

= Traffic (2000 film) =

Traffic is a 2000 American crime drama film directed by Steven Soderbergh and written by Stephen Gaghan . It explores the illegal drug trade from a number of perspectives : a user , an enforcer , a politician and a trafficker . Their stories are edited together throughout the film , although some of the characters do not meet each other . The film is an adaptation of the British Channel 4 television series Traffik .

20th Century Fox , the original financiers of the film , demanded Harrison Ford play a leading role and that significant changes to the screenplay be made . Soderbergh refused and proposed the script to other major Hollywood studios , but it was rejected because of the three @-@ hour running time and the subject matter ? Traffic is more of a political film than most Hollywood productions . USA Films , however , liked the project from the start and offered the film @-@ makers more money than Fox . Soderbergh operated the camera himself and adopted a distinctive cinematography tint for each story so that audiences could tell them apart .

Traffic was critically acclaimed and earned numerous awards , including four Oscars : Best Director for Steven Soderbergh , Best Supporting Actor for Benicio del Toro , Best Adapted Screenplay for Stephen Gaghan and Best Film Editing for Stephen Mirrione . It was also a commercial success with a worldwide box @-@ office revenue total of \$ 207 @.@ 5 million , well above its estimated \$ 46 million budget .

In 2004 , USA Network ran a miniseries ? also called Traffic ? based on the American film and the earlier British television series .

= = Plot = =

= = = Mexico storyline = = =

In Mexico , police officer Javier Rodriguez (del Toro) and his partner Manolo Sanchez (Vargas) stop a drug transport and arrest the couriers . Their arrest is interrupted by General Salazar (Milian) , a high @-@ ranking Mexican official who decides to hire Javier . Salazar instructs him to apprehend Francisco Flores (Collins) , a hitman for the Tijuana Cartel , headed by the Obregón brothers .

Back in Tijuana , Flores , under torture , gives Salazar the names of important members of the Obregón cartel , who are arrested . Javier and Salazar 's efforts begin to cripple the Obregón brothers ' cocaine outfit , but Javier soon discovers Salazar is a pawn for the Juárez Cartel , the rival of the Obregón brothers . That entire portion of the Mexican anti @-@ drug campaign is a fraud , as Salazar is wiping out one cartel because he has aligned with another for profit .

Javier 's partner Sanchez attempts to sell the information of Salazar 's true affiliation to the DEA but is killed for his betrayal . Javier , who can no longer stomach working for Salazar , decides to make a deal with the DEA . In exchange for his testimony , Javier requests electricity in his neighborhood so the kids can play baseball at night rather than be tempted by street gangs and crime . Salazar 's secrets are revealed to the public and he is arrested and is seen suffering probable torture in prison .

Javier explains to the media about the widespread corruption in the police force and army . In Mexico , Javier watches as children play baseball at night in their new stadium .

= = = Wakefield storyline = = =

Meanwhile , Robert Wakefield (Douglas) , a conservative Ohio judge , is appointed to head the President 's Office of National Drug Control Policy , taking on the title drug czar . Robert is warned by his predecessor (Brolin) and several influential politicians that the War on Drugs is unwinnable . Robert 's daughter , Caroline (Christensen) , an honors student , has been using cocaine , methamphetamine and heroin which quickly develops into a drug addiction after her boyfriend Seth (

Grace) introduces her to free @-@ base . Caroline , Seth and Vanessa are all arrested when a fellow student overdoses on drugs and they try to dump him anonymously at a hospital . As Robert and his wife Barbara (Irving) struggle to deal with the problem , he discovers that she has known about their daughter 's involvement with drugs for over six months .

Robert realizes his daughter Caroline is a drug addict and is caught between his demanding new position and difficult family life . On a visit to Mexico , he is encouraged by the successful efforts of Salazar in hurting the Obregón brothers . When he returns to Ohio , Robert learns his efforts to see Caroline rehabilitated have failed . She ran away to the city of Cincinnati , where no one knows her location . She steals from her parents to procure money for drugs .

