

Wall in the Minds

An Oral History of the Rise and Fall
of the Berlin Wall



The John F. Kennedy School Oral History Project

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and Fall of the Berlin Wall**

**Edited and Published by Daniel Aaron Lazar
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Dedication

The John F. Kennedy School Berlin Wall Oral History Project is humbly dedicated to all of the lives that were impacted by the Berlin Wall. In particular, this book is dedicated to the interviewees who were willing to share their memories of living in a divided country.

Further, this book is dedicated to my students. Their devotion to this project reflects their insatiable curiosity and their thirst for knowledge. I applaud their efforts.

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The interviewees for sharing their thoughts and memories.

Preface: Method and Process

Oral history is the dynamic process of gathering and preserving historical perspectives through recorded interviews. This method of historical inquiry gives a voice to people who have been hidden from history and provides researchers with a forum to speak with history face to face.

The John F. Kennedy School Berlin Wall Oral History Project is the culmination of the efforts of fifty students. Each of the students in my two tenth grade history classes played a role in the creation of this book. Thirty students conducted, recorded and transcribed extensive interviews with Germans who lived in a divided country. They interviewed individuals from various backgrounds and encountered a diversity of experiences and perspectives. In all, their interviews amount to over 250 pages of raw qualitative data (the full text of the interviews is available at www.daniellazar.com). Adding to this data bank, four students took on the responsibility of gathering quantitative information. These quantitative researchers, armed with the knowledge that numbers can speak volumes, provided the charts, graphs and maps used in the book. Another four students compiled archival photographs of divided Berlin. One student created a video documentary which, through interviews with student participants, offers valuable insights into the process undertaken for this project. Finally, eight students wrote this book. These students synthesized the data gathered by their classmates with published works in order to create a scholarly oral history text. Their collaboration was nothing short of beautiful, their sacrifices are the lifeblood of this endeavor and I admire their devotion.

It has been my responsibility, as the editor of the John F. Kennedy School Berlin Wall Oral History Project, to facilitate a student-directed effort by encouraging and coordinating their efforts. This book is for and by my students and my objective was to support them in bringing forth the voices of those who stood in the shadow of the Berlin Wall. What stands before the reader is the culmination of the efforts of conscientious, compassionate and curious tenth grade students.

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Table of Contents

I. A Tale of Two Cities Sarah Clark & Kerrick Hesse	11
II. Dissent and Revolt: Walls Don't Just Fall Jana John & Morgan Reed-Parker.....	31
III. 9 November 1989 Rebekah Serio & Paul Wolter.....	49
IV. Defining Unity: Challenges Ahead Nicholas Anania & Anna Zychlinsky.....	61
Bibliography.....	75

Chapter One:

A Tale of Two Cities

Sarah Clark & Kerrick Hesse

Introduction

Nikita Khrushchev, former First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, once expressed, “Berlin is the testicle of the West. When I want the West to scream, I squeeze on Berlin.” This candid confession provides a vivid description of the 1948-1949 Berlin Blockade, a desperate attempt by the Soviets to suffocate the Allies’ initiative to form a West German government. Even before this drastic measure, insurmountable differences between the East and West, especially in their political ideologies, kept them in a constant state of tension over the future of an already war-torn Germany. This deadlock forced the demarcation lines in post-World War II Germany to become a durable characteristic of its political geography, although it was unanimously decided at the July 1945 Potsdam Conference that Germany was to be only temporarily divided into four occupation zones with Berlin, an enclave in the Soviet sector, to be governed jointly by the Allied Powers.



Divided Germany: The Four Sectors

The fall of the Third Reich called for a delicate coalition of powers, which sacrificed Germany’s unity and tore it into two states. The stage was then set for the two Germanys to drift away from each other. However, the religious, political and social repression in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) quickly made the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) an oasis of freedom. This stimulated a daily exodus from the East to the West through the open border in Berlin, fostering a “brain drain” in the East German economy.

Under these circumstances and due to mounting pressure from Walter Ulbricht, former First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), Khrushchev delivered the Berlin Ultimatum in 1958, demanding that West Berlin become a demilitarized “free city.” Throughout the following three years, a military confrontation between the East and West over the Berlin question seemed imminent until in a desperate effort to stop the population hemorrhage, the Eastern Regime initiated the construction of the Berlin Wall, on 13 August 1961.¹ Though this radical solution reduced the chances of a third world war and became a blessing in disguise for the East and West, it was fundamentally the outcome of failed diplomacy and, in the end, it caused unfathomable hardships. The postwar political and economic fragmentation of Germany led scholars and citizens of Berlin to conclude the partition of Berlin was a necessary, proper and desperate response to a seemingly hopeless global conundrum. In spite of this inevitability hypothesis, the formal division of Berlin was largely the outcome of the failures of Eastern and Western diplomatic policies, both of which were designed to foster mutually exclusive hegemony. This ultimately tore the fragile social fabric of Berlin apart, tormenting West and, in particular, East Berliners.

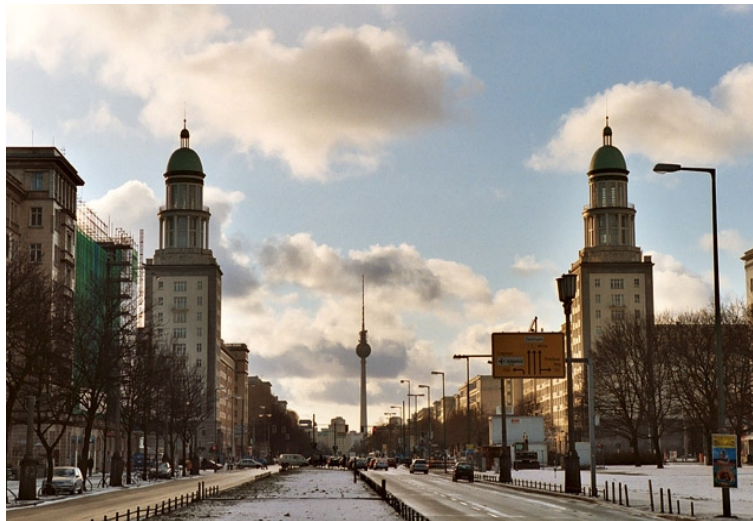
The Wall as a Blessing

The establishment of a two-state Germany, as well as conflicting political and economic ideologies hardened the division of Berlin, making the Berlin Wall a viable and indispensable initiative. The Potsdam consensus among Churchill, Stalin and Truman— wherein the Allied victors were to govern Germany collaboratively—led to inevitable differences and a stalemate abruptly developed. For example, the Soviets set socialization of industry as their primary goal, while the West introduced modest economic reforms, including the dismantling of large conglomerates and the privatization of state-owned enterprises. A four-power agreement was therefore not promising and by 1949 there were two distinct economic and political regions, Trizonia (a tripartite pact between France, Britain and the USA) and the Soviet zone. Thus, in the four years following the collapse of the Third Reich, Germany became a segregated country, with each side having its own economic, political and judicial system. This fragmentation fostered the rise of two governments (the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic), both of which demonstrated little dedication to the pledge of reunifying Germany and Berlin.¹

The far more liberal and democratic regime, The Federal Republic held elections in which an array of legitimate parties campaigned fairly for political power. The economic ministers of the FRG, notably Ludwig Erhard, advocated welfare-state capitalism (*Soziale Marktwirtschaft*), which encouraged individual initiative and productivity through the prospect of profit. This spawned an “economic miracle” that financed a revival of Germany’s rich cultural heritage. Especially after the Third Reich, which suppressed politically subversive arts,

the prospect of more freedom catalyzed cultural revitalization. For example, orchestral concerts and theatrical productions took place again and jazz performances and varied displays of abstract art increased significantly.¹

In stark contrast, the manipulated electoral system in the GDR did not cultivate a democratic environment where voters could exercise a choice. In the early postwar years of war-weary Germany, the Soviets employed the “popular front” tactic, which urged cooperation between liberals, social democrats and communists. A compulsory coalition with the communists ensued and since the first balloting in 1950, elections acquired the purpose of reaffirming the SED’s dominance in the GDR. Socialization of the economy as well as stringent constraints in the cultural sphere, using Stalinist methods, were the defining characteristics of this new regime. The League of Culture, initially dedicated to encouraging innovation, quickly became agents of thought control. The East German government reflected the Soviet craft of “socialist realism” where artists and writers were forced to integrate themes of idealism and working class optimism into their work. This new form of repression even grasped East German architecture, as the construction of the Stalinallee in East Berlin reflected the Soviet “wedding cake” style.¹ These fundamental differences in economic, political and cultural views between the East and West made a four-power government in Berlin unattainable and the construction of the Berlin Wall became a desperate measure to stabilize East German politics and society.



