

STUDY GUIDE



MIDNIGHT FAMILY

A film by LUKE LORENTZEN
MEXICO / 2019 / 81 MIN
Spanish with English Subtitles



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BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before watching a foreign film, it is important to know the current events and history of the country that film comes from.

Mexico has undergone several investigations to examine the holes in its healthcare system and the ways and whereabouts in which equity is lacking. Though the Mexico City government has been working towards improving their preexisting system since the elections in 2000, inequality remains ¹. Research based on real-life stories of Mexicans whose experiences represent the corruption in the healthcare system suggests that, “While universal health access is guaranteed in Mexico as a citizenship-based right, health care corruption—ranging from physicians siphoning patients’ medications from the public health care system into the black market to killing vulnerable patients in the name of medical education—demonstrates that having adequate laws is not enough” ². Access to appropriate and necessary healthcare and providers often depends on a person’s economic and/or social status; this along with the lack of resources (i.e., hospitals, doctors, medicines, etc.) creates the corruption that has plagued the Mexican healthcare system, along with the healthcare systems of many neighboring Latin American countries. Research ways that the people of Mexico City, or other places in the region, try to make up for these faults in their healthcare system.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

A **film synopsis** is a piece of text designed to summarize the film’s narrative, genre, style, and key participants in a way that appeals to a wide audience. The synopsis is part of the film’s marketing process and tends to follow a traditional format. Read this official synopsis for *Midnight Family*:

In Mexico City, the government operates fewer than 45 emergency ambulances for a population of 9 million. This has spawned an underground industry of for-profit ambulances often run by people with little or no training or certification. An exception in this ethically fraught, cutthroat industry, the Ochoa family struggles to keep their financial needs from jeopardizing the people in their care. The Ochoas operate out of one of these private ambulances with an all-male crew ranging in age and experience. This dangerous job, however, is not a lucrative business. Many times, their passengers will neither have insurance or enough money to pay for their services, however necessary their intervention may have been. When a crackdown by corrupt police pushes the family into greater hardship, the family face increasing moral dilemmas even as they continue providing essential emergency medical services.



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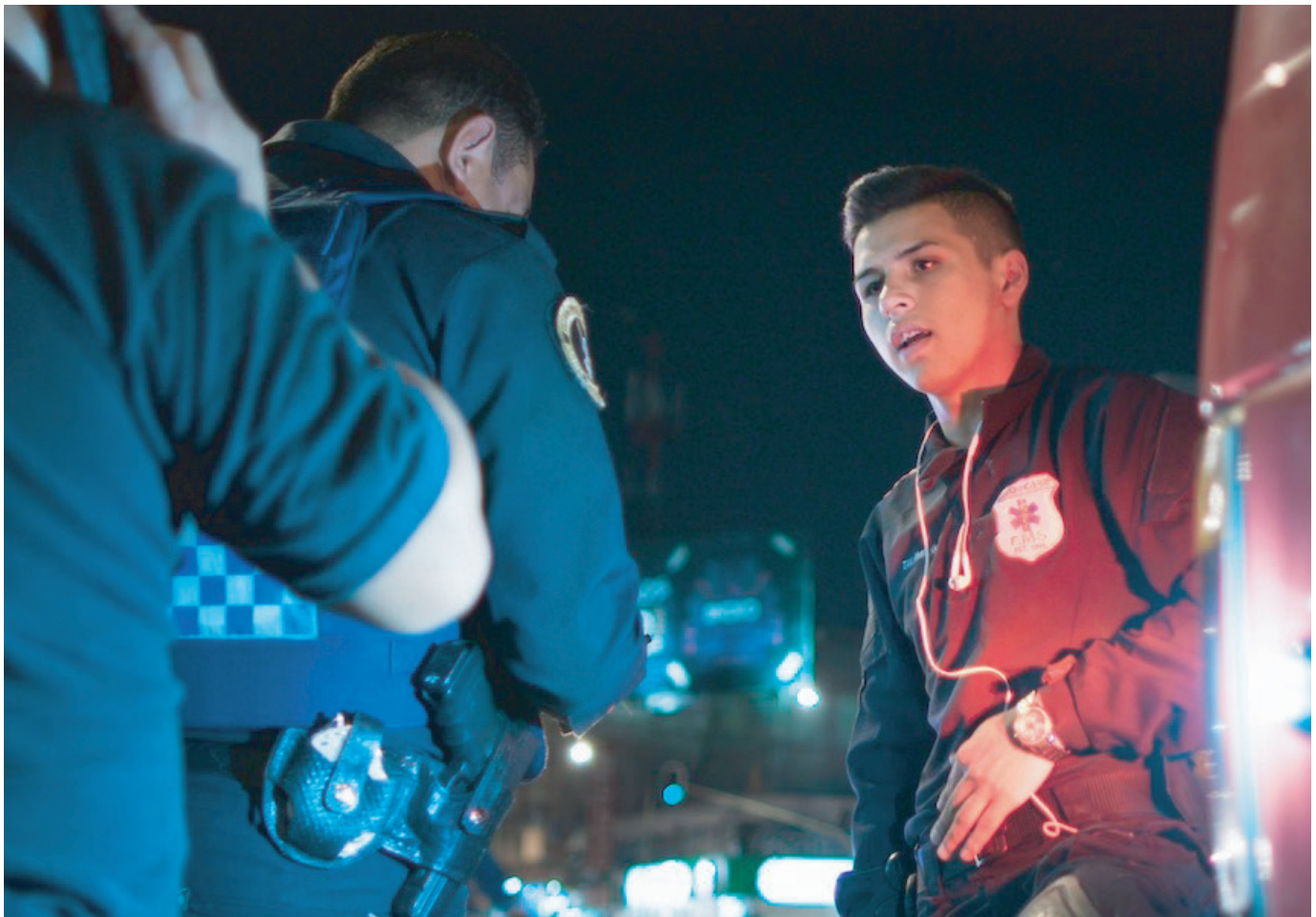
¹ Laurell AC. “Latin American Social Medicine. What Does Latin American Social Medicine Do When It Governs? The Case of the Mexico City Government.” *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 93, no. 12, Dec. 2003, pp. 2028–2031.

