

## Thorny Path of Immigration, Post-9/11

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**Byline:** By MANOHLA DARGIS

### **Body**

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When it comes to politics and the big screen, American filmmakers tend to fall into two camps, the grossly exploitative and the earnestly instructive. On the earnestly instructive side are well-intentioned downers and uppers like "Grand Canyon" and their lower-budget equivalents, like "The Visitor" and "Frozen River," which offer prescriptive lessons in tolerance. On the grossly exploitative are those films, like Wayne Kramer's "Crossing Over," that deliver their sanctimony with less hand-wringing and more fist-shaking, complete with lurid violence and, for no real narrative reason, periodically bared female flesh.

In general, the grossly exploitative flicks tend to be more entertaining or at least bearable than the earnestly instructive variant. (Sam Fuller was a master of the exploitative political film.) Such is the case initially with "Crossing Over," which tries, through a carefully balanced range of characters, to tackle some of the thornier problems involving immigration in America, post-Sept. 11. Largely set in that boiling multicultural hot pot known as Southern California, with a few stops south of the border, the mosaiclike story oscillates between various, unrelated immigrants, legal and otherwise, and the American citizens who are trying to help or hinder them. The film's most obvious models are "Crash" and "Babel," which both advance their multi-everything messages structurally with fragmented, multistrand narratives.

If Mr. Kramer's bid to fuse form and content registers as rather less elegant than "Crash" or "Babel," it is in part because he doesn't seem equally committed to all his characters. Though he's come up with a veritable United Nations of human-interest stories -- including those of an African child stuck in a detention center and an Iranian patriarch on the verge of citizenship -- he spends most of his time hanging out with his film's more familiar faces. By far the most well known is the appealingly gruff Harrison Ford as Max Brogan, an officer for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who comes equipped with a marshmallow heart and a flinty partner with serious culture-shock issues of his own, Hamid (a very fine Cliff Curtis).

In "Crossing Over" immigration isn't just a problem, it's also what defines and limits each and every character. Yet, much like the characters' diversity -- the huddled masses include a Mexican mother and son, an Australian actress and a Korean family -- immigration isn't really the point here. Violence is. When a zealous Muslim teenager, Taslima (Summer Bishil), the daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants, delivers a naive essay on the Sept. 11 hijackers at school, the speech doesn't prompt any soul-searching. It isn't meant to: it's simply a device to show (prove) how wretchedly bigoted everyone in this rainbow coalition actually is, from the black teenagers who hurl insults at Taslima to the white F.B.I. agent who comes cataclysmically knocking on her family's door.

If Mr. Kramer's outrage felt honest, his film would be easier to respect. But time and again, he undermines his own righteousness by pumping up the violence (gangbangers threaten the Korean family) and stripping down his talent, including the Australian, Claire (Alice Eve), who, after attracting the sexual interest of a sleazy immigration bureaucrat, Cole (Ray Liotta), ends up taking really long showers. Cole is married to an immigration lawyer,

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Denise (Ashley Judd), who wants to adopt the African child (Ogechi Egonu) languishing in the same detention center that Taslima lands in. It's all just one big circle of life, which doubtless explains why Mr. Kramer routinely tries to bridge these stories with aerial images of Southern California freeways, where people of every origin flow together except, you know, during rush hour.

"Crossing Over" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). Graphic gun violence, strong language and the occasionally bared female breast and buttock.

## CROSSING OVER

Opens on Friday in New York and Los Angeles.

Written and directed by Wayne Kramer; director of photography, James Whitaker; edited by Arthur Coburn; music by Mark Isham; production designer, Toby Corbett; produced by Frank Marshall and Mr. Kramer; released by the Weinstein Company. Running time: 1 hour 53 minutes.

WITH: Harrison Ford (Max Brogan), Ray Liotta (Cole Frankel), Ashley Judd (Denise Frankel), Jim Sturgess (Gavin Kossef), Cliff Curtis (Hamid Baraheri), Alice Braga (Mireya Sanchez), Alice Eve (Claire Shepard), Justin Chon (Yong Kim), Summer Bishil (Taslima Jahangir) and Ogechi Egonu (Alike).

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## Graphic

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PHOTO: Harrison Ford and Alice Braga in "Crossing Over," Wayne Kramer's film exploring multicultural issues in California.(PHOTOGRAPH BY DALE ROBINETTE/TWC)

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Crossing Over (Movie)

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