Stalinallee, now Karl-Marx Allee, in the wedding-cake style

However these disparities were not solely responsible for the Wall’s construction. Developments in the Allied administration of Berlin from 1948 to 1949 not only stimulated the incipient Cold War, they also aggravated the establishment of a solid division in Berlin. With the British and Americans agreeing that their occupation zones could no longer remain in a limbo, a six-nation London Conference assembled in 1948 to discuss the formation of a West

German government. The Russians reacted harshly by imposing a blockade over Berlin and by consistently harassing its democratically elected government. In addition, they established a SED-dominated puppet government in their sector which aimed to subjugate West Berlin.¹ It also fostered an economic split between East and West Berlin, as services including the S-Bahn had to be reconstructed on an east-west zonal basis. The immediate effect of these developments was the intensification of a political and economic impasse, which rendered a unified government in Berlin politically infeasible.² This impasse stifled the settlement of the Berlin dispute, to say nothing of the larger German question. In light of the Cold War paradigm, any compromise between the two separate governments did not represent a viable alternative because it would likely have been perceived as a sign of weakness. According to Raimo Mitschke, who was born in West Berlin and is now an attaché of the US Embassy in Berlin, the Wall was therefore “the lesser of two evils” and it provided a solution to a national and potentially global stalemate.

The failure of negotiations between East and West German governments over a new four-power currency reform similarly deepened the partition in Berlin and called for the rise of the Berlin Wall. During the London Conference the Western powers authorized the extension of the Marshall Plan (a \$13 billion post-war economic recovery package for Western Europe spearheaded by U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall) to their zones in Germany and the Americans subsequently launched “Operation Bird Dog,” which introduced a new currency with the prospect of connecting West Germany to the Western European economy.³ This was the prerequisite to the desired economic revival and consolidation of the Western zones, as the old currency underwent severe inflation, losing virtually all value. The Soviets, however, objected persistently and claimed this significant decision violated the clause of the Potsdam agreements, which required unanimous approval by all Allied powers.¹ “[Soviet] retaliatory action took the form of further tightening of the Berlin blockade and [involved] conversion of Soviet eastern mark to a new currency.”² At the same time, a four-power currency reform was not a viable option because such a concession could not be implemented by two governments with two opposing economic philosophies.² Ultimately, mutual suspicions regarding intentions in currency reforms intensified the division between East and West Germany. Amidst this economic segregation, Berlin was not able to operate as a united city and a solid division appeared increasingly necessary.

Under a repressive Stalinist regime, East Germans felt a burgeoning dissatisfaction and used Berlin’s special status to gain entry into the West, thus making the Berlin Wall a seemingly necessary measure to ensure stability in the East. After a party conference of the SED in 1952, General Secretary of the SED Central Committee, Walter Ulbricht, embarked on a hard-line course to promote East German industrial growth. These new policies, though successful in

augmenting industry, failed to tend to the needs of farmers. Food shortages ensued as many farmers abandoned their land for the West. Although the East German regime was ordered by the Kremlin to lessen its harsh rule, it stubbornly upheld its unrealistic production quotas.

This led to the tumultuous uprising of 17 June 1953 where East Germans openly confronted the communist regime through a succession of strikes. After it was suppressed, a “New Course” was instituted by Ulbricht’s regime. Although this new plan initially offered more political and cultural leeway, economic priorities quickly took precedence and the cultural and intellectual spheres were again repressed. This catalyzed the exodus to the West through the open borders in Berlin. In 1960 alone, 200,000 people officially registered in West Germany as refugees from the East.¹ In response, the Ulbricht regime shifted its wrath on to West Berlin because the exodus was “brain draining” the Eastern economy. However, the migration of the Eastern population could not be impeded. From the collapse of the Third Reich until the desperate construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, over two and a half million people abandoned the communist cause in the East for the comparatively prosperous West.⁴

1949 (after Sept.)	129,245
1950	197,788
1951	165,648
1952	182,393
1953	331,390
1954	184,198
1955	252,870
1956	279,189
1957	261,622
1958	204,092
1959	143,917
1960	199,188
1961 (1.1-15.8)	159,730
Total	2,691,270

Registered Refugees from the Eastern Sector
Source: The Berlin Wall, Division of a City⁵

The Wall’s erection was justified as a means to stabilize a deteriorating Eastern economy, although the GDR claimed it was an “anti-fascist, protective wall” designed to prevent a capitalist-imperialist infiltration from the West.¹ Though arguably rational, this decision was highly debatable as Berlin’s partition was fundamentally the result of inadequate and substandard diplomacy between the Allied powers.

Failure of Diplomacy, Failure to Unite Germany

From the very outset, self-serving negotiations between the Allies sacrificed German unity and the well-being of Berlin. During the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences of 1945, the powers discussed a diverse array of occupation arrangements. A four-power Allied Control Council was instituted with the purpose of governing Germany as one economic entity, although executive authority was still granted to the occupation powers in their respective zones. These arrangements were provisional until a final peace conference could meet, but insurmountable differences quickly developed. As a result, the peace conference was rendered insignificant and the temporary demarcation lines quickly became a durable aspect of Germany's political geography. Under these circumstances Germany's unity continued to deteriorate as foreign ministers of the wartime alliance consistently failed to move toward a more rational and forward-thinking peace settlement. This called for the establishment of Bizonia, an economic amalgamation of the British and American zones in 1947 and, ultimately, the formation of two separate republics, the FRG and the GDR.¹

Lacking the initiative to assemble for a concluding peace settlement, the involved countries were in fact tending to their own self-interests. These circumstances made Berlin subject to a division that called for the rise of the Berlin Wall. The reason for its construction was not so much a fundamental discrepancy between Allied powers, but rather a failure to negotiate these differences effectively. This ham-fisted diplomacy also manifested in the controversial merger between the SPD and KPD in the Soviet zone.

The manipulated construction of the SED from the Communist Party (KPD) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the Soviet zone prevented Germany's politicians from coming together on their own terms to determine its political destiny. After the Soviets formally accepted the establishment of the KPD in their zone, their close ties became a handicap for the KPD and it quickly lost popularity among the German citizens. This problem was likewise demonstrated in the first postwar national election in another former Russian occupied state, Austria, where the Austrian Communist Party won a meager 5% percent of the votes. Fearing a similar outcome, the German Communists hastily enforced a merger with the KPD and the SPD, and although the SPD's leadership remained suspicious of the KPD's deference to Stalin's totalitarian regime, mounting pressure made the amalgamation inescapable. The German Communists therefore gained influence and the SED consistently won majorities in Soviet zone provincial elections.¹

Another problem resultant from the tenuous political situation between the SPD and KPD emerged at the Munich Conference in 1947 where minister-

presidents of the German states assembled to promote a possible German reunification. During this summit, Social Democratic leaders from the Western zones refused to negotiate with their counterparts from the SED, demanding that the SPD be allowed to operate independently in the Soviet zone. A compromise could not be achieved and another attempt at German reunification was lost.¹ The contentious merger between the SPD and KPD demonstrates how deficient diplomacy further divided Germany and ultimately Berlin. Even the most astute and influential politicians failed to unite and agree on Germany's, and subsequently Berlin's political destiny during the 1947 assembly of minister-presidents in Munich. The Berlin Wall was therefore largely the outcome of failed negotiations between the victors. The following year, the Berlin Blockade represented more examples of aggressive (and regressive) diplomacy.

The 1948-1949 Berlin Blockade was imposed by the Soviets to curtail the solidification of a West German state and encouraged the rise of the Berlin Wall. With the West implementing decisive initiatives to introduce currency reform and to consolidate their zones through a new West German government, the Soviets employed aggressive measures, instituting a blockade over West Berlin.

Railways, highways and canals which had acted as Berlin's lifeline were quickly sealed off. Power plants situated in the Soviet zone cut off the supply to West Berlin. Military units of the Western powers were aggressively restricted to their respective zones. Under these circumstances a third world war seemed imminent. However, the Western allies, determined to suppress this possibility, and at the same time not concede to such aggression, launched the Berlin Airlift (Operation Vittles). WWII bombers were remobilized and the Allies put the potential of modern air transport to the test. For example, one plane reached West Berlin every 30 seconds in the climax of this operation. It quickly became evident that the Soviet's attempt to coerce a Western capitulation had failed and the Berlin Blockade was consequently lifted on 12 May 1949.⁷ Paradoxically, this blockade was imposed by the Soviets to promote German reunification, however, it only reinforced the need to separate West Germany as well as West Berlin from the Soviet zone. The close cooperation between the Western Allies in the Berlin Airlift also fostered this partition. It was primarily the aggressive diplomacy of the Soviets that sacrificed Berlin's unity and pushed for a solid division.

