

August 6, 2004

LETTERS TO THE TIMES

Walling Ourselves Off From the Community

Re "Gates Make Bad Neighbors," editorial, Aug 3: Southern California's love for gated communities has grown quite naturally out of a long history of walls along property lines separating single-family homes. If contractors didn't build the walls, homeowners shared the cost of their construction, often with rifts between them that were never mended.

Robert Frost wrote, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." That "something" has affected us as neighbors. Rarely do we introduce ourselves to new neighbors with a plate of brownies; and how often do we learn, from out-of-state residents, that it took them a year or more to make friends outside (and not with their neighbors), and to feel at home here.

Now we have extended those gates from our property lines to entire developments with uniformed guards — for security, we say. What is not spoken aloud are status and exclusion of "others." Shame on our elected officials for legal exclusions that prevent and deter citizens from access to public areas supported by public funds. Let's open those gates and in the process become better neighbors.

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I commend The Times for its coverage and support of the opposition to the proposed closure of a public street that provides crucial access to the Santa Monica Mountains. The proposed closure or restricted hours of entry is an affront to the notion of public access to public lands.

It is unfortunate that issues like this need to be brought before the bright glare of the media. A meeting last week coordinated by Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski's office was not advertised to all concerned parties. Elected officials and public agencies should represent all their constituents and provide assistance to all, not just a select few with their narrow and selfish agendas.

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