TOTALITY

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Country of Origin: USA
Country of Production: Mexico, Canada, USA
Year Finished: 2026
Color / B&W: COLOR
Format: HDV
Aspect Ratio: 16:9
Runtime: 84 mins.
Language(s): ENGLISH, SPANISH, FRENCH

LOGLINE

TOTALITY is an immersive portrait of the 2024 total solar eclipse that explores what draws some 50 million people – from Mexico through Canada – to view this cosmic spectacle.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Directed by Oscar-nominated filmmakers Kate Davis and David Heilbroner, TOTALITY is an immersive feature documentary portrait of the 2024 total solar eclipse. With a blend of visual grandeur, science, and personal stories, the film asks why, in our polarized era, some 50 million people gather along the eclipse path – across Mexico, the United States and Canada – to experience this cosmic spectacle.

Beginning six months before eclipse day, TOTALITY follows a range of people as they prepare for the unstoppable line-up of the earth, moon, and sun. Characters include astronomers, Texas cowboys,]Canadian inventors, astro photographers, a Texas minister, a 100 year-old woman, a blind boy. On the day of the eclipse, 21 film teams led by top documentary cinematographers

capture a swath of humanity under an astonishing, eerie skyscape in a moment of collective awe.

With no tickets required, no political agenda, no winners or losers, TOTALITY paints the 2024 total eclipse as an equalizer, a spectacular reminder of our tiny place in a vast universe.

LONG SYNOPSIS

"We saw the wall of shadow coming and screamed before it hit. This was the universe about which we have read so much and never before felt: the universe as a clockwork of loose spheres flung at stupefying, unauthorized speeds. When the sun emerged...we joined our places on the planet's thin crust; it held. For the time being, we were home free."

– Annie Dillard

TOTALITY is an immersive feature documentary film portraying the 2024 total solar eclipse. The event, which crossed Mexico through Canada, was arguably the largest mass "feel-good" event in recent decades. Blending visual grandeur, science, and personal stories, the film considers why some 50 million people, in these polarized times, would gather along the eclipse path to witness this cosmic spectacle.

Our characters include: Canadian inventors who design a camera-equipped balloon that they hope will photograph the moon's shadow, a Mexican astronomer who teaches children using a pinhole viewer, a 100-year-old woman who prepares to watch the first eclipse in her life, a Texas cattle rancher who compares totality to millions of bats pouring out from his nearby cave, a 40,000-person watch party at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, a blind boy who will listen to the eclipse through a special audio device, a minister from Uvalde, Texas, who hopes the minutes of darkness will help lead his grieving community into the light, a Tennessee eclipse glasses company churning out 75 million pairs, and astro photographers who perch on a perilous cliff in Arkansas to capture totality.

On eclipse day, our 21 film teams, led by acclaimed documentary cinematographers, set out to capture the beauty along the path, from the seaside town of Mazatlán, Mexico, up to the northern craggy coast of Newfoundland, Canada. Along the way, these portraits are punctuated with bits of science, underscoring the unfathomable odds that a moon could perfectly cover the diameter of the sun when viewed from another planet.

At first contact, when the moon begins to cover the sun, a sense of wonder becomes almost palpable. Children in Cleveland wrangle telescopes, crowds howl at The Texas Eclipse Festival, and an Indianapolis stadium packed with 40,000 spectators erupts in screams.

Then, when full midday darkness sweeps across the landscape, TOTALITY collapses time and space in a finale, as people of all ages and backgrounds gaze up together at an eerily darkened sky followed by the return of the warm sun.

With no tickets required, no political agenda, no winners or losers, TOTALITY paints the 2024 total eclipse as a powerful equalizer. Even if only for a moment of collective awe, this rare event may serve as a spectacular reminder of our tiny place in a vast universe.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

We have made more than a dozen feature documentaries on social ills – criminal justice, mental illness, racism, environmental degradation, and the like. With the world's growing problems, and people feeling increasingly divided, it is easy to lose any sense of wonder or appreciation for our fragile, fleeting existence. When we spoke with Sandbox Films about the upcoming 2024 solar eclipse, predicted to draw tens of millions across three countries, we imagined that this event might serve as a cinematic, emotional tonic for dark times. And so we began mapping out TOTALITY.

Kate Davis was raised around the topic of eclipses through her grandfather, Donald Menzel, a renowned solar astrophysicist and arguably the world's leading eclipse chaser in the 1970s. Menzel was mesmerized by the mysteries of the spheres in ways Kate recalls well. As we embarked on the film, we realized that the eclipse can have a powerful impact on anyone under

the sun. Astronomers, townspeople, and eclipse-chasers alike all spoke of the unsettling darkness of a total solar eclipse as evoking a potent mix of fear, astonishment, humility, and relief. And for many, it is a reminder of both our common humanity and our tiny stature in a grand universe.