Month	US		British		Total	
	Flights	Tonnages	Flights	Tonnages	Flights	Tonnages
26.06-31.07	8,117	41,188	5,919	29,053	14,036	70,241
August	9,796	73,632	8,252	45,002	18,048	118,634
September	12,905	101,871	6,682	36,556	19,587	138,427
October	12,139	115,793	5,943	31,245	18,082	147,038
November	9,046	87,963	4,305	24,629	13,351	112,592
December	11,655	114,572	4,834	26,884	16,489	141,456
January	14,089	139,223	5,396	32,739	19,485	171,962
February	12,051	120,404	5,043	31,846	17,094	152,250
March	15,530	154,480	6,627	41,686	22,157	196,166
April	19,129	189,972	6,896	45,405	26,025	235,377
May	19,365	192,247	8,352	58,547	27,717	250,794
June	18,451	182,722	8,049	57,602	26,545	240,324

Monthly Tonnages delivered by Allies in 1948-49 Berlin Blockade

Source: Berlin Airlift ⁶

The inadequate negotiations between John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev were also stimuli for the rise of the Berlin Wall. Khrushchev and Kennedy, blinded by the pressures of the nascent Cold War milieu, engaged in heated and counter-productive diplomacy that ultimately made a solid division in Berlin necessary. Their mutual prejudices became handicaps for negotiations, and this stymied any initiative towards an agreement between the countries. For example, Kennedy “had been warned that Khrushchev was likely to talk tough” and to make negotiations difficult.⁸ Khrushchev, on the other hand, viewed Kennedy’s replacement of Eisenhower as a constructive change in American politics. He believed the Berlin question could be resolved quickly. To Khrushchev’s dismay, Kennedy chose to act against the communist insurgence in Cuba, leading to the notorious Bay of Pigs incident. This CIA failure and the ensuing media fiasco rendered Kennedy weak and, in Khrushchev’s eyes, made him “no match for Eisenhower anymore.”⁸ Their mutual prejudices led to inadequate and unsatisfactory negotiations over the Berlin question. They were on opposite sides of the river and neither of them were willing to cross in fear of being stranded, which led to tragic results. Khrushchev threatened with the Berlin Ultimatum. Kennedy retaliated and remarked, “we seek peace, but we shall not surrender.”⁸ Their exaggerated views of each other hindered more efficacious negotiations, thus making a solid division in Berlin inevitable. Both leaders’ stubbornness, their need to save face and their mutual fear of looking weak thwarted their relationship. This led to Kennedy strengthening America’s military presence in Berlin, Khrushchev delivering the Berlin Ultimatum, and, in the end, the rise of the Berlin Wall. Had they altered the tone and the content of the peace talks, said developments could have been prevented. The evident discord between Kennedy and Khrushchev divided an already suffering city—and innocent people became prisoners.

Splitting of a City, Splitting of Lives

Once the Wall was erected, it fulfilled its role of keeping the skilled and educated East Berliners out of the West, however it also severed family ties and friendships. The partition sacrificed the unity that Berliners longed for, and pain and anguish ensued. Although the crossing of the border was illegal for two years before the Wall, the actual physical construction of the Wall was a final and absolute answer to the escapee problem. This radical decision had massive repercussions.

In 1948 West Berliners were allowed to visit East Berlin for a total of 30 days per year. This restricted travel opportunity left many people distraught. The inability to visit family was a significant cause for this distress, especially during the Christmas season. Willi Kundra was born in 1933 and completed high school in 1954 at a French school in the French sector of West Berlin. Soon after the Wall was erected, he became pastor in the GDR, near Neu-Ruppin. Kundra stated, "for me it was naturally difficult especially during the vacation and holiday times when I could not go to the West anymore." Desperately seeking to see their family and friends, many Berliners conspired with their acquaintances in neighboring countries to bypass the travel restrictions. Claudia Himmelreich, who was born in Magdeburg (East Germany) and worked as an East German government translator in the 1980's, commented, "we were allowed to travel to socialist countries. Only Yugoslavia was not considered reliable, so we were not allowed to go there." The opportunity for West Berliners to visit the East was gladly accepted; however these visits were quite limited. These occasions resulted in extensive lines snaking past Friedrichstrasse and the infamous *Traenenpalast* (also known as The Palace of Tears). "It was called the crying palace because it was the part when you said good-bye to friends when they left the Eastern part," says Manfred Puche, who was born in East Berlin in 1956 and whose family moved to Baden-Württemberg (West Germany) in 1960.

With mobility restricted and the risk of Westward escape prohibitive, Khrushchev tried to keep East German employees at work. Perhaps neither Khrushchev nor Ulbricht saw the suffering caused by the Wall. Perhaps they did see the suffering but were able to justify this blatant violation of human dignity insofar as it seemed consistent with Stalin's assertion that a revolution cannot be made with silk gloves. In constructing the Wall, Khrushchev caused pain and awakened festering desires to leave the East. Each person was affected as most Berliners had family members on the other side of the Wall.

In particular the division of families seemed to have a profound impact on the German populace. "In September 1961, relatives and friends suddenly could have been living on the moon."⁵ Many families who were separated never saw

each other again or were only allowed to see each other when one of the four permit agreements was in effect. As Himmelreich states, “I never even got to know that part of my family living in the West.” Germans suffered a cavernous void as families were simply split apart. One of the only exceptions was that the elderly could visit the West. Manfred Puche speaks to this by telling of how, “only my grandmother could come to us in the West because she was 70 years old and when people are about 70 or 65, they can come just once a year to visit the Western part. [They were allowed to visit because] all those old people only cost the Eastern government money.” Barring the young and the skilled from crossing to the West severed family ties as a means to bring triumph to the GDR. The Soviets exploited this partition and aimed to demonstrate the glories of communism. They successfully reduced the rates of skilled workers escaping; however, they seemed blind to the reasons for which workers wanted to leave. A more humane solution must have been achievable.

Death, Destruction, Escape

Despite their pain and anguish, even despite the ceaseless lethal attempts to flee Westward, East Germans stuck together. West Germans perceived the Easterners to have a stronger unity. Karen Blaesing, who works at the American Embassy in Berlin and was raised West Berlin concludes, “East Berliners had a stronger...togetherness. You know how it is when people have the same problem, they all stick together.”

The escape attempts came in numerous shapes and sizes, ranging from full-speed attempts through the border posts to elaborate, secretive tunnel missions. Although the stories of those who made it through are told countless times in the folklore, myth and legend of the Wall, the deaths of those who did not make it are only truly told by the grief and the wreathes hung in Berlin today. According to the Berlin Tourism Bureau, “accurate information on the exact number of people who died at the Berlin Wall and on the lives and the precise date of death of all the victims is still not available.”⁹ In August 2005 the *Verein Berliner Mauer* (Organization of the Berlin Wall) and the *Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam* (Center of Historical Research, Potsdam) initiated a research project to investigate the details and to heighten public awareness of the people who died crossing the Wall. As of this writing, they have been able to determine the fate of 138 victims of the Berlin Wall, and more than 100 cases are still being examined.¹⁰ The official numbers are significantly different from those now claimed by this research group.

Attempting an escape was a desperately fatal attempt to reach the West, for not only was there the physical Wall, with barbed wire and border officers, there was also the dreaded death strip. According to the 24 November 1961 issue of *Time Magazine*, *Der Todesstreifen* was a zone where “any German, East or

West, who set foot on the strip, was shot on sight. Immediately behind it there was in effect a second death strip, which was usually lethal only at night: it is the '500-meter zone' where anyone is shot after dark. Beyond that is a 'security zone' dotted with watchtowers that report the movements even of farmers in the fields. Beyond that is a five-kilometer *Sperrzone* (forbidden zone), dotted with control points that check travelers' passes, only available at the time in Communist Party headquarters."¹¹ The death strip also had landmines strewn along it making escapes not only incredibly dangerous, but near impossible. As one border officer reports, "we had a drill everyday and it was made clear that the border violators were to be destroyed or arrested with the use of our weapons. It was clearly stated in our fire regulations: shout out, give a warning shot, then take an aimed shot which prevents the border violator from moving any further."⁵

Any officer who showed mercy had reason to expect the most severe consequences for their insubordination. "There were many escape attempts from tunnel escapes to the border troops deserting their posts. Consequently 27 border guards were shot and eight hundred fugitives lost their lives."⁵ Many of these deaths were not known to the world until the courageous escape attempt of Peter Fechter and Helmut Kulbeik in August 1962. Fechter was shot in the pelvis and left to die on the death strip beside the Wall in plain view of hundreds of onlookers. Fechter's slow and public death is a symbol of the helplessness imposed by the Berlin Wall. Though his life could have been spared, onlookers feared for their own lives and Western soldiers were ordered to stand down.