² Vega, Rosalynn A., and Alfredo Paulo Maya. “Operating at the Edge of Il/Legality: Systemic Corruption in Mexican Health Care.” *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, vol. 26, no. 1, Mar. 2021, p. 46.

INTRODUCING THE FILM *(continued)*

Mixing riveting and grueling scenes of life-or-death moments and candid moments outside of their job, including scenes like Josué playing in the back of the ambulance, Juan's therapeutic phone calls to his girlfriend, and the family's routine to get ready for work, *Midnight Family* is both a compassionate portrait of a working-class family and a frightening ride through a broken healthcare system that risks the lives of both patients and providers like the Ochoa family.

- ❑ From the film synopsis, can you imagine the genre and tone of the film? From this same text, try to identify the main elements from the film's plot and the socio-political background to the film.
- ❑ Based on the synopsis, can you think of some specific challenges that the Ochoa family may face on a nightly basis?
- ❑ Do you think that the film will be politically charged? If so, why?
- ❑ How do the trailer, poster, and still images encourage you to watch the film?
- ❑ Can you make any assumptions regarding what the film is about just from the marketing materials (i.e., trailer, poster, and still images)? In what ways does the marketing material differ from larger commercial productions?



AFTER WATCHING THE FILM:

CINEMATIC ART/TECHNIQUES

- ❑ The film opens inside the back of the ambulance as it is moving. This point-of-view shot, along with several other shots throughout the film in the back of the ambulance as it rushes to the hospital with patients. How does this technique engage the viewer? What other purposes does this type of shot serve?
- ❑ Frequent health emergencies, accompanied by sirens and chaos, are predominant throughout the film. What effect do the moments of silence have on the audience. Chose a scene that highlights this dichotomy and describe your reaction to it.
- ❑ There is never any visible interaction between the family and the people behind the camera. How does this differ from other documentaries that use interviews and people outside of the story in the film itself?
- ❑ Why do you think the camera faces the driver and passenger in the ambulance as they drive to the scene of the call or to the hospital very often? How does it change the tone of these scenes?
- ❑ How does the unpredictability of the pace of the film reflect the events in the film?
- ❑ What power does the genre of the film as a documentary hold? How would its impact change if it was a film based on these true stories with actors and actresses?
- ❑ The film closes with a panoramic shot of the city and a few different shots of the city roads and highways filled with traffic. Sirens sound in the background. What message does this shot send? Would it be as effective if these shots appeared in the beginning?



NARRATIVE

- ❑ Describe the Ochoa family dynamic. How do Fer, Juan, and Josué differ? How are they alike?
- ❑ Juan and Josué are underage. What do you think about their role in the business?
- ❑ What does the scene in the Ochoa's family home tell the viewer about their life outside of their night shifts?
- ❑ The contrast between the Ochoa family's nightlife and day-time life is an important component in the film. Fer has his family to take care of, Josué is a young boy who enjoys playing soccer, and Juan has a girlfriend. What does the documentary show about the balance between their work lives and personal lives? How does the family-run aspect of their work affect their personal lives?
- ❑ Why do they race to get ahead of other ambulances to get to the scene of a call?
- ❑ When they are on their way to an emergency, how does the family get the cars to move out of their way? Do they have a system or uniform way to handle the roads and interact with other drivers?
- ❑ When the police begin enforcing new regulations, such as requiring a special license plate and that the ambulance be younger than 10 years old, how does the family react?
- ❑ As the family eats their dinner made from a compilation of what they could afford from the store during their shift, Josué asks where tuna comes from. What does this scene show about Josué?
- ❑ Describe the interaction between the Ochoa family, the police, and the father of the baby who needed to be taken in the Ochoa ambulance. Why is this scene in particular so important?



THEMES

- ❑ The film takes place in 2019 and displays the corruption and faulty healthcare system of Mexico City. With the COVID-19 pandemic in mind, how might you picture this film to look if it was made after March 2020?
- ❑ How are the police portrayed in the film? Given the sociopolitical context, what do they represent?
- ❑ In a scene at the Ochoa family's home, the viewer observes that they don't have hot water, and Josué worries he won't have enough money for lunch. What role does sacrifice play in the film? What does sacrifice mean for the Ochoa family?
- ❑ When they go to help the girl who was injured by her boyfriend, the first thing she asks is if the services will be expensive. What kind of reaction does this spark in the viewer? Where else does this question arise in the film?
- ❑ How does the Ochoa family deal with the dilemma of arriving at the scene of an emergency and learning that the person cannot afford their services? To what extent should they assist people at their own expense? How can they tackle this question at the time of an emergency?
- ❑ Corruption and inequality in the healthcare system affect people of all ages, and both those working in the system and those who need the care. How do Fer, Juan, and Josué exemplify this?
- ❑ Use this film as an example to craft an argument for or against free market economics in the health care system.
- ❑ Based on what you learned from this documentary and what you know of the US health care system, how can you compare and/or contrast both systems?

