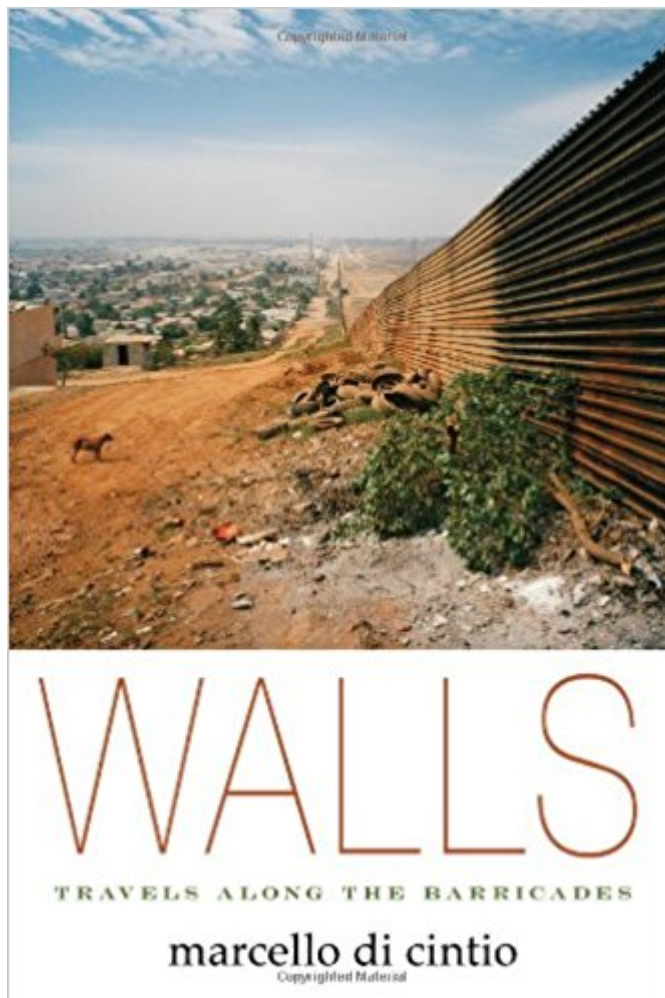


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# Walls: Travels Along The Barricades



## Synopsis

What does it mean to live against a wall? In this ambitious first person narrative, Marcello Di Cintio travels to the world's most disputed edges to meet the people who live alongside the razor wire, concrete, and steel and how the structure of the walls has influenced their lives. Di Cintio shares tea with Saharan refugees on the wrong side of Morocco's desert wall. He meets with illegal Punjabi migrants who have circumvented the fencing around the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. He visits fenced-in villages in northeast India, walks Arizona's migrant trails, and travels to Palestinian villages to witness the protests against Israel's security barrier. From Native American reservations on the U.S.-Mexico border and the Great Wall of Montreal to Cyprus's divided capital and the Peace Lines of Belfast, Di Cintio seeks to understand what these structures say about those who build them and how they influence the cultures that they pen in. He learns that while every wall fails to accomplish what it was erected to achieve; the walls are never solutions; each wall succeeds at something else. Some walls define Us from Them with Medieval clarity. Some walls encourage fear or feed hate. Some walls steal. Others kill. And every wall inspires its own subversion, either by the infiltrators who dare to go over, under, or around them, or by the artists who transform them.

## Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Soft Skull Press (August 20, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 159376524X

ISBN-13: 978-1593765248

Product Dimensions: 1 x 6.5 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #204,474 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #107 in [Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Historical Geography](#) #363 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Emigration & Immigration](#) #509 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Human Geography](#)

## Customer Reviews

Even as technology and globalization promise the destruction of barriers internationally, nations, regions, cities, and nationalities continue to erect walls and barriers to separate themselves from

“others” of all types. Di Cintio offers a tour of walls and barriers of stone, steel, brick, and other materials in this first-person exploration of walls as impressions of power and will, isolation and protection. From the Middle East to the Americas, Di Cintio ponders why societies build walls and the impact on populations on both sides of them. He offers character sketches of individuals and nations—Palestinian villagers protesting Israel’s security barrier, Mexicans diligently penetrating the U.S. border in Arizona, illegal immigrants circumventing the barriers to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta in North Africa. Those who would penetrate a barrier risk life and limb for a chance at advancement, while the protectors often go “medieval” to keep them out. Di Cintio offers historic perspective from the Great Wall of China to the Roman emperor Hadrian’s wall across what became Britain and from the Maginot Line to the Berlin Wall. An engaging look at the meaning of walls. --Vanessa Bush