Peter Fechter as he lay dying after being shot by East German border guards.

The division, however politically convenient, was morally unacceptable and the escapees knew it. Although the partition may have fostered more unity

among East Berliners, it led to desperate escape attempts leading, in most cases, to imprisonment and/or death. Volker Heinz, a Berlin lawyer who was strongly opposed to the partition, tells of his efforts to aid individuals in their escape efforts:

I worked together with a man who had great experience in building tunnels. When the period of building tunnels was over we managed to persuade a Syrian diplomat to smuggle people in the boot of their car through Check Point Charlie, and my function was to go to East Berlin, meet the would-be escapees and safely guide them to the point where the diplomat with his car would take them over. Since we wanted this method to work many times, I tried to ensure that the GDR citizens would neither recognize the car, nor the driver nor the car's number plate.

We managed during the period of 6 months to bring over the border some 60 or so people, but in the end, largely by betrayal, the method was discovered, the diplomat expelled and the GDR citizens and I were imprisoned. I was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment, but after about a year, exchanged and released.

Those who did not escape were left to suffer the wrath of one of the most repressive regimes in modern European history.

Berlin still bares the hideous scars, many still not fully healed, that the Wall created. These scars run deepest amidst East Berliners. For instance, the prominent GDR television tower (*Die Fernsehturm*), a symbol of Soviet dominance and the repression of free media, still looms in the Berlin skyline as a constant reminder. For East Berliners, privacy was a distant luxury as the *Stasi* maintained a close eye on the populace. Willi Kundra tells of his sister's experience:

When my sister came for the first time to visit East Berlin, the *Stasi* took pictures of her and she was followed. She was asked if she actually had parents in the house that she was visiting and with whom had she spoken. She was spied on and asked if she only visited her parents or if she had done something else in East

The East German government was paranoid about leaky sources or the loss of citizens. They had to keep their citizens loyal and subdued and, in the process, tortured the souls of the East German citizens through repressing their right to speak freely. Kundra, knew that as a pastor he, "was watched, and that there were spies in the services, who listened to the sermon and wrote down notes. However, this did not disturb me further. As a pastor, you had a certain amount of freedom, so that you could say anything you wanted, but you had to take it into account that it was all written down." Even among friends no one felt entirely safe. There were innumerable accounts of betrayal by friends as well as strangers.

Paola Telesca moved to Berlin in 1985 and lived on both sides of the city in the employ of the Colombian Embassy recalls:

going to a concert once and afterwards there was a party at a friend's place. After we had all arrived at our friends place, she secretly warned me, saying that one man in particular wasn't known to anyone, and that's why I should watch what I was saying.

Many East Germans developed trust issues that estranged them from friends and neighbors. Many stories tell of creepy and uncomfortable visits by the *Stasi*. For example Telesca tells of a friend of hers who, "lost her red leather glove somewhere on the street. Two days later the police came by to her house and gave it back to her." This really freaked her out, because she hadn't told anyone that she had lost her glove, which meant that she was being closely watched. The GDR government knew that they lacked the support of many East German citizens—they were keenly aware of the dissent and the potential for revolt and therefore kept strict watch on many citizens. The Western view, well-articulated by Blaesing, was that East Germans were conditioned, "they were just forced into a lot of things that ... seemed right to them. But it was forced, so they didn't really have a choice." Each of these accounts illustrates forms of cruelty that left lifelong scars. In addition to this tyrannical observation, the GDR government utilized propaganda to convince their citizens of their ideals.

Propaganda on Both Sides

The German Democratic Republic implemented mass propaganda campaigns that blinded many East Berliners to their oppression. East Berliners, however, were not as easily fooled as their government might have hoped. Examples of blatant propaganda were demonstrated on television because it was a medium with a mass audience. Himmelreich shares one example of a television program in the East on:

Der Schwarze Kanal, where a journalist every week provided examples of alleged propaganda or lies broadcast by the West. But to most people this was such obvious communist propaganda and it was so ridiculous that it became kind of a cult show.

The GDR propaganda machine, with the seemingly endless support of the Mother Russia, waged a full-scale propaganda assault in an attempt to create a New German. This New German would sacrifice of himself, in the spirit of Marx and Lenin and, collectively, the ideal social order would emerge. Perhaps more time and energy should have been focused on promoting economic progress and social liberty rather than on mass propaganda. As Telesca states:

24 A Tale of Two Cities

You would see huge red banners claiming a political or economic progress, which was contradicted when you looked at any part of the surroundings. To me there was nothing more depressing, than a red banner with some sort of enthusiastic socialist slogan, that is placed in front of some grey and run-down building.

A second recollection of Himmelreich offers another example of such propaganda:

At Brandenburg Gate there was a kind of museum, and there was a border guard who explained to people the necessity of the Wall and the evil nature of the American regime and how could they dare to interfere in our domestic affairs by asking for this border of the sovereign country to be gone.

Sylvia Iden, a high school instructor at the John F. Kennedy German-American School who taught in East Berlin during the partition of Berlin, shares an anecdote which illustrates the extent to which schools in the GDR were controlled by the state:

The problem is you don't see the government when you're a small fish. What you do see is your boss. For instance, this school director told me that my style of teaching was not the correct one and that I had to teach children in a socialist way. We were all forced to take part in a kind of a meeting and every second week where we had to learn how the SED had developed and their results and how good they were. So you saw the government through your boss. And also the whole class was in this organization called the FDJ (Free German Youth) and every second week we had to do regular things including going to the movies and such.

The catch was that the students had to tell what they had been doing during the past year. Then I found that one of my students had been called to the FDJ *Kreisleitung*—meaning that they had been questioning my student about what we did in class. So they were already asking students about their teachers and were making protocols.

Even on the day the Wall went down. We all went to the border in the first instruction hours, we came back and we were all so excited having dreams about what they would do when they crossed the border. And one of these kids who was also in FDJ was called later by one of the SED members. This girl was very clever and when they asked her about what they did in this morning she simply replied 'what do you think we did? We obviously had instruction.' And then they couldn't say anything anymore.

The GDR government was not the only regime to utilize propaganda to further its agenda. *Radio im Amerikanischen Sektor* (Radio in the American Sector or RAIS) sought to mold the minds of the West Germans as well as East Germans from the western side of the Wall. Dr. Ulrich Schürmann, a former

instructor of history and now Managing Principal at the John F. Kennedy German-American School recalls that in order to:

strengthen the spirit of West Berlin there was a lot of political cabaret going on, which nowadays we don't have. We just survived on that spirit of confrontation. I remember that there was a very popular radio broadcast from a radio station in the American sector. It was an American run program that ran once a month called *Die Indulane* (translated as "The Islanders") and it all rotated around the theme that West Berlin lived as a free island in the Red Sea, red standing for of course Communism, all surrounding us. I think it very much shaped what we felt or thought about the East. Entire families would sit in front of that radio if that program was on. I remember that our entire family, my brother and I, my mom, my grandma we would all sit there and listen to that radio program.

The voices of those who lived through the years of division clearly demonstrate that the both governments attempted to mandate their ideals and denounce the opposition. However, citizens perceive this to be blatant propaganda. Consequently, many people developed a healthy distrust of their government. The people of the GDR never trusted their state-owned media and, accordingly, were deprived of non-propagandized versions of local and global affairs, since Western media was prohibited.