Robert drags Seth along as he begins to search Cincinnati for his daughter . After a drug dealer who is prostituting Caroline refuses to reveal her whereabouts , Robert breaks into a seedy hotel room and finds a semi @-@ conscious Caroline in the company of an older man . He breaks down in tears as Seth quietly leaves . Robert returns to Washington , D.C. , to give his prepared speech on a " 10 @-@ point plan " to win the war on drugs . In the middle of the speech , he falters as he realizes how futile this all is , then tells the press that the War on Drugs implies a war even on some people 's own family members , which he cannot endorse . He then walks out of the press conference and takes a taxi to the airport . Robert and Barbara go to Narcotics Anonymous meetings with their daughter to support her and others .

= = = Ayala / DEA storyline = = =

A third story is set in San Diego , where an undercover DEA investigation led by Montel Gordon (Cheadle) and Ray Castro (Guzmán) leads to the arrest of Eduardo Ruiz (Ferrer) , a high @-@ stakes dealer posing as a fisherman . Ruiz decides to take the dangerous road to immunity by giving up his boss : drug lord Carl Ayala (Bauer) , the biggest distributor for the Obregón brothers in the United States . Ayala is indicted by a tough prosecutor , hand @-@ selected by Robert to send a message to the Mexican drug organizations .

As the trial against Carl Ayala begins , his pregnant wife Helena (Zeta @-@ Jones) learns of her husband 's true profession from his associate , Arnie Metzger (Quaid) . Facing the prospect of life imprisonment for her husband and death threats against her only child , Helena decides to hire Flores to assassinate Eduardo Ruiz ; she knows killing Ruiz will effectively end the trial nolle prosequi . Flores plants a car bomb on a DEA car in an assassination attempt against Ruiz . Shortly after planting the bomb , Flores is assassinated by a sniper in retaliation for his co @-@ operation with General Salazar ; the car bomb kills Castro , but Gordon and Ruiz survive .

Helena , knowing Ruiz is soon scheduled to testify , makes a deal with Juan Obregón (Bratt) , lord of the drug cartel , who forgives the debt of the Ayala family and has Ruiz poisoned . Ayala is released , much to the dissatisfaction of Gordon , who is still angry over the death of his partner . During a phone conversation between Ayala and Metzger , Carl has deduced that the person who originally informed on Ruiz was Metzger himself . Evidently in a bid for power with another drug cartel in Mexico , Metzger took \$ 3 Million to inform on Ruiz to the FBI , and facilitate the downfall of the Ayala organization . Ayala said that Metzger was planning on taking over Ayala 's empire completely . As Ayala hangs up the phone , Metzger looks up to see two hit men entering his office . Soon after the release , Gordon bursts into the Ayala home during a celebration for Carl and surreptitiously plants a listening bug under his desk , all while struggling with the bodyguards .

= = Relationship to actual events = =

Some aspects of the plotline are based on actual people and events . The character General Arturo Salazar is closely modeled after Mexican General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo , who was secretly on the payroll of Amado Carrillo Fuentes , head of the Juarez Cartel . The character Porfirio Madrigal is modeled after Fuentes . The Obregón brothers are modeled after the Arellano Félix brothers . At one point in the film , an El Paso Intelligence Center agent tells Robert his position , official in charge of drug control , doesn 't exist in Mexico . As noted in the original script , a Director of the

Instituto Nacional para el Combate a las Drogas was created by the Attorney General in 1996 .

= = Cast = =

= = Development = =

Steven Soderbergh had been interested in making a film about the drug wars for some time but did not want to make one about addicts . Producer Laura Bickford obtained the rights to the United Kingdom mini @-@ series Traffik and liked its structure . Soderbergh , who had seen the mini @-@ series in 1990 , started looking for a screenwriter to adapt it into a film . They read a script by Stephen Gaghan called Havoc about upper @-@ class white kids in Palisades High School doing drugs and getting involved with gangs . Soderbergh approached Gaghan to work on his film , but found he was already working for producer / director Edward Zwick . Bickford and Soderbergh approached Zwick , who agreed to merge the two projects and come aboard as a producer .

