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- [G. Allen Johnson](#)

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'Crossing Arizona'



Documentary. Directed and produced by Joseph Mathew and Dan DeVivo. (Not rated. 96 minutes. At the Roxie.)

Filmmakers Joseph Mathew and Dan DeVivo probably had no idea that when they were making "Crossing Arizona," the issue of immigration reform, already a hot-button topic, would fill urban streets with tens of thousands of protesters and create chaos in Congress, but in their good luck, that is exactly the situation as their movie opens at the Roxie today in its theatrical premiere.

The film, which premiered at Sundance in January, examines the immigration problem along the Arizona-Sonora border. An estimated 3,000 Mexicans have died there trying to cross into the United States since 1993, when government policy mandated fencing off the border near urban areas, primarily San Diego and El Paso, Texas, where illegal immigration had become problematic. Undocumented immigrants are still trying to cross the border, into the more dangerous Arizona desert, where water, food and medical assistance are as scarce as the Border Patrol.

Mathew and DeVivo try to give all sides of this complex story. They talk to activists who are both for and against illegal immigration, human rights groups that provide water at checkpoints, law enforcement officials, politicians, local ranchers, "coyotes" who traffic illegal immigrants across the border and illegal immigrants themselves.

As Ray Borane, the mayor of Douglas, Ariz., points out, far-left liberals, ultra-right-wing conservatives and everyone in between seem to agree that the current U.S. policy is not working. It's what to do about it that is in contention.

No hour-and-a-half documentary can do much more than scratch the surface of the issue, but Mathew and DeVivo provide an excellent primer and some human faces on the front lines. Any solution will have to combine delicate diplomacy, national security issues, economic concerns of both American employers and workers, and a better, more sensible system of acquiring citizenship.

"Crossing Arizona" left me with some indelible images: The body of a 28-year-old pregnant woman in the desert, the exchange between a retired nurse and an activist, and the rancher who said he has endured more than \$1 million in cattle losses and damage because of illegal

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immigrants crossing his land.

Most haunting was the meeting of an Indian providing water at various checkpoints on a reservation and an undocumented immigrant who had paid about \$1,300 to be smuggled across the border so he could work to get enough money for his wife's surgery. The American lends a sympathetic ear and provides some water and food but tells the Mexican he will not survive unless he turns himself in to the Border Patrol.

The look on the Mexican's face says it all.

Screenings will have bilingual subtitles. The filmmakers will be at screenings today through Sunday.

-- Advisory: Some graphic images of dead bodies. -- G. Allen Johnson

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