Trying to Justify a Plan Gone Awry

The division deprived East Berliners of the opportunity to properly recover from the war. The economy of East Germany was impoverished and suffered notorious waiting periods for many items. There are countless stories of outrageous lines and struggles for basic commodities, such as flour, butter and sugar. Walter Salzmann, a German of Austrian ancestry, who started to work for the United States Government in January 1986 in East Berlin (but lived in the West), said, "a lot of people were dissatisfied the economic situation because you just couldn't get what you wanted to get. It wasn't available. If you wanted to buy a car or a television you had to wait for a long time, many years in fact." The economy was in significant trouble, unable to supply the simplest demands, and this was made worse by the West, as Himmelreich verifies, "bread and milk and butter and vegetables cost very little in the East, which led to people from the West coming to the East and buying these things, leading to shortages in the East." This suffering economy did not offer a stable life for its people; yet the GDR aimed to create not only solid grounding but also to hold strong while unaware or unconcerned Westerners drained the GDR meager supplies. Barren, grey buildings were a symbol of East German suffering. "But even nature was sort of ugly: I remember that forests in East Germany were extremely badly damaged and looked sick and ugly." (Telesca). GDR citizens were obliged to endure the stifling disadvantages of a depleted economy. This division between

the prosperous West and the drowning East exacerbated the tensions between the two sectors of Berlin.

The presence of the Allied military forces within each sector imposed fear and suspicion upon Berliners. The West and East each asserted their own uncompromising view. Dr. Walter Peterson, an American who has been teaching the John F. Kennedy School in Berlin since 1983, experienced a dramatic introduction to the US-Soviet rivalry on Berlin soil. He recalls how:

Soviets pressured the Westerners to give up on Berlin with little tricks. For example, super sonic booms of their planes going over the city. Actually, my first introduction to Berlin was landing at Tempelhof airport, and then from there that night staying with a German family in Charlottenburg and having these supersonic booms happening night and day, and windows breaking. I was, at that point, introduced not just to the inconvenience of this but to the tricks played, the efforts made by the Soviet Union and the East.

These tricks were effective in illustrating the tension between the two countries. Not limited to such political theater, Both the Soviets and the Allies were determined to demonstrate their supremacy though their commitments to their respective sectors. Telesca speaks to the Allied commitment and to how they validated their superiority by sustaining a commitment to West Germany:

The Western world made it perfectly clear that they would defend the freedom of Berlin at any costs. John F. Kennedy said even back in the sixties *Ich bin ein Berliner*, meaning, if the East threatened Berliners, they threatened America, who will therefore step in. A former French president, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, said in the 70s: *La Liberté de Berlin', c'est aussi le nôtre* [The freedom of Berlin is also ours], assuring Berliners of the support of the French. A very famous saying, I think by the first mayor of Berlin, Ernst Reuter, was *Ihr Völker der Welt – schaut auf diese Stadt* ["The People of the World are Watching This State"]. I think these appeals to the nations of the world somehow succeeded and many Western countries took a deep and profound interest in West Berlin and its political environment.

Making the world aware of Berlin's situation was mandatory to inspire a global clamor bring down the Iron Curtain. If Kennedy did not come to Berlin and say, *Ich bin ein Berliner* ["I am a Berliner"] the world might not have cared about Germany and Germans might have thought themselves lost. Many, like Puche, believed the West was a faithful ally:

I felt that the West German Government helped West Berlin because West Berlin was not able to stay alone without the Western part of Germany and the Western part of the world. It was impossible. We had no industry because lots of headquarters we had here in Western Berlin moved to Frankfurt and to Munich and to everywhere. The western part of Berlin was just empty. And eastern Germany was surrounding Western Berlin.



The Division of a Berlin Neighborhood

Although it can be argued that the West and East showed dedication to the respective sectors under their control, albeit in ways unfathomable to the modern observer, their strong fear and loathing of each other made unification of East and West Berlin impracticable. The actions of the Allies drove Berliners apart and scarred Berlin permanently.

Conclusion: The Failures of Compromise

As the Berlin Wall was constructed on 13 August 1961, one symbolic concrete slab at a time, most Westerners failed to see the geo-strategic blessing provided by the Wall. Although the building of the Wall was and continues to be viewed as unjust and cruel, many scholars conclude that however inhumane, the Wall was necessary to thwart the threat of a third world war. The global turmoil resulting from a possible world war, this time nuclear, called for immediate action concerning the German Question. Khrushchev answered. At the same time, this blessing hypothesis merely couches the failures of the chief diplomats, including but not limited to Kennedy and Khrushchev. By failing to negotiate and implement a more humane solution, the Soviet and the Allied governments tore at the seams of the already the fragile social fabric of Berlin. This violent ripping apart of families and friends is branded into the minds of today's Germans.

Chapter Two:

Dissent and Revolt: Walls Don't Just Fall

Jana John & Morgan Reed-Parker

“Any form of government, no matter how despotic and violent in nature, is always dependent upon the tacit consent of the population, and since this consent rests upon voluntary grounds, it can be withdrawn at any time, which subsequently would lead to a disintegration of the existing authoritarian societal structure.” This hypothesis, offered by Étienne de La Boétie during his time as a young student at the University of Orleans nearly half a millennium ago, has been repeatedly verified throughout the course of modern history. Fortresses, brigades, gates and walls—structures imposed to divide mankind, often against the will and better judgment of the masses—rarely manage to crumble of their own accord. Overcoming barriers to human dignity requires an oppressed population, suffering from a fragile economic system, to successfully bring an authoritarian regime to its knees. The demolition of the Berlin Wall is a shining example of this historical theme. Although the city was not politically united during the decades leading up to 1989, the citizens of the Eastern Sector, with the support of their counterparts in the West, found the strength to come together and to peacefully bring down the system that denied them their dignity as humans. It is due to their determination, stamina and integrity, that physically and psychologically imposed borders no longer limit the citizens of Berlin. Whereas segregation is ordinarily associated with racial, ethnic or religious divisions, the Berlin Wall was erected to further the self-serving ideological objectives of two aggressive global superpowers. Though the decision to construct the Wall can be understood in light of Cold War tension and the pressures of the new nuclear world, it was nevertheless an irrational imposition which warranted dissent and revolt.

Although the rot at the core of the East German government was perhaps largely responsible for German reunification, it was the relentless acts of civil disobedience and the massive illegal westward migration that caused the downfall of this oppressive regime. Often referred to as “voice” and “exit” forms of protest, these acts of disobedience were carried out both by individuals and by organized resistance groups, the majority of which were led by reform-oriented communists or socialists. The impact of these forms of nonviolent direct action clearly illustrate that it is impossible for an authoritarian regime to create and maintain its power structure through forceful means alone. Even authoritarian structures are dependent, to some degree, upon the support of their victims; thus a united opposition can, through active withdrawal of cooperation, undermine the strength of a despotic system. In East Germany, engaging in acceptable forms of political involvement—such as participating in restricted, manipulated, and controlled elections—was often construed as legitimizing the system. In contrast, engaging in nonviolent direct action, such as protesting in the streets or leaving the country illegally, meant refusing to accept the rules and motives of the administration, thus directly assaulting the system’s legitimacy.¹

The 1953 Uprising

The East German government was first rattled by the inconvenient truth of mass protest against their authoritarian regime on 17 June 1953. Provoked by the SED's instigation of unreasonably high production quotas, factory workers throughout the country responded by putting down their tools and taking to the streets to demand shorter work days and higher pay. These demonstrations gradually evolved into a full-fledged fight for freedom and democracy. With anarchy chasing at its heels, the government was in a state of panic and shock. The Communist party was not prepared for, nor knowledgeable about how to handle a mass resistance movement from below. Blindsided with the demands for reunification, democracy and competitive elections, the SED felt compelled to ask the Soviets for help. It wasn't long before the situation turned violent. Protesters hurled rocks, Soviet troops responded with bullets. Soviet tanks rolling through the streets of East Germany were blown up by civilian protesters. Mass arrests ensued as one onlooker recalled:

It was horrible—the several shots that were fired, one after the other, how the people fell to the ground. We immediately saw some victims covered with blood, lying on the ground and obviously in pain. Everybody was calling for police and ambulances. Some of the victims were lifted onto police trucks and then rushed away for medical treatment.²

The fighting lasted ten days, the troops were eventually able to pacify the streets. However, out of pure frustration and antagonism towards the system, many of the protesting workers simply left the country. The ensuing labor shortage resulted in a failure to meet production quotas and standards of quality thereby setting up the country's economic system and export potential for failure. This was the last act of mass resistance the SED had to deal with for many years. But as the East German citizens surrendered to the habit of suppressing their aggression, the frustration continued to mount inside the volcano of dissent, until one day it erupted.

