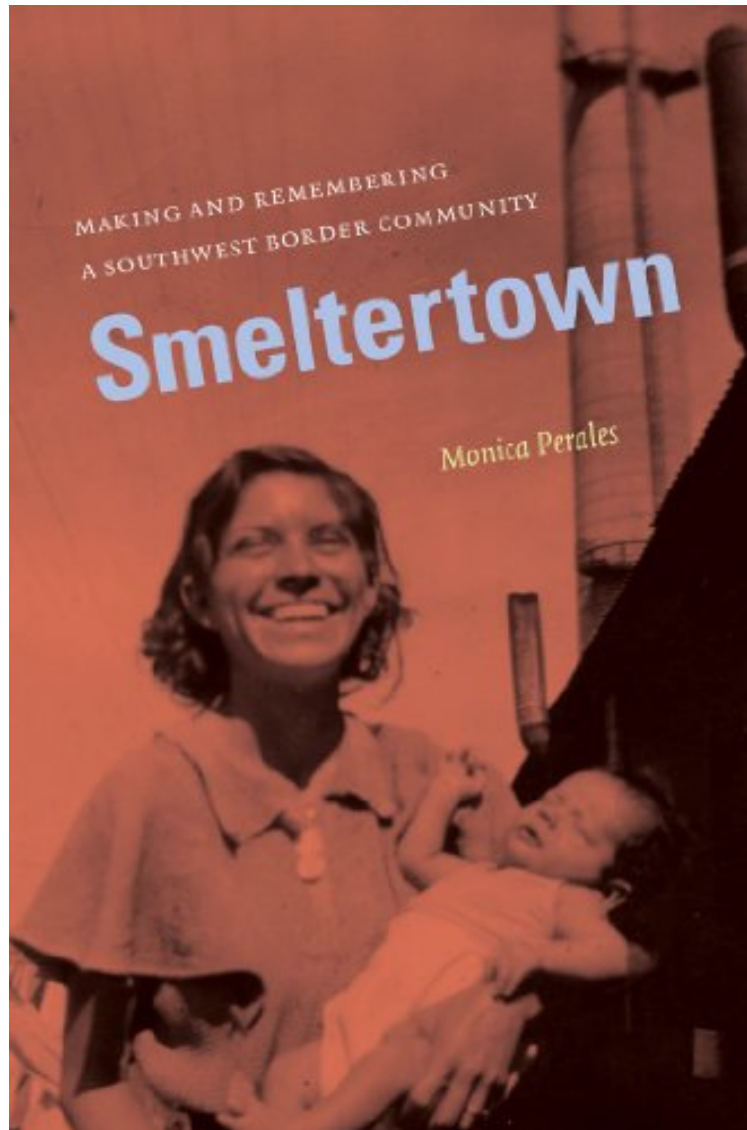


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## Smelertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community

*Monica Perales*

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**Monica Perales : Smelertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Smelertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Smelertown is a State of MindBy TYKEThis is an academic book, well-researched, and an especially fascinating immigrant story. The author is a descendent of the Smelter Workers who labored in the smelting plant in El Paso, and lived in a vibrant community in the shadow of the smokestacks of

the smelter. It is also speaks to the history of El Paso and the Mexican-American contributions to the city. Home is not so much a place, but a web of relationships and experiences that bind a group together. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By VLADIMIR ARKHIPOV very good 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Study of a Southwestern Community By Shawn M. Warsawick Monica Perales is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Houston, having earned her Ph.D. in history from Stanford University where she studied under historians Richard White and Albert Camarillo. Perales also studied history at the University of Texas El Paso, where she earned an MA in history and counts historians Yolanda Leyva, Cheryl Martin and Ernesto Chavez as having influenced her academic work. *Smelertown* is Perales's first work and is based on her doctoral dissertation. With the above in mind, Perales crafts a sophisticated work in which she analyzes the growth of both *Smelertown* (a company town where workers employed by the American Smelting and Refining Company) and El Paso, arguing that the company town was not just a single entity, but in fact was composed of a number of real and imagined social worlds created by the people of *Smelertown* and the company both in the past and in the present. (3) Additionally, Perales postulates "A critical examination of *Smelertown* thus reveals how globalization, free trade, transnational capitalism, and trans border flows of people and products have profound roots in the history of the region." (6) Thus, she situates her work in the larger overall story of American history and shows the importance of her work stretches beyond the local level and sheds light on an important subarea of U.S. history-Mexican-American (or Chicano/a) history. With this in mind, Perales divides her work into three parts; part one of *Smelertown*, titled "Making Places," is divided into two chapters. Chapter one discusses the development of El Paso as an economic center in the transnational commerce which developed between Mexico and the United States in the late nineteenth century (as well as a major point for immigrants entering the U.S. from points south). Chapter two, titled "Creating *Smelertown*" looks at life for the residents of the barrio and "the multilayered worlds created by the company and the residents themselves." (12) Part two, "Making Identities" explores how residents of *Smelertown*, in the face of discrimination, were able to make their own identities rather than simply adopt the identities others created for them. The final third of the book looks at the importance of historical memory and its importance to the former residents of *Smelertown*. The epilogue is particularly poignant and showcases the author's talents not only as a historian, but also as a writer. Perales work draws upon numerous primary sources including newspapers, ASARCO company archives, INS records as well as interviews conducted by the Institute for Oral History at the University of Texas El Paso. Her secondary sources include numerous works central to Borderlands and Chicana/o historiography including works by Albert Camarillo and Richard White, to name a few. Perales uses numerous methodological tactics to create her monograph including the lenses of transnational history, urban history, historical memory and, to a lesser extent, the core/periphery analytical framework. Furthermore this work is a work of Chicana/o history and fits in well under western history. Unsurprisingly Perales work is a major contribution not only to the historiography of the western United States, but to borderlands history as well as to the literature dealing with Chicana/o issues. In the last three decades numerous studies have been done on various cities in the American southwest and Mexican-American peoples including Los Angeles, Tucson and San Antonio amongst the most notable. Perales now adds El Paso to that list and in doing so she has made a major contribution to the field.

