

Entertainment

## Filmmaker Ricardo Martinez screens work on infamous U.S. border wall

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By Donna Doherty, Register Arts Editor

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HAMDEN — Historically and poetically, walls have had their fair share of praise and criticism.

The taking down of one of them, the Berlin Wall in 1989, is probably the most infamous and widely reported events in our lifetime.

Filmmaker Ricardo Martinez has documented the story behind The Secure Fence Act — the building of the controversial wall that stretches 700 miles along the U.S. and Mexico border from Brownsville, Texas, to San Diego, prompting heated and continuing debate among Americans today .

He'll screen "The Wall" Monday at 7 p.m. at Quinnipiac University's Alumni Hall on the campus at 275 Mount Carmel Ave.

It's the first full-length feature documentary for the Oakland resident, who became intrigued with the subject when he was a film student at New York University's Tisch School as The Secure Fence Act bill made its way through Congress in 2006.

"... I was really surprised that the measure had gone so far so far below the radar ... I'm not really a political person. Quite frankly, I wasn't even paying attention to the politics. But once I saw a news article and the comments people were making on the record, I was really surprised. Being from California, a border state, I've been to Tijuana and Mexico, and realized the border had complex problems going on."

Martinez says his intent was to keep a dialogue going about the fence, not to take sides, not to pose the question, "Are you an open border guy or in favor of building a fence?"

He was surprised at some of the answers, because it was much more complicated and interesting than he thought — so much so that the project held his normal "short attention span" for three years. In conversations with border patrol officers, illegal immigrants, municipal administrators, immigration lawyers, homeowners, even tactical groups along the border, the one common thread was a need to secure the border.

"People are not against border security."

In fact, proponents of an open border "are few and far between," Martinez says. "Most people who live on the border still say they need to have something to deal with the drug war. ... They say we should spend money on boots on the ground troops. The universal statement from law enforcement is we need more funding."

He adds, "Border security is not something you debate, or you're looked upon as weak on national security. You can see

that from Obama and Clinton and even Bush, even though it was under the Bush administration that the bill was passed. Bush himself was a critic of the fence. It was not the final process in his eyes.”

Some feel the fence is to keep out illegal immigrants, some think it's to thwart illegal drug smuggling across the border.

But Martinez said that, according to border patrol officers, its actual purpose is to “slow the immigrants down 3-5 minutes to allow a border patrol officer to respond.”

The misconception is that tactically the border patrol has “asked or even searched for this, or that they look at this as a be-all, end-all solution. They will tell you that personnel is the No. 1 deterrent to keeping people from crossing the border.”

But that means money. Patrolling the fence comes under the aegis of the Department of Homeland Security. The conservative think tank Cato Institute has estimated the fence has already cost \$1.2 billion, but that figure is projected to rise as high as \$2 billion.

Why? Because property owners aren't happy with what the government wants to pay them for their land, and have filed civil suits against it.

Martinez says it's one of the most controversial aspects of the fence, which averages about 20 feet in height and varies in about seven different kinds of material, including concrete.

He uses the citizens of Granjeno, Texas, as an example.

“They were paying people something like \$3,000 for an acre of land,” he says. “If they paid free-market value, it could cost a quarter of a million dollars in some cases.”

Presently, there are 10 to 15 miles under dispute in civil cases.

Martinez, who won the Silver Spire Award as a 16-year-old documentarian at the San Francisco International Film Festival, has been showing the film mostly on college campuses, and has a few film festivals on his schedule, including Chicago's Latino Film Festival in the spring. That's between his work as a staff editor and motion graphics designer for, as his bio notes, “an ABC reality show that he's not supposed to name.”

There will be a Q&A session with Martinez will follow the screening.

For more information on the film, see the Web site [www.thewalldocumentary.com](http://www.thewalldocumentary.com).

Contact Donna Doherty at 203-789-5672 or [ddoherty@nhewhavenregister.com](mailto:ddoherty@nhewhavenregister.com).

## IF YOU GO

- Event: “The Wall”

- When: 7 p.m. Monday

- Where: Alumni Hall, Quinnipiac University,

275 Mount Carmel Ave., Hamden

- Admission: Free

- Info: 203-582-8652

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