How to capture this experience artistically? We chose to set human stories against a vast natural backdrop, combining observational cinema (wide, verité tableau shots inspired by doc film classics such as KOYAANISQUATSI, SAMSARA, ASCENSION) with more personal, individual dramas. As far as we could find, this hybrid cinematic style had no easy filmmaking template. And so our project grew into an experiment of sorts, knitting up close character-driven narratives with observational tableaux-style shooting, drone footage and expansive landscapes.

But because the moon's shadow takes five hours to cross North America, capturing the impact of totality posed substantial artistic and practical challenges. To create a seamless flow, we put 21 film teams through in depth zoom tutorials, and we created a detailed style book which outlined a unified artistic approach to framing, lens choice, and lighting. On eclipse day, our teams set out to their locations across the 3,500-mile path, and we let the day unfold.

To consider the broadest range of eclipse day footage, we also launched a crowdsource initiative, seeking personal reactions from eclipse watchers from across three countries. We received over 2,000 submissions, but found it was a gamble that yielded amazing moments, and highlighted the film's central theme regarding the commonality of humans, as a far-reaching cast of characters draws together for a shared experience.

The personal dramas, geographical range and crowdsourced footage build to TOTALITY's final sequence, where time and place merge in a kaleidoscopic finale, as if the eclipse is happening *simultaneously for everyone*.

We hope that TOTALITY is an invitation to witness not only something beautiful and positive, but help viewers recognize our tiny, amazing spot in the universe. As astro photographer Ian Lauer says in the film, while gazing up at the stars, "Space makes me feel more connected to people. We are all that we have."

FILMMAKERS BIOS

KATE DAVIS and DAVID HEILBRONER (co-directors and co-producers)

Kate Davis and David Heilbroner have made more than 20 documentaries with world distribution in theaters and on platforms including HBO, MTV, PBS American Experience, MSNBC, Paramount Plus, the History Channel, BBC, and ARTE.

Davis's film SOUTHERN COMFORT won over 25 festival awards, including the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, a Special Jury Award as the Berlinale, First Prize at Hot Docs and Seattle Film Festival, an NAACP Image Award and The Grierson Award in England for Best Documentary. David co-directed DIONE WARWICK: DON'T MAKE ME OVER, which was a centerpiece at the Toronto Film Festival.

Kate and David are 2017 Academy Award nominees for TRAFFIC STOP, which also won the Grand Jury Prize at DOC NYC. They directed and produced SAY HER NAME: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF SANDRA BLAND (NAACP Image Award), THE NEWBURGH STING (Peabody Award), JOCKEY (Emmy Award, Best Direction), STONEWALL UPRISING (Peabody Award), and SCOPES: THE BATTLE OVER AMERICA'S SOUL for the History Channel (EMMY Award).

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Derek Howard is a cinematographer whose work has screened at Venice, Berlinale, Telluride, Sundance, TIFF, SXSW, IDFA, among other festivals. He was a participant in the IDFA Summer School, IDFAcademy, Reykjavik International Film Festival's Trans Atlantic Talent Lab, Berlinale Talents, and the Playlab Filming in the Amazon residency with Apichatpong Weserthat.

Most recently, he shot Rodrigo Reyes hybrid feature "Dear Fatima," which won the best film, best direction, and audience awards at the 2026 Guadalajara Film Festival, and Raha Shirazi's Hotdocs premiering "A War on Women," a feature documentary about gender equality in Iran.

ABOUT SANDBOX FILMS:

Sandbox Films is an award-winning documentary studio that illuminates the art and beauty of scientific inquiry. Sandbox Films provides creative and financial support for artist-driven documentary projects that explore the world (and beyond) with curiosity, creativity and humanity. As a mission-focused, artist-first nonprofit, Sandbox Films is redefining the documentary genre. Founded in 2020, Sandbox Films' slate of critically acclaimed films includes Oscar-nominated FIRE OF LOVE; Sundance Jury Prize winners ALL LIGHT, EVERYWHERE and NOCTURNES; Werner Herzog's FIREBALL, Penny Lane's CONFESSIONS OF A GOOD SAMARITAN and Emmy-winning FATHOM; ANDRÉ IS AN IDIOT, winner of the 2025 US Documentary Audience Award and Jonathan Oppenheim Editing Award at Sundance and most recently THE LAKE, winner of the 2026 Sundance U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Impact for Change. Sandbox Films' documentaries have found extensive audiences via top streaming and distribution partners including Apple TV+, Hulu, National Geographic Documentary Films, NEON and Netflix, and in movie theaters internationally. Based in New York City, Sandbox collaborates with visionary filmmakers, scientists and production partners globally to celebrate a culture of questioning that invites nuance and imagination.

For more information visit: www.sandboxfilms.org

MAIN CREDITS

Directed, produced and edited by
Kate Davis and David Heilbroner

Executive Producer
Jessica Harrop

Executive Producer
Caitlin Mae Burke

Director of Photography
Derek Howard

Music Composed by
Troy Herion and J.,R. Narrows

Co-producer
Harrison Nir

Associate Producer
Marcus Wright