Company town. Blighted community. Beloved home. Nestled on the banks of the Rio Grande, at the heart of a railroad, mining, and smelting empire, *Smelertown*--La Esmelda, as its residents called it--was home to generations of ethnic Mexicans who labored at the American Smelting and Refining Company in El Paso, Texas. Using newspapers, personal archives, photographs, employee records, parish newsletters, and interviews with former residents, including her own relatives, Monica Perales unearths the history of this forgotten community. Spanning almost a century, *Smelertown* traces the birth, growth, and ultimate demise of a working class community in the largest U.S. city on the Mexican border and places ethnic Mexicans at the center of transnational capitalism and the making of the urban West. Perales shows that *Smelertown* was composed of multiple real and imagined social worlds created by the company, the church, the schools, and the residents themselves. Within these dynamic social worlds, residents forged permanence and meaning in the shadow of the smelter's giant smokestacks. *Smelertown* provides insight into how people and places invent and reinvent themselves and illuminates a vibrant community grappling with its own sense of itself and its place in history and collective memory.

*Smelertown* is an engaging exploration of the intersections of globalization and transnationalism." --The Journal of American History *Smelertown* is an important contribution to the growing body of research in Mexican American, gender, and social history.--Journal of Southern History A significant contribution to our understanding of Chicana/o and labor history. . . . Aside from being thoroughly researched, Perales's book is excellently composed. . . . It will be of use to labor, gender, environmental, and social historians.--Southwestern Historical Quarterly In addition to telling the story of the birth, life, and demise of a vibrant community, *Smelertown* provides valuable insights.--Humanities Texas Highly recommended.--Southern Historian Historian [Perales] chronicles [the] birth, growth, and death of her

family's neighborhood. . . . [in] the first in-depth book about Smelertown.--El Paso TimesPerales chronicle[s] the journey of Mexican-Americans and their role in the industrialization and globalization of a small community near El Paso. Her book . . . tells their story where families thrived and business excelled.--Houston ChronicleNot just a narrative history . . . but also a look at how the community was created by Anglos and Hispanics, citizens and immigrants, rich and poor. . . . This well-researched and well-documented work would be a good addition for academic libraries, especially collections related to borderlands studies or labor issues.--Library Journal Monica Perales is a superb oral historian who carefully calibrates the memories of her narrators. Smelertown will be a defining work for its engagement across the spectrum of twentieth-century U.S. history, speaking to debates in Chicano history, labor studies, and memory. This is a poignant, exhaustive, and insightful community study.--Vicki Ruiz, author of *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America*From beginning to end, I was deeply impressed with the pacing and flow of Perales's narrative, by her vivid descriptions, by her oral historical work and archival digging, and by the many actors (including her family members) whom she brings to broad attention for the first time.--Stephen J. Pitti, author of *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Race, Mexican Americans, and Northern California*From the Inside FlapNestled on the banks of the Rio Grande, at the heart of a railroad, mining, and smelting empire, Smelertown was home to generations of ethnic Mexicans who labored at the American Smelting and Refining Company in El Paso, Texas. Using newspapers, personal archives, photographs, employee records, parish newsletters, and interviews with former residents, including her own relatives, Monica Perales unearths the history of this forgotten community. "Smelertown" provides insight into how people and places invent and reinvent themselves and sheds light on a vibrant community grappling with its own sense of self and its place in history and collective memory.