

JANITORS,
STREET VENDORS,
AND ACTIVISTS



THE LIVES OF
MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS
IN SILICON VALLEY

CHRISTIAN ZZOLNISKI

Janitors, Street Vendors, and Activists: The Lives of Mexican Immigrants in Silicon Valley

By Christian Zlolniski

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This highly accessible, engagingly written book exposes the underbelly of California's Silicon Valley, the most successful high-technology region in the world, in a vivid ethnographic study of Mexican immigrants employed in Silicon Valley's low-wage jobs. Christian Zlolniski's on-the-ground investigation demonstrates how global forces have incorporated these workers as an integral part of the economy through subcontracting and other flexible labor practices and explores how these labor practices have in turn affected working conditions and workers' daily lives. In Zlolniski's analysis, these immigrants do not emerge merely as victims of a harsh economy; despite the obstacles they face, they are transforming labor and community politics, infusing new blood into labor unions, and challenging exclusionary notions of civic and political membership. This richly textured and complex portrait of one community opens a window onto the future of Mexican and other Latino immigrants in the new U.S. economy.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Zlolniski makes a critical contribution to our understanding of the underside of advanced capitalism. He shows us its complexities: It is not only about misery, it is also about shaping subjective and political possibilities. If there is one concept that comes to mind it is the complexity of powerlessness." - Saskia Sassen, author of *Guests and Aliens* "In a time when we have great need to understand Mexican immigrants and their place in U.S. society, Zlolniski offers a superior analysis of why and how advanced capitalist economies employ undocumented workers. After reading his book, we will never think again of immigration as something that exclusively comes from outside. The immigrants, too, have agency in his account, as he narrates and analyzes an important case of unionization, pointing to significant new possibilities in American life." - Josiah Heyman, Professor of Anthropology, University of Texas at El Paso"

From the Inside Flap

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"This is a well-written and accessible ethnography of Mexican immigrants in Silicon Valley, the working poor who live in the shadow of affluence. Zlolniski presents a nuanced analysis of the thin line between formal and informal work, how families strategize and cope with the myriad challenges wrought by poverty, and the structural limitations to human agency. Zlolniski's perceptive ethnography illuminates hidden social worlds and struggles for dignity through collective action."—Patricia Zavella, author of *Women's Work and Chicano Families: Cannery Workers of the Santa Clara Valley*

"Stringing together multiple livelihoods, moving among wage labor, the informal economy, and political activism, the immigrants Zlolniski profiles refuse to submit completely to the structural cards stacked against them. In this important and carefully situated study, Zlolniski engages internationally relevant debates over the changing nature of work, the abandonment of employer liability, and the propensity for the media to construct myths that simplify and underestimate the hard work of immigrant families in Silicon Valley."—David Griffith, author of *Fishers at Work, Workers at Sea: a Puerto Rican Journey through Labor and Refuge*

From the Back Cover

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