



# Showdown in the Sonoran Desert: Religion, Law, and the Immigration Controversy

*Ananda Rose*

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The U.S. immigration debate has raised some of the most difficult questions our nation has ever faced: How can we preserve the integrity of sovereign borders while also respecting the dignity of human beings? How should a border—that imaginary line in the sand—be humanely and effectively maintained? And how should we regard "the stranger" in our midst?

To understand the experience of those directly impacted by the immigration crisis, Ananda Rose traveled to the Sonoran desert, a border region where the remains of some 2,000 migrants have been recovered over the past decade. There she interviewed Minutemen, Border Patrol agents, Catholic nuns, humanitarian aid workers, left-wing protestors, ranchers, and many other ordinary citizens of southern Arizona. She discovers two starkly opposed ideological perspectives: that of religious activists who embrace a biblically inspired hospitality that stresses love of strangers and a "borderless" compassion; and that of law enforcement, which insists on safety, security, and strict respect for international borders. But by embracing the stories these people tell about their lived experience—whether the rancher angered over seeing his property damaged by trespassing migrants, or the migrant who has left three children behind in a violent shantytown in the hope of providing them a better life through southbound remittances, or the Border Patrol agent stuck between his loyalty to law and the pain of finding a baby girl dead in the desert—Rose takes readers beyond predictable and entrenched partisan views to offer a more nuanced portrait of the conflict on the border. Ultimately, she argues, the immigration question turns on how we choose to view "the other"—with compassion or with fear.

In writing that is intimate, insightful, even-handed, and often gut-wrenchingly vivid, *Showdown in the Sonoran Desert* offers a fresh new way to frame one of the most important debates of our time.

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