Traffic was originally going to be distributed by 20th Century Fox , but it was put into turnaround unless actor Harrison Ford agreed to star . Soderbergh began shopping the film to other studios , but when Ford suddenly showed interest in Traffic , Fox 's interest in the film was renewed and the studio took it out of turnaround . Fox CEO Bill Mechanic championed the film , but he departed from the studio by the time the first draft was finished . It went back into turnaround . Mechanic had also wanted to make some changes to the script , but Soderbergh disagreed and decided to shop the film to other major studios . They all turned him down because they were not confident in the prospects of a three @-@ hour film about drugs , according to Gaghan . USA Films , however , had wanted to take on the movie from the first time Soderbergh approached them . They provided the filmmakers with a \$ 46 million budget , a considerable increase from the \$ 25 million which Fox offered .

= = = Screenplay = = =

Soderbergh had " conceptual discussions " with Gaghan while he was shooting The Limey in October 1998 , and they finished the outline before he went off to shoot Erin Brockovich . After Soderbergh was finished with that film , Gaghan had written a first draft in six weeks that was 165 pages long . After the film was approved for production , Soderbergh and Gaghan met two separate times for three days to reformat the script . The draft they shot with had 163 pages with 135 speaking parts and featured seven cities . The film shortens the storyline of the original mini @-@ series ; a major character arc , that of a farmer , is taken out , and the Pakistani plotline is replaced with one set in Mexico .

= = = Casting = = =

Harrison Ford was initially considered for the role of Robert Wakefield in January 2000 , but would have had to take a significant cut in his usual \$ 20 million salary . Ford met with Soderbergh to flesh out the character . Gaghan agreed to rework the role , adding several scenes that ended up in the finished film . On February 20 , Ford turned down the role and the filmmakers brought it back to Michael Douglas , who had turned down an earlier draft . He liked the changes made and agreed to star , which helped greenlight the project . Gaghan believes Ford turned down the role because he wanted to " reconnect with his action fans . "

The filmmakers sent out letters to many politicians , both Democrat and Republican , asking them to make cameo appearances in the film . Several of the scenes had already been shot using actors in these roles , but the filmmakers went back and re @-@ shot those scenes when real politicians agreed to be in the film . Those who agreed , including U.S. Senators Harry Reid , Barbara Boxer , Orrin Hatch , Charles Grassley , and Don Nickles , and Massachusetts governor Bill Weld , were filmed in a scene that was entirely improvised .

== Pre @-@ production ==

The project was obtained from Fox by Initial Entertainment Group , and was sold to USA Films by IEG for North American rights only . Stephen Soderbergh never approached USA Films , and the film was fully funded by Initial Entertainment Group .

After Fox dropped the film in early 2000 and before USA Films expressed interest soon after , Soderbergh paid for pre @-@ production with his own money . USA Films agreed to give him final cut on Traffic and also agreed to his term that all the Mexican characters would speak Spanish while talking to each other . This meant that almost all of Benicio del Toro 's dialogue would be subtitled . Once the studio realized this , they suggested that his scenes be shot in both English and Spanish , but Soderbergh and del Toro rejected the suggestion . Del Toro , a native of Puerto Rico , was worried that another actor would be brought in and re @-@ record his dialogue in English after he had worked hard to master Mexican inflections and improve his Spanish vocabulary . Del Toro remembers , " Can you imagine ? You do the whole movie , bust your butt to get it as realistic as possible , and someone dubs your voice ? I said , ' No way . Over my dead body . ' Steven was like , ' Don 't worry . It 's not gonna happen . ' " The director fought for subtitles for the Mexico scenes , arguing that if the characters did not speak Spanish , the film would have no integrity and would not convincingly portray what he described as the " impenetrability of another culture " .