The Power of Exit

It wasn't until the 1980's that the mass emigration disaster, which the country experienced from its inception almost three decades earlier, began to resurface. In the spring of 1989, East Germany relaxed its legal emigration policy, resulting in the departure of 46,000 citizens to the West. Beginning in August many East German citizens capitalized on the reform-minded legislation of Soviet Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev in order to obtain refugee status. Shortly thereafter, the clamor for escape resounded through Warsaw, Budapest and Prague. In September an agreement was settled between Berlin and Bonn allowing the transport of selected refugees to the West. In the ensuing days, news of the evacuation spread like wildfire and an additional 7,600

refugees were granted their demands to enjoy the same privileges as those who left before them.

Consequences of Escape Attempts

Total Circumference of the Wall	165.7 km
Deaths of Refugees/Escape Helpers	75
Wounded by Firearms	115
Attacks Against the Wall	34
Arrests on the Border	3130

Source: *Escape from Berlin* ³

The GDR was a powder keg of dissidence where the slightest spark could have triggered the implosion of the Communist regime and the beginning of a new era for East Germany. A leak in the powder keg presented itself in the form of opening of the Austro-Hungarian border on 11 September. Within three days, 15,000 East Germans arrived in the West. Individual protesters “exiting” illegally—an act which cost so many citizens their lives in the preceding decades, became an uncontrollable mass movement by the fall of 1989.¹

Migration between GDR and West Germany

City	surface/sq. km	Population (x 1.000)				
		1989	1981	1970	1960	1950
Berlin	403	1279,2	1157,6	1094	1071,8	1189,1
Cottbus	8262	875,6	884,6	872	807,3	804
Dresden	6738	1713,1	1804,4	1845	1885,2	1981,2
Erfurt	7349	1222,9	1238,9	1247	1248,7	1369
Frankfurt	7186	706,1	706,9	689	657,7	643,5
Gera	4004	728,1	742	739	726,9	756,9
Halle	8771	1748	1829,4	1890	1969,8	2118,9
Karl-Marx-Stadt	6009	1817,5	1925,3	1994	2112,1	2333
Leipzig	4966	1333,1	1409,4	1458	1518,7	1630,4
Magdeburg	11526	1237,9	1267,1	1298	1377,4	1518,6
Neubrandenburg	10948	615,8	622,6	629	651,7	715,2
Potsdam	12568	1111,2	1118,7	1125	1161,3	1221,7
Rostock	7075	909,8	889,8	868	831,9	846,3
Schwerin	8672	590,2	590,2	592	623,1	691,1
Suhl	3856	545,3	549,2	550	544,9	568,7
TOTAL DDR:	108333	16433,8	16736,1	16890	17188,5	18387,6
TOTAL BRD:	248688	62679	61712,7	61001,2	55784,8	49986
Total Germany	357021	79264	78603	78047	73132	68543

Source: *German Democratic Republic: Historical Demographical Data of the Administrative Division from 1950-1989*⁴

A disproportionate percentage of those who demonstrated their loss of faith in the GDR system by joining the “exit” revolution were under 30 years old. This posed a severe threat to the prospect of future leadership and labor potential, both crucial to the survival of the economy. In a study conducted by Peter Thal Larsen, Banking Editor of the *Financial Times* in London, the loss of working potential for East Germany was estimated to be approximately 10,000 *Deutsch Marks* per emigrant.⁵ Major industries, public transport, health care facilities and schools suffered grievously from mass emigration. In a desperate attempt to revive the economy, the government employed army units in some of the effected sectors to replace the diminished civilian workforce, however as a result of a) the sheer quantity of Westward migrants and b) the need to maintain a healthy military presence, this effort proved futile.

The chances of mere “exit” bringing down the system were very slim. The “exit” strategy was, for the most part, an act of individual resistance which was undertaken to bring freedom to the victim; it was not an act of disobedience designed to foster the destruction of the regime. In order to be understood as a successful form of protest, emigration must be seen in the context of its combination with public demonstration, commonly referred to as the “exit voice seesaw.”⁶ As seen in the case of the emigration movement, the size and frequency of demonstrations underwent a sharp increase in a short period. Aside from some notable exceptions during the regime’s first months in power, the SED experienced no overwhelming resistance from the population until the spring of 1989 (this is not to suggest that East Berliners were passive, rather to assert that active resisters presented no overwhelming threat). The boycott of the fraudulent May elections triggered the first, albeit modest wave of protests. Moritz Müller, a West Berlin architect who resided in Charlottenburg at the time the Wall fell, recalls these protests as being:

A rebellion of the young generation towards the old establishment of that time. In Germany, it started in Berlin with the visit of the Shah of Persia and his wife during which the student Benno Onesorg was killed by a policeman on the night of their visit. This was very dramatic and, later on, became a symbol of student resistance.

Although this political assassination lit the first torch of outward rebellion, it was not until September 1989 that the size and frequency of the demonstrations began rapidly acquiring cumulative momentum. In a matter of weeks the number of participants grew steadily from hundreds to hundreds of thousands.

The Role of the Protestant Church

The Protestant church played an influential role by supporting efforts to organize and execute nonviolent protests. Leipzig’s Nikolaikirche offered a safe haven to stage protests—it was assumed that the GDR government would be

less likely to fire on peaceful protesters on such sacred grounds. The church provided a platform for regular discussion and expression of popular dissent. Originally intended to bring attention to the absurdity of the nuclear arms race, these gatherings evolved into a forum where frustrations about lacking mobility rights (i.e. emigration to the West) were articulated. Beginning in the spring of 1989, Monday night prayer services were followed by peaceful marches against the SED regime. While the Church was supporting said protests, Erich Honecker made a last attempt to regain balance by staging mass celebrations of East Germany's fortieth anniversary. However his refusal to acknowledge the urgent need for change only increased the pressure from below; thousands of citizens continued to leave the country daily, while protests became routine in almost every major East German city. The Monday night demonstrations were now an institutionalized event of nonviolent protest—an estimated 70,000 people participated on 9 October and 120,000 people participated a week later.⁷ The Protestant church, though directly monitored by the state and deemed a political threat, served as a medium for organized dissent activities. Though Protestant ministers and representatives were among the most outspoken critics of the system, its newspapers were not as strictly controlled as those of the mainstream media, which meant its copy machines were available for the reproduction of leaflets opposing the regime. Many church facilities also served as hideaways for demonstrators who feared repercussions from the State. Ergo, several grassroots protest movements were born out of church circles. When asked to describe his recollection of the resistance movements Marcus Gladrow, who was born in 1963 in Baden-Württemberg (West Germany) and currently a Berliner who works as a counselor for foreigners, responded:

When we heard about people gathering to protest the government policy in the GDR, we feared that the police would use force and kill people like what happened in 1953, but I think that the church played an important role. People demonstrated peacefully and the police didn't do too much. Of course there was some force, but not as massive as we had feared. We were just amazed about the scale of the protests...hundreds of thousands of people protested on the streets, forcing the government to give in and make more concessions. It was amazing to watch.

This remained the case throughout the demonstration era. The pacifistic nature of these protests, held on the sacred ground of the church, resulted in relatively little action on the part of the authorities, which came as a surprise to many.



A group of protesters carrying a sign urging “nonviolence for democracy”

By effectively employing “exit” and “voice” forms of nonviolent protest, the citizens of East Germany publicly questioned Honecker’s authority, robbed the regime of their strength and undermined the SED’s dominion over human and material resources. Violent actions would have been counterproductive under these circumstances because the activists were in no position to successfully defeat the regime through force. Moreover, by engaging in violent protests, the rebels would have alienated a significant proportion of the public (who was still scarred from the violence of WWII). By choosing non-violence, the protesters were able to undermine the productivity of the East German economy and, in effect, place the legitimacy of the Honecker regime in question.