“A travelogue that takes the Canadian writer along the frontiers, barricades, and peace lines that give lie to claims of a more-connected globe; Di Cintio is eloquent about the psychology of barriers.”—Wall Street Journal  
“Di Cintio (Poets and Pahlevans: A Journey into the Heart of Iran, 2006, etc.) leads a whirlwind tour of the world, looking at the unlikely places where the human mania for erecting barriers has shown itself; Solid journalism that takes readers into cheerless, contested places they probably would not wish to see for themselves. An eye-opener.”—Kirkus  
“An intriguing journey around the world’s walls; Di Cintio uses his explorations as way of thinking about unresolved conflicts. He is at his best when he makes the trip into an adventure, running the Sahara marathon, collecting smugglers’ stories worthy of the Polish master-traveller Ryszard Kapuscinski.”—The London Times  
“He writes well, unpicking some of the world’s trouble spots in spare and lucid prose; Di Cintio has a sympathetic ear and an eye on the long, slow melancholy of divided spaces.”—Literary Review  
“...illuminating, brilliantly composed; Di Cintio’s book is a travel book that takes its readers through many countries and gives them a sense of what it is like to live on one side of a wall and to experience the fragmentation and destruction of the landscape of one’s country. He writes with passion and empathy for the victims of those monstrous walls that take no account of how they affect the human beings living next to them.”—The Financial Times  
“His wide-ranging narrative mixes geopolitical background with first-hand accounts of dispiriting individual experiences in squalid refugee camps; Di Cintio’s journeys successfully articulate the diminishing, humiliating effect of the walls on

those who have no choice but to push against them. [Sunday Telegraph](#); [I don't feel] ... Di Cintio justifies his upbeat claim, at the end, that 'the urge to tear down barriers is a stronger impulse than the urge to build them.' But what he does do, bravely and forcefully, and with impressive commitment, is to bear witness to the pain and suffering of people who live in the shadow of separation barriers. [The Guardian](#); What's it like having a physically massive, politically symbolic barrier for a neighbor? That's the question posted by this deftly written travelogue, which drops into settlements in Israel, Northern Ireland, Mexico and more to paint stark portraits of life beside some of the world's most notorious reinforced borders. [Time Out UK](#); An ambitious investigation of the globalized world's underbelly. [Metro UK](#); Di Cintio immerses himself in his chosen locations, providing historical background and rich reportage of the many social and political realities of being walled in (or out). What emerges is a collection of interrelated vignettes full of dense description and fascinating characters that give the reader a true sense of place; it is a deeply humane, honest, and even cautious account of an outsider who seeks as much as possible to understand local contexts. [Quill and Quire](#) (starred review); Marcello Di Cintio is one of the best travel writers of his generation. In *Walls*, he tells compelling and engrossing stories with his customary mix of vivid detail, a strong sense of history, a lovely sense of humor and, above all, a fascination with the human race in all its contradictions. [Margaret MacMillan](#), bestselling author of *Dangerous Games*, *Nixon and Mao*, and *Paris 1919* and Warden of St Antony's College, Oxford University "I've never bought the divisive notion that good fences make for good neighbors. But one thing's for sure: Walls make for great stories; something Marcello di Cintio richly demonstrates in this energetically researched and beautifully recounted work of reportage." [Taras Grescoe](#), author of *Straphanger and Bottomfeeder* "Di Cintio explores eight political hot spots; zones where walls split terrain, people and minds. With admirable legwork and vivid prose, he discovers that these walls and the communities living along both sides of them are sights of fear, illness and suspicion, but also sights of solidarity, storytelling and intense creativity. This journey is his method of engagement, and in reading it he implicates us in the tensions and suppressed ambitions of these divided societies." [Moez Surani](#), author of *Floating Life*; As Robert Frost's front-porch adage has it, 'Good fences make good neighbors.' Well, not only would Di Cintio disagree, but he also has an honest, compassionate, and expertly written counter-argument. *Walls* is the kind of non-fiction you might call eye-opening, since it features Di Cintio travelling to all kinds of barricades around the world and interviewing the disparate

people who live in their shadows. But he actually engages many more parts of the body than that – the brain and the heart both come to mind. – Edmonton Journal, 5 Favorites of 2012; [A] tour de force of reportage; Di Cintio writes vividly, conscientiously, compassionately, and, in his concluding paragraphs, optimistically in spite of all he has witnessed – for he has also witnessed moments of beauty, courage, and art. His readers are the beneficiaries. – Alberta Views; [Di Cintio] observes and reports tirelessly, then makes powerful and poetic connections between all that he has seen and heard. Walls is a moving and extremely engaging book, a reminder of the constant thrum of hope amid so many man-made obstacles. – Canadian Geographic; Marcello Di Cintio's new book is exactly the kind of non-fiction I adore most. It's ambitious, intensely personal, and uses one basic idea as the jump-off point for tackling all kinds of fascinating issues along the periphery. – The Edmonton Journal

