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## Places

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A Wall Between Countries, A Bridge for People

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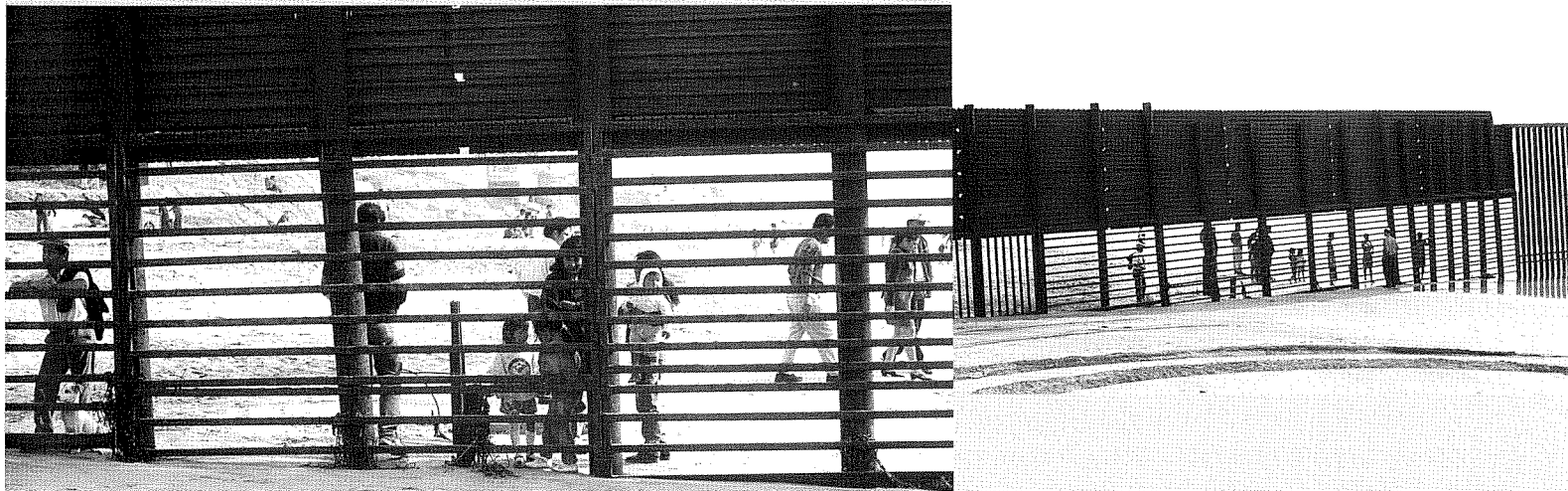
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René Carlos Davids, Christine Killory

Elements of Secularity

# A Wall Between Cou

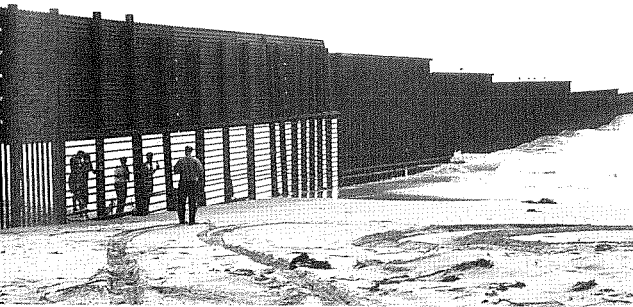


The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a wall as “a continuous and usually vertical solid structure, narrow in proportion to length and height, serving to enclose, protect or divide.” But walls can often generate the opposite forces; they can entice, invite one to cross or unite. Think of the Wailing Wall or the activities the Berlin Wall used to provoke.

The wall along the border between Mexico and the U.S. is not a single piece of construction. Along some stretches it is a metal skeleton or sheathed in corrugated metal; in other places it is made of chain link. White marble obelisks mark the border at regular intervals as it passes through the desert; metal bars define it at its western end. As the wall attempts to divide two distinct territories, the sand, tides, wind and people flocking to the wall come together.

The appeal of what cannot be reached because it is obstructed, the lure of what is forbidden or unreachable, is stronger when the reality beyond the wall is partially visible, veiled or screened. When not attempting to cross, people

# ntries, a Bridge for People



stream to the border to get a glimpse of the other side, to take photographs, to talk to each other and people on the opposite side, to watch for helicopters, INS vans or patrol boats. The militarization of the border has given it a cinematic quality.

The chronically troubled Mexican economy makes the U.S. – Mexico border at Tijuana-San Ysidro a permanent magnet for illegal crossers. Since political pressure to control immigration into the U.S. intensified, the preferred route of immigrants has moved eastward to the Sonoran Desert. At the western end of the wall, visual rather than physical transgression has become the norm. “Is that San Francisco?” asked a Mexican man through the bars, pointing to the distant skyline, his eyes gleaming.

The border wall has no architectural program, yet it generates intense activity. Crudely built, it is loaded with complex symbolism, more construct than construction. The wall reveals the power of an abstraction to create human environments. By dividing nations, it unites people.

The border wall at the Pacific Ocean (left) and near the San Ysidro–Tijuana crossing (above).  
Courtesy René Carlos Davids and Christine Killory.