

GARY SOTO

"Well written....believable."

—BOOKLIST

A young man with dark hair, wearing a yellow tank top and purple shorts, is dribbling a basketball on a court. The background is a wall covered in graffiti. The title 'TAKING' is written in large, white, block letters across the middle of the image.

TAKING

Sides

By the author of *BASEBALL IN APRIL* and *PACIFIC CROSSING*

ONE

Tony," Lincoln Mendoza whispered into the telephone. "It's your buddy, Linc."

"Linc? My homeboy moved to the good side of town," Tony Contreras answered sleepily.

It was 7:15 Thursday morning. The rising sun hurled a spear of light through Lincoln's kitchen window. His dog, Flaco, lay still, bathing in the warm rays, his ribs slowly rising and falling. His mother was in the shower, singing along with the radio.

"Be serious, *ese*. We're playin' you next Tuesday,"

Lincoln said, moving the receiver from one hand to the other.

There was a pause and the squeak of bedsprings. Tony was sitting up. "Do you know what time it is? It's early, *bombre*. It's still dark."

"Not if you open your eyes. It's time to crack those books," Lincoln said.

"Books? Yeah, I'm gonna crack 'em over my little brother's head, the *menso*. He spilled a soda on my bed."

"Leave him alone. He's just a punk," Lincoln said then changed the subject back to basketball. "It's gonna be weird playin' Franklin for real."

Lincoln was a star basketball player, tall but not thin. When he made a fist, his forearm tightened with muscles. His stomach was muscle, his legs muscle. His face was brown, like coffee laced with cream, and his hair black as a chunk of asphalt. People said he was handsome, but Lincoln wasn't really sure.

He had moved from the Mission District of San Francisco, an urban barrio, to Sycamore, a pleasant suburban town with tree-lined streets. His mother had gotten tired of yanking open her drapes to see run-down Chevys and fender-buckled Ford Torinos bleeding black oil. Tired of the ghetto blasters shouldered by shirtless *vatos*. Tired of jackhammers cutting up the street early

in the morning. Tired of the Number 43 bus leaving shreds of black smoke hovering in the dank city air. It was time to get out, she said one day when she came home from work and found her planter box tipped over, her snapdragons stomped, and her small Victorian flat ransacked. The window screen was slashed, and the TV and stereo were gone. Left in their place were a couple of crushed beer cans and cigarette butts.

So they had moved to a small two-bedroom house with a yard and a mulberry tree whose fruit left purple splotches on the sidewalk. Lincoln was now an eighth grader. The move was a voyage of ten miles south from San Francisco to a place where the better homes stood in the sunlight of wealth and sent Lincoln from Franklin Junior High to Columbus Junior High.

“How are the *vatos* at school?” Lincoln asked.

“OK.”

“Are they mad at me?”

“¿*Por qué?*”

“You know, movin’ away. Like my new school play-in’ you *vatos?*”

Tony groaned. “You kiddin’? No one’s mad. If we had money, we’d get out too.”

“That’s what you think. This place is dead. No one ever comes out of the house to check out the world.”

SOME GAMES YOU LOSE

NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU PLAY.

Lincoln Mendoza is brown, not white. Nothing is going to change that.

Sure, these days he lives in Sycamore, the mostly rich, mostly white suburbs, instead of the hard-knocks barrio where he grew up. But he's still loyal to his friends back at Franklin Junior High, and he's still loyal to his old basketball team—even though now he shoots hoops for Columbus.

But loyalty is not so easy when Lincoln's new team faces his old team on the boards. How can he play his best against his best friends? Yet how can he betray his new teammates by not giving the game everything he's got?

"[A] touchingly realistic story . . . Soto masterfully conveys the Hispanic-American experience." —PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

"Soto creates a believable, compelling picture. . . . Quiet yet powerful." —KIRKUS REVIEWS

A NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOK FOR THE TEEN AGE

Taking Sides is the first novel about Lincoln Mendoza.
His story continues in *Pacific Crossing*.

GARY SOTO's first book for young people, *Baseball in April and Other Stories*, won the California Library Association's Beatty Award and was named an ALA Best Book for Young Adults. He has since published many more books for young readers. He lives in Berkeley, California.

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