The filmmakers went to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and U.S. Customs early on with the script and told them that they were trying to present as detailed and accurate a picture of the current drug war as possible . The DEA and Customs pointed out inaccuracies in the script . In addition , they gave the production team access to the border checkpoint to Mexico , as shown in the film during the scene in which Wakefield and his people talk with border officials . Despite the assistance , the DEA did not try to influence the content of the script . Soderbergh said Traffic had influences from the films of Richard Lester and Jean @-@ Luc Godard . He also spent time analyzing The Battle of Algiers and Z , which , according to the director , had the feeling that the footage was " caught " and not staged . Another inspiration was Alan J. Pakula 's film All the President 's Men because of its ability to tackle serious issues while being entertaining . In the opening credits of his film , Soderbergh tried to replicate the typeface from All the President 's Men and the placement on @-@ screen at the bottom left @-@ hand corner . Analyzing this film helped the director deal with the large cast and working in many different locations for Traffic .

== Principal photography ==

Half of the first day 's footage came out overexposed and unusable . Before the financiers or studio bosses knew about the problem , Soderbergh was already doing reshoots . The insurers made him agree that any further mishaps resulting in additional filming would come out of the director 's own pocket . Soderbergh shot in various cities in California , Ohio and Texas , on a 54 @-@ day schedule and came in \$ 2 million under budget . The director operated the camera himself in an effort to " get as close to the movie as I can , " and to eliminate the distance between the actors and himself . Soderbergh drew inspiration from the cinema verite style of Ken Loach 's films , studying the framing of scenes , the distance of the camera to the actors , lens length , and the tightness of eyelines depending on the position of a character . Soderbergh remembers , " I noticed that there 's a space that 's inviolate , that if you get within something , you cross the edge into a more theatrical aesthetic as opposed to a documentary aesthetic " . Most of the day was spent shooting because a lot of the film was shot with available light .

For the hand @-@ held camera footage , Soderbergh used Panavision Millennium XLs that were smaller and lighter than previous cameras and allowed him to move freely . In order to tell the three stories apart , he adopted a distinctive look for each . For Robert Wakefield 's story , Soderbergh used tungsten film with no filter for a cold , monochrome blue feel . For Helena Ayala 's story , Soderbergh used diffusion filters , flashing the film , overexposing it for a warmer feel . For Javier Rodriguez 's story , the director used tobacco filters and a 45 @-@ degree shutter angle whenever

possible to produce a strobe @-@ like sharp feel . Then , he took the entire film through an Ektachrome step , which increased the contrast and grain significantly . He wanted to have different looks for each story because the audience had to keep track of many characters and absorb a lot of information and he did not want them to have to figure out which story they were watching .

Benicio del Toro had significant input into certain parts of the film ; for example , he suggested a simpler , more concise way of depicting his character kidnapping Francisco Flores that Soderbergh ended up using . The director cut a scene in which Robert Wakefield smokes crack after finding it in his daughter 's bedroom . After rehearsing said scene with the actors , he felt that the character would not do it ; after consulting with Gaghan , the screenwriter agreed and the filmmakers cut the scene shortly before it was scheduled to be shot .

= = = Post @-@ production = = =

The first cut of Traffic ran three hours and ten minutes . Soderbergh cut it down to two hours and twenty minutes . Early on , there were concerns that the film might get an NC @-@ 17 rating and he was prepared to release it with that rating , but the MPAA gave it an R.

= = Release = =

= = = Box office performance = = =

Traffic was given a limited release on December 27 , 2000 in four theaters where it grossed USD \$ 184 @, @ 725 on its opening weekend . It was given a wide release on January 5 , 2001 in 1 @, @ 510 theaters where it grossed \$ 15 @. @ 5 million on its opening weekend . The film made \$ 124 @. @ 1 million in North America and \$ 83 @. @ 4 million in foreign markets for a worldwide total of \$ 207 @. @ 5 million , well above its estimated \$ 48 million budget .