8

Organized Nonviolent Protest

In the meantime, several illegal resistance movements became more organized throughout the summer of 1989. Perhaps the most prominent of these movements, *Neues Forum* (New Forum), was founded in September as the first countrywide political movement outside the Protestant church. *Neues Forum* struggled to achieve basic democratic rights and intentionally refrained from organizing itself as a party, however, this did not shield the group from thorough investigation and extensive pressure from the *Stasi*. While the founders of *Neues Forum* (Barbel Böhley, Rolf Henrich, Ingrid Keppe, Sebastian Pflugbeil, Jens Reich, Reinhard Schult and Ina Seidel) originally maintained a very limited membership, by late October of 1989 around 200,000 people had signed their petition to transform *Neues Forum* from an illicit resistance group into a publicly acknowledged political organization. The public support for this petition resulted in an overwhelming enlargement of the organization; membership had escalated to approximately 10,000 following the signing of the petition. Fueled by this momentum, *Neues Forum* demanded free democratic elections and other reforms, with the aim of reshaping GDR political culture. Of course, the GDR regime desperately resisted this change in domestic policy and

thus refused to register *Neues Forum* as a sanctioned voice of the people. In spite of this resistance, *Neues Forum* finally received recognition as a political organization in November 1989. In February of 1990 *Neues Forum* joined with *Demokratie Jetzt* (Democracy Now) and *Initiative Frieden und Menschenrechte* (The Initiative for Peace and Human Rights) to form *Bündnis '90* (Alliance '90) who, working in coalition with *Die Grünen* (the Green Party), remains politically active to this day.⁹ Contrary to common belief, many of these protest groups did not organize with the explicit intention of dissolving the SED regime entirely, but rather with the goal of gathering people power to establish more democratically centered ideals *within* the Communist government. When asked if he thought the protests of the 1980s were intentionally carried out to bring down the Wall, or simply to achieve more justice within the divided state, Patrick Vonderau, who was born in West Berlin (Charlottenburg) and was a student at the Freie Universität Berlin at the time, responded:

I think maybe one really strong motivation in the beginning was to obtain freedom; particularly freedom of travel. Looking back, I think about all these people trying to flee from the GDR via Hungary and that was a very strong motive just to leave the country...to be free, to go abroad. People simple desired the freedom to buy things and to travel.

Whether the fed-up citizens of East Berlin chose to demonstrate against the Wall or against the system, individually or as part of an organized group, during these contentious months it was the voice of the resistance movement as a whole that robbed the East German regime of its pride, its power, and most importantly, its future.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow: Graffiti Art

While the resistance movement was an initiative of the citizens of East Berlin, West Berliners also played a notable role in the movement as well. Regardless of which side one lived on, the Wall served as a concrete daily reminder of the repression of those living in the Soviet sector. In the East, this reminder presented itself in the form of the so called “Death Strip”, a desolate strip of ground occupied by guards, guns, dogs, barbed wire and trenches. In the West, this reminder stood as a monotone slab of lifeless concrete. However, in 1975 the Wall underwent a restructuring. This so called “Border Wall ‘75” was 3.6 meters high and painted white. The Wall’s reconstruction immediately drew the attention of politically conscious artists from around the world. For them, this new wall was an extensive blank canvas, which desperately needed to be painted. The artists set to work, and it was not long before the multitude of visitors to the Wall, both West Berliners and tourists, joined them in creating a potpourri of political messages with graffiti, for which the injustices of the Wall became the focus.



As the resistance movement began to gather cumulative momentum, it manifested itself not only in visual art but also through the music industry. One example, as seen above, is Pink Floyd's 1988 concert tour where the band attempted to bring awareness to the unjust situation in which the citizens of East Berlin had found themselves cornered for the past three decades.

Three main themes were demonstrated in the art on the Wall. The first and perhaps most potent of these themes was political resentment and cries for freedom. Many of the messages written on the Wall articulated the opinions of West Berliners who were determined to fight for the freedom of those in the East. Secondly, the graffiti on the Wall sought to emphasize the strangled economic situation of East Berlin, all the while strengthening the belief that the SED regime was headed toward inevitable self-destruction.



In this picture the Trabant (an automobile manufactured East Berlin but unavailable to most East Berliners) represents the resistance movement. The picture illustrates that, while Brezhnev and Honecker are intimately cooperating to suppress the citizens of the Soviet Union and East Germany, revolution will, in the end, plough its way through the barrier depriving the East Berliners of their right to freedom.

Finally, the art of the Berlin Wall reiterated the fact that the resistance movement was not limited to the city of Berlin, but rather, that it had become a global cause. It highlighted the struggles of demonstrators fighting for freedom against authoritarian communist regimes around the world. Thus the graffiti further revealed the interconnectedness of their situations.



The portion of the Wall shown above offers a message which can be interpreted as the overall motto of the resistance movement, not only in East Berlin, but in other nations suffering the repression of a communist regime as well [it states, “let me live my life, enjoy freedom, touch the limit, reach the stars, understand the world...that’s what I want”].

The evolution of Berlin Wall art symbolized the contrast between the dynamic, international community of West Berlin and the oppressed, sterile society of the East—in other words, the epitome of Western free expression and Eastern repression. It is clear that this new form of political expression was greatly influenced by the graffiti movement which was manifesting in the United States at the time. Beginning in the 1980s, graffiti artists swarmed the streets of New York and other large cities, beautifying the concrete jungles they called “home”, while at the same time finding a constructive, non-violent medium through which to articulate their struggles for justice. Rooted in East Coast hip hop culture, this new art form emerged which celebrated rebellion from authority—be it the New York City Police Force or the *Stasi*. The messages of resistance demonstrate that, in their own way, West Berliners actively engaged in a form of creative protest against the SED regime. It was in this way that the West Berliners screamed their support for their fellow citizens who were being treated unjustly.

En Route to 9 November 1989

As the resistance movement on both sides of the Wall continued to grow, day after day *Wir sind das Volk* (We are the People) could be heard echoing

through the streets of Leipzig, Dresden, East Berlin, Karl-Marx Stadt, Magdeburg, Halle, and Potsdam. Cries for more democracy, free elections, “new thinking” and mobility rights resounded throughout East Germany. Nonviolent discipline was so strongly maintained during these demonstrations that burning candles, initially only a declaration of adherence to nonviolent principles, became the overall symbol for resistance against the regime.¹⁰ Outward opposition continued to escalate until it peaked on 4 November when over half a million people took to the streets of East Berlin. Meanwhile, the lack of power in the labor force, partially resultant from East Berlin’s dwindling population, continued to severely damage the functioning of society. As Doug Bond, former President of the Association of Nonviolent Acts at Harvard University, convincingly hypothesizes, “the threat of nonviolent action was reinforced with a display of the actionists’ capacity to control resources.”¹¹ Pressure on the leadership was at its peak, placing the regime in an extremely vulnerable position, under which it became much easier for them to be played like a row of dominos.⁷ As a means to quell some of the protests and to reestablish the legitimacy of his authority Wolfgang Berghofer, the presiding mayor of Dresden, hesitantly agreed to meet with representatives of the demonstrators. A tipping point emerged on 18 October 1989 when East Germany’s long-time infamous autocrat, Erich Honecker was forced to resign all his political positions. He had been suffering from cancer and his lack of stability, both physically and politically, had long become apparent not only to his own people, but to the entire world. This triggered a power struggle in the Politburo and key figures such as Margot Honecker, Hany Tixh, Kurt Hager, and Erich Mielke were forced to retire from the fallout of this struggle.¹² Ultimately, Egon Krenz, who was donned by Honecker to be his successor, assumed leadership (Krenz was later sentenced to six and a half years in prison on charges of Cold War crimes—more specifically, the manslaughter of GDR citizens who attempted to escape and electoral fraud). On 7 November, the entire government under Willi Stoph, the East German Prime Minister at the time, resigned. This was followed only two days later by the Wall-shattering press conference given by Günter Schabowski which went down in history as a symbol of freedom, hope, and dreams come true. Schabowski’s speech, though some contend that it was a politically folly resultant from weeks of political protests, called for an immediate and unconditional opening of the Wall and, thus, freedom for all those who wished to cross the border to a life that was inconceivable to them for almost four decades. Fortunately, Schabowski failed to acknowledge the note attached to the bottom of the page stating that the speech was to be read on 10 November.

Rational Apathy

While the resistance movement gained steady momentum throughout the 1980’s, there remained a silent majority of East German citizens who, for

various reasons, opted for civil obedience during this tumultuous historical epoch. Their acceptance of and compliance with the SED's authoritarian rule may be hard to sympathize with or to fully understand; yet it was not without justification. A substantial part of the population supported the ruling party because they either profited from the oppressive system or were otherwise dependent upon it. *Stasi* spies were paid according to the usefulness of the information they provided, if a spy ever encountered financial problems, the *Stasi* immediately and generously came to their aid. These spies, combined with the police, the army, the firefighters, the justices, the post-office employees, and many other individuals, composed a substantial web of citizens who relied on and profited from the existing oppressive rule. In contrast, non-cooperation with the authorities proved detrimental to the individual and his/her family, thus ensuring their further cooperation with the government.¹³ This system of reward and punishment played a fundamental role in East Germany's survival. If the government had not been able to maintain this convoluted system of rewards and punishments, it is likely that the regime would have crumbled much sooner. In addition, to the citizens whose financial security was contingent upon hands of the state, there were those who were too old, too young, or otherwise incapable of participating actively in the demonstrations.

