United States, and all four want to live the American dream, but only two have documents. As the girls attempt to make it into college, they discover that only the legal pair sees a clear path forward. Their friendships start to divide along lines of immigration status.

Then the political firestorm begins. A Mexican immigrant shoots and kills a police officer. The author happens to be married to the Mayor of Denver, a businessman who made his fortune in the restaurant business. In a bizarre twist, the murderer works at one of the Mayor's restaurants—under a fake Social Security number. A local Congressman seizes upon the murder as proof of all that is wrong with American society and Colorado becomes the place where national arguments over immigration rage most fiercely. The rest of the girls' lives play out against this backdrop of intense debate over whether they have any right to live here.

Just Like Us is a coming-of-age story about girlhood and friendship, as well as the resilience required to transcend poverty. It is also a book about identity—what it means to steal an identity, what it means to have a public identity, what it means to inherit an identity from parents. The girls, their families, and the critics who object to their presence allow the reader to watch one of the most complicated social issues of our times unfurl in a major American city. And the perspective of the author gives the reader insight into both the most powerful and the most vulnerable members of American society as they grapple with the same dilemma: Who gets to live in America? And what happens when we don't agree?



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