

WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

FILM SYNOPSES

125-Word

Walking the Line offers a harrowing view of the chaos, absurdity, and senseless deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border through private citizens who are taking the law into their own hands. The region, celebrated for its history of lawlessness, has become the most highly trafficked areas for immigrants in the world—and one of the most dangerous. A shift in border policy forces migrants to cross the unforgiving desert where thousands die; those who make it face volatile civilian militias. Following rancher vigilantes with semiautomatic weapons, outlaw pastors with four-wheel drives, and impoverished immigrants with dreams of a better life, the film explores the uncertain line between what is patriotic, what is moral, and what is just.

250-Word

Walking the Line offers a harrowing view of the chaos, absurdity, and senseless deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border through private citizens who are taking the law into their own hands. Southern Arizona, a region celebrated for its history of lawlessness, has become the most highly trafficked area for immigrants in the world—and one of the most dangerous. A shift in border policy forces migrants to cross the unforgiving desert where thousands die; those who make it face volatile civilian militias.

The film explores the front lines of what many fatigue-wearing, self-styled warriors dub a “border war.” A commander marshals his armed troops, cocks his rifle, and maps out maneuvers when suspected immigrants invade the property. A nighttime raid led by a cigar-chomping vigilante leads to the capture of startled migrant workers. *Walking the Line* offers an intimate look into what drives these individuals to such extremes.

Standing in opposition to the vigilantes, humanitarians organize to prevent migrant deaths. Confronting the growing crisis, they too find themselves on the wrong side of the law. A Tucson pastor is indicted on federal felony charges for aiding and abetting while an American Indian faces banishment from his reservation for constructing water stations.

At once disturbing, offbeat, and revealing, the film offers a scathing critique of a policy—and people—gone mad. Following rancher vigilantes with semiautomatic weapons, outlaw pastors with four-wheel drives, and impoverished immigrants with dreams of a better life, *Walking the Line* explores the uncertain line between what is patriotic, what is moral, and what is just.

WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

- Winner, top prize in the “Human Rights/Human Dignity” category at the Ohne Kohle International Film Festival in Austria/Germany
- 2005 Student Academy Award regional finalist
- 2005 Angelus Awards finalist
- Official Selection, Leeds International Film Festival
- Official Selection, Austin Film Festival, TX
- Official Selection, Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, AK
- Official Selection, Savannah Film Festival, GA
- Official Selection, Scottsdale International Film Festival, AZ
- Official Selection, Oxford Film Festival, MS
- Official Selection, New England Film and Video Festival, MA
- Official Selection, Boston Latino International Film Festival, MA
- Official Selection, Taos Mountain Film Festival, NV
- Official Selection, River’s Edge Film Festival, KY
- Official Selection, deadCenter Film Festival, OK

WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Jeremy Levine

Director, Producer

Levine, a recipient of the prestigious Park Scholar Award, recently completed a fellowship at Working Films where he revamped the non-profit's website. Last year, he produced *Jolly Black Slaves*, a documentary on a shockingly racist Dutch tradition. Levine also produced a short movie for Express Yourself, a Massachusetts-based performance group, which premiered at the Schubert Theater in Boston.

Landon Van Soest

Director, Producer

Van Soest works at the Sundance Channel and is currently in preproduction on a documentary exploring globalization and environmental destruction in Kenya. In the summer of 2003, Van Soest worked with Big Mouth Productions on *Deadline*, a feature documentary chronicling Governor George Ryan's process of pardoning every inmate on Illinois' death row. Earlier that year, he produced *The Fringe and the Fabric*, an experimental documentary that explores the role of the individual in society through interviews with a cult member and a 92-year-old nursing home resident.

Ben Crane

Executive Producer

Crane is Associate Professor in the Park School of Communications at Ithaca College, where he teaches documentary, critical thinking, and ethics. He holds a Ph.D. degree in Communication Arts from the University of Wisconsin. As a producer, he has won the national Emmy Award in News and Documentary, the Gabriel Award, the Columbia University Major Armstrong Award, and the Documentaries International Jan Karski Award, among many others. His documentary, *School Prayer*, was selected in 2001 for the Best of ITVS national tour, as one of the best independent documentaries of the last decade.

WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

CREDITS

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY
Jeremy Levine and Landon Van Soest

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Ben Crane

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS
Dan Coles
Aksel Edgar-Lund
Brian Grady
Emily Hagan
Diana Mucedola

ADDITIONAL FOOTAGE PROVIDED BY
Pan Left Productions

TRANSLATION BY
Yeiry Guevara
Kate Sheppard
Beth Sanders

SPECIAL THANKS TO
The Levine Family
The Van Soest Family
Dave Jones
Dianne Lynch
David Priester
Peter Bardaglio
Susanna Maxwell
Kerry Pauldine
Garry Brodhead

FUNDING PROVIDED BY
The Park Scholar Program
Roy H. Park School of Communications
Ithaca College Office of the Provost
The Levine Family

© 2005 Two-Headed Productions

WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

THE LINE-UP

(1 of 2)



JACK FOOTE

Leader of Ranch Rescue, a group of citizens dedicated to keeping illegal immigrants off of private property. Foote often refers to the border as a “war zone.”

