Desert America: Boom and Bust in the New Old West

Rubén Martínez
Loyola Marymount University

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About the Author

A native of Los Angeles and the son and grandson of immigrants from Mexico and El Salvador, Rubén Martínez is a writer, performer and teacher. He holds the Fletcher Jones Chair in Literature and Writing at Loyola Marymount University, and is an artist in residence at Stanford University’s Institute for Diversity in the Arts. He is the author of Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail, The New Americans: Seven Families Journey to Another Country, and The Other Side: Notes from the New L.A., Mexico City and Beyond. His new book, Desert America: Boom and Bust in the New Old West is now available in hardcover from Metropolitan/Holt Books.

He is an Emmy-award winning journalist with two decades of experience in print, broadcast and online media. He hosted and co-wrote the feature-length documentary film, When Worlds Collide, shot on location throughout Latin American and Spain, for national PBS.

As a musician, he has collaborated with the likes of The Roches, Los Illegals and Concrete Blonde. A veteran of the spoken word and performance art scenes, he is the host of the VARIEDADES “performance salon” in Los Angeles, interdisciplinary shows that focus on topical themes.

About the Author’s Work

The economic boom—and the devastation left in its wake—has been writ nowhere as large as on the West, the most iconic of American landscapes. Over the last decade the West has undergone a political
and demographic upheaval comparable only to the opening of the frontier. Now, in Desert America, a work of powerful reportage and memoir, Rubén Martínez, acclaimed author of Crossing Over, evokes a new world of extremes: outrageous wealth and devastating poverty, sublime beauty and ecological ruin.

In northern New Mexico, an epidemic of drug addiction flourishes in the shadow of some of the country's richest zip codes; in Joshua Tree, California, gentrification displaces people and history. In Marfa, Texas, an exclusive enclave triggers a race war near the banks of the Rio Grande. And on the Tohono O'odham reservation, Native Americans hunt down Mexican migrants crossing the most desolate stretch of the border.

With each desert story, Martínez explores his own encounter with the West and his love for this most contested region. In the process, he reveals that the great frontier is now a harbinger of the vast disparities that are redefining the very idea of America.