



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

*Helen Thorpe*

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**A powerful and moving account of four young women from Mexico who have lived most of their lives in the United States and attend the same high school. Two of them have legal documentation and two do not. *Just Like Us* is their story.**

A stunning work of in-depth journalism in the tradition of *Random Family*, Helen Thorpe's *Just Like Us* takes us deep into an American subculture -- that of Mexican immigrants -- largely hidden from the mainstream. We meet four girls on the eve of their senior prom, in Denver, Colorado. Each is bright and ambitious and an excellent student. Their leader, Marisela, dazzles teachers during the day and spends her evenings checking groceries to help pay the bills. She dreams of college and a professional career -- but she doesn't have a green card or a Social Security number because her parents brought her across the border illegally.

Marisela's best friend, Yadira, shares her predicament. But they spend all of their time with two girls who are legal -- Elissa, who was born in the United States, and Clara, who has a green card. Each of the girls views the others as her equals, yet the world does not treat them that way.

Their situation becomes increasingly painful and complex as the four young women approach adulthood, and Marisela and Yadira watch their two legal friends gain opportunities that are not available to them. All four hold American aspirations, but only Clara and Elissa have the documents necessary to realize those hopes. Their friendship starts to divide along lines of immigration status.

Then a political firestorm begins. An illegal immigrant commits a horrendous crime in Denver, and a local congressman seizes on the act as proof of all that is wrong with American society. Arguments over immigration rage fiercely, and the girls' lives play out against a backdrop of intense debate over whether they have any right to live in the country where they have grown up.

This brilliant, fast-paced work of narrative journalism is a vivid coming-of-age story about girlhood, friendship, and, most of all, identity -- what it means to fake an identity, steal an identity, or inherit an identity from one's parents and country. No matter what one's opinions are about immigration, *Just Like Us* offers fascinating insight into one of our most complicated social issues today. The girls, their families, those who welcome them, and those who object to their presence all must grapple with the same deep dilemma: Who is an American? Who gets to live in America? And what happens when we don't agree?

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