= = = Critical response = = =

Rotten Tomatoes reported that 92 % of critics gave the film positive write @-@ ups , based on a sample of 154 , with an average score of 8 / 10 , with del Toro receiving widespread acclaim , and the consensus being " Soderbergh successfully pulls off the highly ambitious Traffic , a movie with three different stories and a very large cast . The issues of ethics are gray rather than black @-@ and @-@ white , with no clear @-@ cut good guys . Terrific acting all around . " At Metacritic the film has received an average score of 86 , based on 34 reviews . Film critic Roger Ebert gave the film four out of four stars and wrote , " The movie is powerful precisely because it doesn 't preach . It is so restrained that at one moment ? the judge 's final speech ? I wanted one more sentence , making a point , but the movie lets us supply that thought for ourselves " . Stephen Holden , in his review for The New York Times , wrote , " Traffic is an utterly gripping , edge @-@ of @-@ your @-@ seat thriller . Or rather it is several interwoven thrillers , each with its own tense rhythm and explosive payoff " . In his review for The New York Observer , Andrew Sarris wrote , " Traffic marks [Soderbergh] definitively as an enormous talent , one who never lets us guess what he 's going to do next . The promise of Sex , Lies , and Videotape has been fulfilled " .

Entertainment Weekly gave the film an " A " rating and praised Benicio del Toro 's performance , which critic Owen Gleiberman called , " haunting in his understatement , [it] becomes the film 's quietly awakening moral center " . Desson Howe , in his review for the Washington Post , wrote , " Soderbergh and screenwriter Stephen Gaghan , who based this on a British television miniseries of the same name , have created an often exhilarating , soup @-@ to @-@ nuts exposé of the world 's most lucrative trade " . In his review for Rolling Stone , Peter Travers wrote , " The hand @-@ held camerawork ? Soderbergh himself did the holding ? provides a documentary feel that rivets attention " . However , Richard Schickel , in his review for Time , wrote , " there is a possibly predictable downside to this multiplicity of story lines : they keep interrupting one another . Just as you get

interested in one , Stephen Gaghan 's script , inspired by a British mini @-@ series , jerks you away to another " .

= = = Top ten lists = = =

Traffic appeared on several critics ' top ten lists for 2000 . Some of the notable top @-@ ten list appearances are :

2nd : A. O. Scott , The New York Times

2nd : Jami Bernard , New York Daily News

2nd : Bruce Kirkland , The Toronto Sun

3rd : Stephen Holden , The New York Times

3rd : Owen Gleiberman , Entertainment Weekly

3rd : Peter Travers , Rolling Stone

4th : Roger Ebert , Chicago Sun @-@ Times

4th : Jack Mathews , New York Daily News

= = = Accolades = = =

The film won Academy Awards in the categories Best Director (Soderbergh) , Best Supporting Actor (Benicio del Toro) , Best Film Editing (Mirrione) , and Best Adapted Screenplay (Gaghan) . It was also nominated for Best Picture , alongside another Soderbergh film , Erin Brockovich , but lost to Gladiator . Traffic was nominated for five Golden Globe Awards including Best Motion Picture ? Drama , Soderbergh for Best Director , del Toro for Best Supporting Actor ? Motion Picture , Catherine Zeta @-@ Jones for Best Supporting Actress ? Motion Picture , and Stephen Gaghan for Best Screenplay . Both del Toro and Gaghan won in their respective categories . In addition , del Toro won Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role . He went on to win BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role along with Gaghan , who won for Best Adapted Screenplay .

New York Film Critics Circle named Traffic as the Best Film , Soderbergh as Best Director , and del Toro as Best Supporting Actor . Los Angeles Film Critics Association awarded Soderbergh Best Director . Members of the Toronto Film Critics Association voted Soderbergh as Best Director and del Toro as Best Actor . National Society of Film Critics also voted Soderbergh and del Toro as Best Director and Best Supporting Actor , respectively .