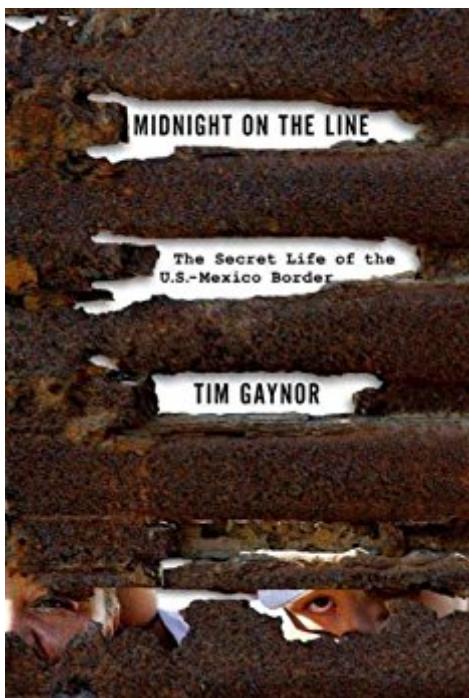


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Midnight On The Line: The Secret Life Of The U.S.-Mexico Border



Synopsis

A probing, ground-level investigation of illegal immigration and the people on both sides of the battle to secure the U.S.-Mexico border. With illegal immigration burning as a contentious issue in American politics, Reuters reporter Tim Gaynor went into the underbelly of the border and to the heart of illegal immigration: along the 45-mile trek down the illegal alien "superhighway." Through scorpion-strewn trails with Mexican migrants and drug smugglers, he met up with a legendary group of Native American trackers called the Shadow Wolves, and traveled through the extensive network of tunnels, including the "Great Tunnel" from Tijuana to Otay Mesa, California. Along the way, Gaynor also meets Minutemen and exposes corruption among the Border Patrol agents who exchange sex or money for helping smugglers. The issue of illegal immigration has a complexity beyond any of the political rhetoric. Combining top-notch investigative journalism with a narrative style that delves into the human condition, Gaynor reveals the day-to-day realities on both sides of "the line."

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Customer Reviews

I'm not generally a non-fiction reader, but this book is great. It is written by a newspaper guy who researched and lived the life of the Mexican/ US border. I was also afraid that it would be a "here are the facts, make your own conclusion" kinda book, but Tim gives you a full perspective from many, many interesting views from so many (often opposing viewpoints). It is reminiscent of a Hemingway novel for me. I highly, highly recommend this book.

For what it is -- a reporter's overview of the day-to-day lives of the smugglers (of drugs, people and weapons) on the US/Mexico border and the law enforcement personnel (chiefly those in the United States -- this is a good book. And anyone who wants a solid overview of what life is like trying to work "the line" at the San Diego border crossings with a K-9 unit, patrolling the border in a helicopter or investigating corrupt immigration cops, will get a solid overview. The problem is that such a timely, controversial and crucial issue cries out for a more comprehensive, analytical and thoughtful treatment. It's not that there is anything amiss with what is here -- it's lively, intriguing, thought-provoking and rich in first-hand detail. But it simply doesn't go far enough; it's like reading a series of long newspaper articles on different aspects of the question, none of which ever drill deeply enough beneath the surface for the reader to form their own thoughts or opinions. Gaynor is clear that his goal isn't to address issues of immigration policy. But failing to do so makes the book far too lightweight. Nor does he provide enough historical context for those who aren't already familiar with border issues. Anyone looking here for a clue as to when illegal immigration across the southern border of the US became such a hot potato issue will look in vain. Was it in the 1970s, when the economy went down the drain, and jobs became so scarce? There's no clue. Similarly, although Gaynor is obviously familiar with the provinces of origin of the migrants he encounters in his research, he never shares much of that knowledge with us, beyond noting that a certain province is poverty-stricken, or a handful of details of a particular migrant's life. Surely, understanding more of the context in which would-be migrants live would show more clearly than anything else the reason why they are so desperate to walk for a week across the Sonoran desert, risking death? Indeed, the focus is so heavily on the US side of the law enforcement side of things that I kept wondering what was happening to Mexican law enforcement, which emerged only intermittently in Gaynor's narrative. I know from following news developments that there is a massive corruption problem, and that many go in daily fear of their lives. It would have been