CASEY NETHERCOTT

Co-founder of Ranch Rescue. Nethercott bought a ranch in southern Arizona to host Ranch Rescue’s final operation, code-named “Thunderbird.”



KALEN “TINY” RIDDLE

Member of Ranch Rescue and Nethercott’s personal bodyguard. He often patrols the front gates of Nethercott’s property armed with a semiautomatic weapon.



RICHARD KOZAK

Landowner on the Arizona-Mexico border. Drug dealers crossing Kozak’s property have shot at him with AK-47s on four separate occasions. The fifth time, Kozak decided to fire back.



CHRIS SIMCOX

Leader of Civil Homeland Defense, a private militia aimed at stopping the flow of illegal immigrants. Simcox claims to have apprehended over 4,000 immigrants and recently led 500 volunteers from around the country in the Minuteman Project.



WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

THE LINE-UP

(2 of 2)



MIKE WILSON

Ex-member of the Tohono O'odham Reservation. Wilson provides water and aid for migrants crossing through the most treacherous stretch of the Sonora Desert.

GLENN SPENCER

Founder of American Border Patrol, a high-tech surveillance organization that tracks illegal immigrants entering the country. Spencer believes that the Mexican government is planning to reconquer the southwest of the United States through illegal immigration.



REVEREND JOHN FIFE

Leader of the Samaritans Patrol, a group that provides food, water, and medical aid to migrants crossing the desert. Twenty years ago, Fife was convicted of three federal felonies for aiding and abetting illegal immigrants.



ARMANDO NAVARRO

Chicano activist and opponent of Jack Foote. Critics have accused Navarro of leading a separatist movement to create an independent Mexican state in the southwestern United States.



ISABEL GARCIA

Activist and leader of Derechos Humanos. Garcia vehemently opposes what she calls "racist vigilantes who have no idea what is happening on our border."



WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

BORDER STATS

Number of leaders of the four most prominent militia organizations in southern Arizona who have been arrested on weapons charges in the past two years: 4¹

Number of illegal immigrants Chris Simcox claims his militia has apprehended since he began patrolling the border three years ago: 4,000²

The same statistic, according to a local newspaper reporter: 180³

Number of volunteers Simcox claimed to have patrolling the border in April 2005 for the "Minuteman Project": 900⁴

Estimated permanent population of Altar, Sonora, a small town in Mexico: 15,000⁵

Estimated number of migrants who cross through Altar to attempt to illegally enter Arizona each year: 110,000⁶

Average number of migrants crossing through the Tohono O'odham Reservation in southern Arizona every day: 1500⁷

Estimated number of illegal immigrants attempting to enter the country every year: 600,000⁸

Year that the INS implemented Operation Gatekeeper, marking a major change in U.S. border strategy: 1994⁹

Estimated number of migrants who have died since 1994 attempting to cross the desert: 3000+¹⁰

SOURCES:

¹http://www.adl.org/learn/extremism_in_the_news/White_Supremacy/arizona_border_update52105.htm;

²<http://www.azstarnet.com/sn/border/62520.php>; ³<http://www.azstarnet.com/sn/border/62520.php>;

⁴"Border watch volunteers wrap up month long stakeout on Arizona border," The Associated Press, April 30, 2005; ⁵<http://www.azstarnet.com/sn/border/49176>; ⁶<http://www.azstarnet.com/sn/border/49176>;

⁷"Border is right problem, 'Minutemen' wrong answer," USA TODAY, April 14, 2005;

⁸http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2001885055_border22.html;

⁹<http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040923-075943-8722r.htm>;

¹⁰<http://washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040923-05943-8722r.htm>

WALKING THE LINE

www.walkingthelinemovie.com • wtlmovie@yahoo.com • 978-578-0273 • 11 Gardner St. Beverly, MA 01915

PRESS PHOTOS

For full-resolution digital copies of these pictures, please email wtlmovie@yahoo.com.



Kalen "Tiny" Riddle tests his aim on the Ranch Rescue compound in Douglas, Arizona. Riddle patrols the desert in pursuit of illegal immigrants.
Photo credit: Jeremy Levine



An illegal immigrant drinks water after spending two days lost in the desert. Hundreds of migrants die every year trying to cross the Arizona desert.
Photo credit: Landon Van Soest

PUBLISHED ON AUGUST 25, 2005:

Sound and Fury

A vivid documentary traces border vigilantism

By **TIM VANDERPOOL**

On maps, Cochise County settles cleanly into Arizona's southernmost angles, lodged hard against Mexico and jutting east to the New Mexico line. But in truth, borders blur here. Mexico bursts steadily northward; nighttime buzzes with illegal immigrants, U.S. Border Patrol, narco-traffickers and, more recently, vigilantes.



Courtesy of Jeremy Levine
Filmmakers Jeremy Levine and
Landon Van Soest with local rancher

Into this chaos, in the fall of 2003, arrived two college students from upstate New York. They were carrying a bulky camera and slim savvy about what makes the border tick. Two years later, Jeremy Levine and Landon Van Soest have emerged with *Walking the Line*, a stylish, sophisticated documentary look at Cochise County's rollicking vigilante movement.

