

From a 1964 Chicago Tribune Family Profile to a New Microdrama: Yellow House Studios Begins With Back to 18th Street

A Pilsen time-travel story inspired by Mexican American Chicago, blending live action and AI-assisted filmmaking across 2026 and 1962.

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, August 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In 1964, the Chicago Tribune devoted a multi-page feature titled "Our Mexican Americans II" to Fortino and Connie Méndez, a young Mexican American family building a life, business and community in Chicago.

Sixty-two years later, that article has helped inspire [Back to 18th Street](#), a new scripted microdrama from [Yellow House Studios](#), filming this weekend in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood.

Created by Chicago native Maria Teresa Hernandez, the series draws loosely from her own family history and the broader history of Mexican Chicago to tell a fictional story about identity, ownership, belonging, displacement and what one generation leaves behind for the next.

"What stayed with me was seeing a major Chicago newspaper, in 1964, devote that kind of space to Mexican Americans and celebrate the fullness of their lives," said Hernandez. "It made me think about how our communities are represented today — when they're celebrated, when they're misrepresented and when their stories disappear altogether. Back to 18th Street is a love letter to Mexican American Chicago, and especially to Pilsen."

A TIME-TRAVEL STORY ROOTED IN REAL HISTORY

Back to 18th Street follows Anita Méndez, a young Mexican American woman grieving the



Fortino and Connie Méndez, whose life in Mexican-American Chicago helped inspire their granddaughter Maria Teresa Hernandez to create Back to 18th Street.

sudden loss of her parents and questioning whether to hold onto her family's longtime Pilsen building or leave Chicago behind.

After an encounter with an heirloom pocket watch, Anita steps through present-day 18th Street and emerges in 1962 Pilsen, where she comes face-to-face with her grandfather as a young man, before he has purchased the building that will eventually anchor their family for generations.

As the timeline begins to shift, Anita has one day to understand the people, sacrifices and community that created the future she inherited — and to repair what she unknowingly set in motion.



Back to 18th Street creator Maria Teresa Hernandez and co-director Miranda Gonzalez, longtime friends who first met at Notre Dame High School for Girls in Chicago.

Built in the fast-paced language of the microdrama — short episodes, immediate hooks and cliffhanger-driven storytelling — the series also weaves real historical context into its fictional world, including Pilsen's changing demographics, Mexican American entrepreneurship,

neighborhood organizing, barriers to property ownership and the community networks that helped families build lives in Chicago.

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Back to 18th Street is a love letter to Mexican American Chicago and especially to Pilsen — a community whose history deserves to be seen and carried forward.”

*Maria Teresa Hernandez,
Founder & CEO, Yellow House
Collective*

The goal is to make history feel immediate, emotional and bingeable.

LIVE ACTION MEETS AN AI-ASSISTED 1962

The present-day storyline will be filmed with live actors in Chicago. Anita is the character who crosses into 1962, where AI-assisted filmmaking will help extend her performance into a historically inspired Pilsen storyworld.

Yellow House is collaborating with Visible People, an AI rendering and experiential media production house led by CEO and Chicago native Erik Bankston, to build the series' 1962 storyworld.

“These tools let us expand what is possible without losing the human performance at the center of it,” said Bankston. “We can take Anita’s journey and build a 1962 Chicago around her at a scale that would once have been out of reach. AI is the paintbrush. The story, performance and point of view are still human.”

The production brings together Latino actors, writers, filmmakers, producers, editors and creative technologists, with an emphasis on expanding representation both on screen and throughout the evolving production process.

MADE IN CHICAGO, FROM THE INSIDE OUT

The series is co-directed by Miranda Gonzalez and Chicago filmmaker Erick Juarez.

Hernandez and Gonzalez first met as sophomores at Notre Dame High School for Girls in Chicago, connecting over their Mexican American roots, a shared love of the arts and a desire to see the richness of their culture reflected on screen. As teenagers, they promised each other that one day they would create together. More than 30 years later, *Back to 18th Street* brings that promise to life.

For Gonzalez, the project is deeply personal — not only as a filmmaker, but as a lifelong Chicagoan.

“As someone born and raised in Chicago, I know how rare it is for stories about our neighborhoods to be told by those of us who were born here and still live here,” said Gonzalez. “*Back to 18th Street* is the first of many neighborhood stories we want to amplify. Pilsen is dear to me. I remember falling asleep in the booths at Nuevo Leon as a child, and years later walking my own children into Casa del Pueblo when it was still on Blue Island. Passing down my Mexican culture matters to me. Passing down my Chicago culture matters just as much.”

Juarez brings an additional Pilsen connection to the project. His recent Pilsen-set short *Cake*, inspired by his own Chicago upbringing, premiered at the Cleveland International Film Festival and later earned Audience Choice recognition at the Chicago Latino Film Festival.

“Pilsen carries generations of history within a few city blocks, and *Back to 18th Street* gave us an opportunity to explore that history through a very contemporary form,” said Juarez. “The challenge was to honor the specificity of the community — its evolution, its families and what people built there — while creating a story that feels cinematic, emotional and propulsive. That intersection of history and a new storytelling language is what made the project exciting to me.”

Live-action production on *Back to 18th Street* begins Saturday, August 29, and continues through Sunday in Chicago, including Pilsen.

Additional release and distribution details will be announced.

Interviews, limited behind-the-scenes access, archival family materials, the original 1964 Chicago Tribune feature and first-look imagery are available upon request.

ABOUT YELLOW HOUSE STUDIOS

Yellow House Studios is the original storytelling arm of [Yellow House Collective](#), developing culturally rooted serialized entertainment for the vertical era.

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