



The Ballad of Esequiel Hernandez
Resource Page¹

In 1997, the U.S. government designated the small town of Redford, Texas as a major drug corridor. U.S. Marines were secretly deployed to the area of the border near Redford and took up a position close to a local river crossing to watch for smugglers. In 1989, President George H.W. Bush had authorized the deployment of thousands of troops to the U.S.-Mexico border as part of its strategy for the “War on Drugs.” On the evening of May 20, 1997, 18-year-old Esequiel Hernandez, a U.S. citizen, left his house in Redford to tend to his family’s goats. As usual, he took with him a .22 rifle to scare away wild dogs. Seeing the Marines in the distance and mistaking them for dogs, Hernandez fired two shots. The Marines proceeded to trail Hernandez believing that he was a drug smuggler, and eventually shot and killed him. Esequiel Hernandez planned on joining the Marines after high school.

The U.S.-Mexico border stretches for nearly 2,000 miles and is the most frequently crossed border in the world. In 2006, an estimated 46 million people entered the U.S. from Mexico on foot, 180 million in passenger cars, and about 3 million by commercial buses. The border is a politically charged region because of the impact of illegal immigration and drug trafficking on both national security and the economy. As the film poignantly illustrates, the border is also home to families and communities living on both sides (roughly 11.8 million people live in the U.S.-Mexico border area). Thus, the militarization of the border raises complicated political, social, and legal questions. In 1878, Congress passed the Posse Comitatus Act in order to limit the powers of the federal government to use the military for domestic law enforcement purposes. Shortly after the shooting of Esequiel Hernandez, the Clinton administration suspended all military activities along the border. However in 2006, President Bush ordered the return of troops to the region where efforts to secure the border focus on fence building (Secure Fence Act of 2006).

To learn more about the film and the issues it covers, please visit the following websites:

Film Website - <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/ballad/>

The Border Film Project - www.borderfilmproject.com

Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Posse_Comitatus_Act

Organizations

BorderLinks - www.borderlinks.org

Latin American Working Group - www.lawg.org

Washington Office on Latin America – www.wola.org

News Coverage

NPR story Life Along the U.S.-Mexico Border -<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5445168>

Bush ordering up to 6,000 in Guard to border - <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12796688/>

New Tactics to Control Immigration Unveiled -
http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/23/washington/23immig.html?_r=1&oref=slogin

¹ Special thanks to Anne Parsons for writing this background sheet.