Behind this film is a precipitous learning curve. "Originally, we came (to Arizona) because we'd heard about these crazy guys with guns chasing illegal immigrants," says Levine. But their aim quickly turned "away from the sensational, and into the much larger issue that's happening down at the border, which is immigrant deaths." Another surprise, says Van Soest, is the bitterness this region provokes. "There's the extreme right-wing and the extreme liberal, and not much in-between. Meanwhile, nothing seems to be getting done."

Their narrative cuts right to the chase, as an old woman rumbles into view atop a dusty ATV. She says vigilantes just showed up on her land one day. So she called them useless as the U.S. Border Patrol, and ordered them to depart post haste. If they doubted her resolve, well ... Then she pulls a fat pistol from her lap, and waves it at the camera with dazzling nonchalance.

Welcome to the border.

Soon we're shuffling through a series of familiar border faces, from Rep. Raúl Grijalva and No More Deaths' Rev. John Fife to Isabel Garcia of Derechos Humanos. But it's vigilantes who really drive this film. Sometimes they simply emerge as predictable and goofy and faintly pathetic. At other moments, however, their fanaticism is blunt. One such moment occurs when Ranch Rescue founder Jack Foote explains his philosophy toward immigrant families he scours the desert to find. "The fact that criminals are desperate doesn't make me feel any better that they're on my property," he says, eyes flat. "You do it by drawing that hard line."

We see Chris Simcox, head of the Tombstone-based Civil Homeland Defense, excitedly chomping a cigar when his nighttime patrol stumbles across an immigrant group. American Border Patrol's Glenn Spencer talks to the camera as video surveillance monitors flash and snarl behind him ("He actually video-taped us video-taping him," says Levine). Later, Foote rattles on bitterly about a former colleague, revealing internecine struggles for leadership of the group.

They also relished toying with the young filmmakers. "We kept trying to get reassurance from them,"

says Levine, "but they told us that this would be dangerous, that there would be scorpions, armed military people from Mexico, armed drug dealers--and they said they'd do their best to protect us, but they couldn't guarantee anything."

When Levine and Van Soest first arrived, they were camped in the Douglas, Ariz., Motel 6, awaiting a connection with Casey Nethercott of Ranch Rescue. "We were to call a phone number," says Levine, "and two of their guys were going to come and check us out." If the pair passed muster, they'd be led to the headquarters. It was ultimately much ado about nothing: "When we gave them a call, they nonchalantly gave us directions," Levine says. "So when we pulled up at the compound in our rental car, there were guys with semi-automatic weapons and army camouflage at the gate, and they just let us in."

Inside his concertina wire-laced compound, Nethercott quickly fired up an intimidating swagger. Harassment hit a fever pitch one night, when Levine was stuck with Nethercott and his Rottweiler while the others were out on patrol. Nethercott feigned barely keeping his attack dog at bay. Then he simply glared. "At that point," Levine recalls, "Casey says to me, 'I just want to stab you in the side and fuck you in the wound.'"

This "soldier-of-fortune" moment doesn't appear in *Walking the Line*. And that highlights its prime strength: Levine and Van Soest resist easy opportunities to simply poke fun at these erstwhile warriors. Instead, the militia men talk freely to the camera, and they are hanged--or not--on their own words. "We wanted to avoid taking things out of context," says Van Soest. For example, "the first cut had some things that were heavy-handed, going out of our way to make these people look wrong. But then we went back and just let people speak their piece. We tried to give everybody the benefit of the doubt in the final version."

As a result, viewers get the expected dose of propaganda. But we also glimpse those rare moments--sometimes only seconds--when bravado vanishes and the guard is dropped. One such peek occurs when Simcox and colleagues discover several illegal immigrants in the darkness. The militia leader is exuberant and cocky. Awash in the full thrill of a sick moment, he suddenly loses his taciturn media countenance, enjoying this game as migrants sit amid desert brush, their heads bowed.

"That scene was very strange for us," says Van Soest. "This was the climactic scene, and there was a lot of tension in the air, even though people were laughing. It felt like a game."

Levine remembers "this wave of adrenaline passing through us. Then you realize these (illegal immigrants) are people. They're human beings, and it was really, really uncomfortable to stick a camera in their faces."

He pauses. "In a way," says Levine, "we were in the same boat as Simcox and his group. We were out there looking for immigrants. And if we kept going out and didn't find any ... that would be telling in one way, but it also meant we would fail with our documentary."

Months of planning had led to that moment, Van Soest adds, "and it was immediately bittersweet. It was very depressing situation."

But there was a surprise bonus: "We could never get (militia members) to use the word 'vigilante' on film, and they supposedly hate the word," says Van Soest. "Then as soon as Simcox apprehends these people, the first thing out of his mouth is 'A vigilante has got you!'"

To obtain copies of *Walking the Line*, and learn more about its production, go to www.walkingthelinemovie.com.