

# Bright Lights, northern New Mexico, freed from Freon

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## FULL TEXT

Probably the best bargain in Boston for movie lovers in general and documentary fans in particular is Emerson College's Bright Lights Film Series. Twice a week at the Paramount Center it screens some of the best recent films and hosts discussions with filmmakers and other experts. And it's free.

The upcoming iteration features two documentaries on topical subjects, different in tone but equally topical and trenchant.

Shortlisted for an Academy Award and winner of last year's Independent Film Festival of Boston Best Documentary award, Stephen Maing's *"Crime + Punishment"* (2018) tells a present-day Serpico story about a group of black and Latino New York police officers who put their careers and safety on the line to blow the whistle on corruption and racism.

Though the practice had been prohibited since 2010, monthly quotas for arrests and summonses were still being imposed on officers, a policy that unfairly targeted minorities and the poor. A group called the NYPD 12 covertly organized and brought a class-action lawsuit against the department to expose and halt the abuse. Meanwhile, Maing also follows the progress of a determined private investigator seeking justice for a young man who was a victim of the quota program. As dramatic and suspenseful as a Hollywood movie (and, thankfully, without car chases), the film exposes a problem symptomatic of a dysfunctional justice system.

"Crime + Punishment" screens on April 9 at 7 p.m. A discussion with the director follows the screening.

Maxim Pozdorovkin's *"The Truth About Killer Robots"* (2018) takes a deceptively humorous approach to what some pessimists see as the pending takeover of the world by automata and artificial intelligence. It begins with a case in Germany where a factory robot apparently murdered a man (the machine was not prosecuted). Other troubling developments include a self-driving Tesla automobile that slammed obliviously—or perhaps malevolently?—into a semi-trailer, killing its passenger, who was watching a Harry Potter movie at the time (so maybe both machines were in on it); and policemen who used a robot designed to defuse bombs to deliver a bomb to a sniper and blow him up. Perhaps most troubling is the Chinese man who is happily married to his sex doll. And you thought the machines were just after our jobs?

"The Truth About Killer Robots" screens on April 11 at 7 p.m. A discussion with the director follows.

Go to [web.emerson.edu/brightlights](http://web.emerson.edu/brightlights).

### Health care in extremis

Many Americans struggle to get adequate health care, but none more so than those living on the margins of northern New Mexico. Many are elderly or addicted to alcohol and opioids, and the nearest medical center is miles away and often inaccessible. Laura Green and Anna Moot-Levin's *"The Providers"* (2018) follows three health-care professionals who work for El Centro, a network of services that offer free care to those with no other options. Nurse practitioner Chris Ruge visits addicts and alcoholics at home and with admirable patience tries to get them to stay clean, sober, and healthy. As his long-suffering wife notes, his dedication takes its toll on his personal life. Family physician Leslie Hayes is critical of doctors who, unlike herself, refuse to acknowledge opioid abusers. "They're already in your waiting room," she says, "you're just not identifying and treating them." The El Centro Medical director, Matt Probst, himself a local with a troubled upbringing, struggles to keep the financially challenged

service solvent while dealing with family members facing the same substance abuse problems as his patients. Not always a grim picture —a nonagenarian carpenter who builds boxes for funerary ashes is especially inspiring —“The Providers” shows humanity at its neediest and at its most admirable. “The Providers” premieres on PBS’s “Independent Lens” on April 8 at 10 p.m. and will also be available simultaneously for online streaming at pbs.org.

#### Doomsday averted

Remember the shrinking ozone layer and how the aerosol propellant for hair spray and deodorants was going to end the world? Had nations not come together to ban this product millions today would be dying from skin cancer and world agriculture would have collapsed. We wouldn’t even have survived long enough to be done in by climate change.

Jamie Lochhead’s succinct, lively, and whimsical *“Ozone Hole: How We Saved the Planet”* tells the story of CFCs, a line of chemicals that seemed at first a boon and turned out to be a bane. They were invented in the 1920s by a brilliant chemist, Thomas Midgley Jr., who might have been the unluckiest scientist to ever live. Freon, his first formulation of CFC, replaced the toxic substances then being used for refrigeration. Later he would invent leaded gasoline, which likewise seemed a good idea at the time but also proved toxic. Later in life Midgley contracted polio but devised a harness that could help him move about. The harness accidentally strangled him to death in his sleep.

Full of such digressions, Lochhead’s film is enlivened throughout by quirky archival footage, animated graphics, and an overall spirit of baleful glee, reflecting the fortunate resolution of what could have been a catastrophic situation. In the 1970s scientists discovered that Freon and all forms of CFC were rapidly destroying the ozone layer. As is often the case, the response was skeptical and hostile, especially from the corporations that had turned the multipurpose substance —used in products “from refrigerators to space capsules,” as one interview subject puts it —into a \$8 billion industry. But self-preservation prevailed over profits, and an international movement championed by President Reagan and Britain’s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher resulted in the 1987 Montreal Protocol to ban CFCs. The destruction of the ozone layer slowed, stopped, and reversed. By 2065 it should be fully restored.

Where can we find such radical eco-warriors as Reagan and Thatcher to save us from the environmental disaster that threatens us today?

“Ozone Hole: How We Saved the Planet” can be seen on April 10 at 10 p.m. on PBS, pbs.org, and the PBS Video App.

Go to [www.pbs.org/about/blogs/news/ozone-hole-how-we-saved-the-planet](http://www.pbs.org/about/blogs/news/ozone-hole-how-we-saved-the-planet).

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Credit: By Peter Keough Globe Correspondent

Caption:

A still image from “Ozone Hole: How We Saved the Planet.”

Windfall Films/NASA

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