A compelling, personal, historical-journalistic tale that ushers you alongside the author to meet, speak with and experience the lives of those living in the shadow of some of the world's most notorious divides. It's a very appropriate book to be reading in our modern political age. With touches of humor, poetic insights and grace, Di Cintio wants you to feel what it's like to meet walls that are meant to keep people apart – through the voices and stories of some who live beside them. What do they share in common? What are their differences? And why do we keep building walls, at all? This book fascinated, inspired, and humbled me. I am better for reading it, and suggest you do too.

Another look at walls, but not just the usual suspects. There is some fantastic storytelling in these accounts, whether they be the dramas of wall-climbers or the testimonies of people whose lives are divided by political barriers.

This book made me aware of walls I did not know about and made me feel in part, as a human being, responsible to let them stay. Let us bring them down!

Do not quote Robert Frost's "Good fences make good neighbors" to Marcello Di Cintio. When he was working on his book *Walls: Travels Along the Barricades* (Soft Skull Press), he avoided mentioning his project of visiting walled-off nations and cities and neighborhoods, because every time he did, someone would quote that line and it "made me want to scream." Still, if you needed

evidence that "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," his book bountifully provides it. People have built walls for as long as they have been building anything. The Emperor Hadrian is remembered for nothing else besides building a wall across Roman Britain in the first century CE. Scholars now think that it had little utility in keeping people in or out, and was nothing but "a theatrical expression of imperial power." The walls Di Cintio visited all have this trait, while they tend to fail in their ostensible primary missions of stopping the transfer of violence or smuggled goods or job applicants or freedom-seekers. At some level, governments must think the walls are worth the show, because they spend millions on building and maintaining them. Di Cintio has traveled to eight different wall sites to try to find out what is really going on, and to see what the walls really accomplish. It's a travel book with a mission, to show what it is like to live near a wall and how the walls fracture communities and understanding. As he points out in his introduction, globalization, international markets, easy electronic communication, multinational corporations, and even global terror networks "are nationless and borderless and care nothing about the lines we draw on our maps and fortify with steel. And yet the walls continue to rise..." Di Cintio's sentiments are always with the oppressed people that have to endure the walls, and he has many happy traveler's tales to give us about hospitality or culinary surprises. But he also tells us of the tear-gassed riots he experiences in Palestine, or the bonfire riots in Belfast. In Belfast is a situation Di Cintio has seen in other walled communities: "Only those who couldn't afford to live anywhere else - the poor, the elderly, the infirm - lived on the interfaces. Rents were cheaper along the fortified lines because no one wanted to be there." Walls seem only to alter, and worsen, the situations they were erected to solve. Di Cintio finds people who can't do anything about their walls, so they try to turn them into something else. There are graffiti artists who decorated the West Bank wall between Palestine and Israel, and they did not do it just for propaganda or for esthetics. The Send A Message project would take your thirty Euros, spray your message onto the wall, photograph it, and send you a picture. The messages were far from inflammatory, and most were simply frivolous, like "Hey, Ruby, let's get married," or ads for blogs or rock bands. The money funded a Palestinian youth center. Then there is musician Glenn Weyant, who says of the wall at the U.S. / Mexico border, "Some say it is a fence. Some say it is a wall. I say it is an instrument," a 2,000 mile-long musical instrument. He proves it by putting microphones on it and drumming on different parts of it. Di Cintio visits as well the wall between Nicosia and Lefkosa, and Ceuta and Melilla, and others. (His book could use some maps.) He even finds a wall where one might least expect it, near his home town of MontrÃ©al. There's a two-kilometer fence that separates the affluent town Mont Royal from its poor neighbors in Parc-Extension. It has stood for fifty years, supposed to keep out the riff-raff, but it

is permeable. While other walls in the book are scaled by those in search of freedom or better lives, at Halloween "... Parc-X kids crossed their Wall in search of better candy." This is one of the book's many amusing moments, and Di Cintio is a charming and entertaining writer. The overall effect of all these walls is sad, though. What he says of one wall could stand for the others: "Instead of addressing the despair that leads migrants across our borders, we build a wall. The walls admit our defeat. We throw up a wall right after we throw up our hands."

Walls is an engaging and compelling read about a difficult subject. The first person narrative really takes you to all of the great walls and borders of the world and gives a visceral experience of what life there is like. Completely absorbing and totally relevant.

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