fascinating to see their daily struggle to police the border contrasted with that of their American counterparts. There is nothing inherently wrong with what is in the book -- it just doesn't do justice to the complex landscape of the US/Mexico border today. I understand that it's easier to narrow the scope of a book to something that is manageable, but sometimes that isn't a strategy that readers will find rewarding. In this case, it felt as if Gaynor had mined his reporter's notebook for the most interesting bits of his ongoing coverage of his 'beat' and fleshed out each as a separate chapter. If he'd taken the time to dig deeper, this could have been an excellent book. As it stands, by the time you read the fourth or fifth chapter devoted to policing the board, a kind of 'echo effect' sets in. The introductory chapter is an interesting one that doesn't really reflect what is going on in the book as a whole. In it, Gaynor and a colleague make the trek across the border the same way that an illegal immigrant would (although they stop and have their passports scrutinized.) After reading it, and moving on to the rest of the book, I was struck by how out of place it is in this narrative, and it ended up feeling a bit too much like a stunt: "Western reporter tries to feel what it's like to be a desperate Central American migrant!" I realize that isn't what was intended, but while it will give some readers a sense of what is involved, it's the feeling I was left with. I also ended up contrasting this, in my own mind, with an article I read a while ago (the New York Times magazine perhaps?), in which the reporter had traveled all the way to the border alongside the migrants he was writing about. The story in that case was about their sufferings and their stories, not the reporter's own. And the real test of a writer's ability to make you feel that you know the characters so well that you care what happens to them -- even in a nonfiction book. What you will get in reading this book is a serviceable, often lively and interesting survey of how various agencies go about policing the border these days. What you won't get is any historical, social, political or economic context (or very little of it). If the topic isn't already one in which a reader is passionately interested, this isn't a book that will change that, sadly enough. Which is why I have rounded my rating down to 3 stars rather than up to 4, as I typically would do. The great "Border War" chronicle, it seems has yet to be written. (Or if it has, I haven't found it yet!)

A well balanced look at what takes place along the U.S. and Mexico border.

great story

There's a very good review here rating *Midnight on the Line* with 3.5 stars. I wholeheartedly agree; 3.5 it is! Tim Gaynor's writing style reminds me of the regular fare within a big town newspaper. It's

well written but a little poetic for a topic that demands real answers. His insertion or imbedding on the line is interesting but blatantly contrived as to appear one with the characters of the book. There are no answers in the book, just questions with exclamation points (the new journalism). In fact, another reviewer writes, 'where are the answers to the issue of stopping illegal immigration'? Clearly this reviewer falls into the larger category of Americans that believe getting published (or elected to public office) makes one an authority. Nope, this is a reporters journal through and through. Having said all of that, *Midnight on the Line* will appeal to those that like Reality TV and true crime novels. It has enough personal interaction to appease those that live to view life through the bubble of humanity. I also believe Gaynor will find a more receptive audience amongst his fellow Britains. They are more removed from the personal drama and less prone to have seen the nightly news coverage of America's immigration debacle, NAFTA and the U.S./Mexico super-hiway. Our apparent salvation, comparatively, is that our neighbors to the south have high regard for the family and a spirituality that closely mirrors our own. The Brits are less insulated and find their immigration issues more volatile and alarming than our own. Gaynor does deserve one greater praise for shining another disrobing beam of transparency on the issue of Human Trafficking. Modern slavery is alive and well in the good old Apple Pie Kingdom and we are sorely wanting for an answer to the problem. By and by, this isn't a terrible book but it simply adds nothing new to the ongoing saga of immigration in North America.

This is a great book, colorfully written that really takes the reader into the life of the border. The opening passage with its first-hand account of walking across the desert from the Mexican border really makes you realize all the dangers and difficulties inherent in such a crossing. The accounts of all the different ways people have sought to be driven across the border (i.e. false compartment in the gas tank) will blow your mind. The description of the Minutemen is dispassionate and interesting. Most all the people described in the book are engagingly portrayed. Along the way, the book delves into the cartels, corruption, drone technology and politics. The explanation of the challenges that go along with any project to build a fence all along the border, especially the fact that such a fence would not do the trick by itself and would need to be patrolled by a large number of Border Guards, is very interesting. This book is a very worthwhile read.

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