Outside Influence: A Global Context

While "exit" and "voice" were the driving forces behind the fall of the East German regime, various external variables helped to steer the vessel of reunification toward success. Radical changes in the global balance of power, particularly the crumbling of the Soviet-led alliance system, inspired East Germans to demand a united Germany. Initially Honecker vehemently resisted implementing Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* (economic and political restructuring) policies in East Germany. However, as Gorbachev became a beacon of hope in the communist world, Honecker, began to adopt "new thinking", albeit slowly. Gorbachev's *de facto* repudiation of the Brezhnev Doctrine (adopted in 1968 to justify Kremlin intervention in Soviet Bloc uprisings when satellite governments failed to quell rebellions on their soil) evidenced in Hungary and Poland, made it clear that Moscow's allies could no longer rely on Soviet military support for their authoritarian regimes.

This left the SED alone to face growing opposition in the population; it also rendered the Iron Curtain porous, achieving the prerequisite for the success of the "exit" movement. These newly punctured gaps in the border also assured the East Berliners' constant exposure to West German ideology. It was through their access, albeit limited, to Western media that the East Berliners were able to familiarize themselves with an economic system and a lifestyle, which many found to be more appealing than that which was thrust upon them.¹³ Ever since *Ostpolitik* had overthrown the West German Hallstein Doctrine in 1969, mail

between East Germany and the outside world was permitted and capitalist magazines and newspapers became relatively easy to obtain. With the establishment of the *Grundlagenvertrag* between the two German states in 1972, cross-border visiting was permitted, a privilege widely taken advantage of. "From 1970 to the early 1980s, between 1.1 and 1.6 million East Germans visited the West each year, while the number of East Germans traveling in the opposite direction ranged from about 1.2 to 3.1 million."⁵ Exposure to Western culture did not stop at that; strictly capitalistic long, medium, and short-wave radio broadcasts were available to the citizens of East Germany, and beginning in the 1970s about 90% of the population also had regular access to West German television programs. Rather than exposing the weaknesses of liberal capitalism, these programs and their featured advertisements strived to portray an overly optimistic view of the West German consumer paradise, placing a clear emphasis on the continually widening gap between the East and West German economic systems. The power of "exit" would have diminished without West Germany's comparatively robust economy and its evolving policies of granting citizenship to East German refugees.¹² Naturally, this provoked an East German longing for the materialistic society they had been denied for nearly 40 years, thus triggering some of the initial dissatisfactions with the current regime, furthering the struggle between civil society and state, and fueling the desire to demonstrate against it. When asked to share his opinion on the influence of the West German government on the fall of the GDR, Moritz Müller recalls:

The West German government acted very carefully not to cause diplomatic interferences with the East German powers. Nevertheless, the engagement of the former foreign minister, Hans Friedrich Genscher, supported a modest change and final opening of the authoritative conditions in East Germany. The traveling of East Germans into more liberal neighbor states, like Czechoslovakia, and asking for political asylum at the West German embassies started the process of changes. East Germany with the SED and their representatives, they were very supportive of this development.

This belief parallels a statement made by Gorbachev upon his 1989 visit to Berlin when he stated to Honecker, '*Wer die Zeichen der Zeit nicht sieht, wird von der Zeit bestraft*' ("he who does not see the signs of the times will be punished accordingly"). This meant if the *nomenklatura* bureaucrats did not understand the signs of the time, they would be rendered impotent by the protesters, an accurate foresight of the situation which prevailed.

Civil disobedience in East Germany was influenced by an international struggle for economic and political liberalization. *Solidarnosc*, or Polish Solidarity, is a prime example of one such influence. Founded in September of 1980 by Lech Walesa, Solidarity became the first non-communist trade union in a communist country. After many failed attempts to repress the union, the Polish government was forced to negotiate. The round table talks between the

weakened government and Solidarity, eventually led to the semi-free elections of 1989. By the end of 1990, a coalition government was formed and Walesa became Poland's new president. Solidarity's success was unprecedented in Poland and became an inspiration to the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Solidarity's influence led to the intensification of anti-communist ideals all over Eastern Europe, which helped to weaken their communist governments. The victory of anti-communist candidates in Poland's 1989 election sparked off a succession of peaceful anti-communist revolutions in central and eastern Europe, sometimes referred to as the "Revolutions of 1989", which ultimately helped to catalyze the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁹ *Solidarnosc* was vital in setting an example of success for the East German protesters, inspiring them to fight for what they believed in as they nonviolently resisted the authoritarian SED regime, and proving that although their goals may have seemed far-fetched, they were achievable.

The citizens of Poland were neither the first nor the last to take a stand against a repressive authoritarian government. The power of protest swept the land with almost as much unstoppable momentum as Communism had decades earlier. While the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian governments were also confronted with massive resistance during this decade, perhaps one of the most influential movements of people against the state paralleling the events in Eastern Germany was that of the Chinese people against the regime of Deng Xiaoping. After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, Deng set out to lead China in a new direction. He began by initiating a program called the "Four Modernizations", which emphasized the promotion of major advancements in agriculture, industry, science, and defense. Deng introduced the prospects of private ownership and moderate free-market policies. He welcomed foreign capital and technology and even went so far as to set up Special Economic Zones where foreigners could own and operate industries. While his reforms initially resulted in a surge of economic growth, they eventually played a significant role in widening the already large gap between rural farmers and city dwellers who were exposed to Western influences.¹⁴ With these economic reforms in place, the Chinese soon developed a longing for more political freedom. Secret meetings were held on university campuses discussing methods by which to carry out their dissidence. As it became increasingly difficult for the students to hide their overwhelming desire for change, it became increasingly difficult for the government to suppress their demonstrations. It wasn't until May of 1989 that the protesters finally shifted from passive to active civil disobedience on a large scale. Thousands marched to Tiananmen Square demanding democratic liberties. The crowds joined together, singing revolutionary songs all the while carrying a plaster statue, which they called the "Goddess of Liberty". They waved handcrafted banners declaring, "Give us liberty or give us death." Deng reacted by sending troops to the square in an attempt to disperse the protesters. As a result of the demonstrators' refusal to

evacuate the square, the situation soon turned violent. Hundreds if not thousands were killed or wounded in the brutal confrontation between the military and the people—the Chinese government maintains that the death toll was “around 200” whereas external sources such as the Chinese Red Cross estimate the casualties at 2,600.¹⁵ Many who were able to escape the massacre were arrested and imprisoned. Tiananmen Square demonstrated that the Chinese government would not succumb to pressures for reform outside of the acceptable types of protest as delineated by the Chinese Communist Party. Perhaps most importantly, Tiananmen Square illustrated the international struggle for democratic reform in the face of Communist party resistance.¹⁶ Dissent and revolt, from Warsaw to Beijing, catalyzed civil disobedience in Berlin.

These were the factors that came together to create the window of opportunity during which the East German demonstrators brought the SED regime to its knees. Volker Heinz, who was born in 1943 in the southwest German city of Wuppertal and who, in 1964, was imprisoned for trafficking people across the border between East and West Berlin before he became a lawyer in London, is thankful that the Wall fell peacefully:

There was no wrong time for the Wall to fall; the sooner the better. So when it fell, ultimately it was the right time. I also believe it happened the right way because it was not achieved by violence, but as a result of demonstrations that went on for many years—all round the world—and gained the increasing support of the population.

As the demonstrations continued on through the weeks leading up to 9 November, the commonly heard *Wir sind das Volk* (We are the People) gradually became *Wir sind ein Volk* (We are One People), and the weight on the shoulders of the SED was quickly becoming unbearable. It was at this time that the perfect storm of outside influence, a weakening economic system, a vulnerable labor force, and most importantly vocal demonstration, finally came together on that unforgettable autumn day, the day when the East German government was forced to take their last bow—a bow which did not inspire a standing ovation.

Chapter Three

9 November 1989

Rebekah Serio & Paul Wolter

As has been demonstrated, Berliners did not passively accept the partition of their city or the pervasive injustices of life in the GDR. However, their attempts to pursue political and economic freedoms, as well as their attempts to bring down the Wall, proved futile until 1989. For many, the Wall had become a seemingly permanent geopolitical fixture. An entire generation was born and raised in a divided Europe and a bipolar world. Not phased by the seeming permanence of the bipolar world, many influential world leaders strove to persuade the Soviet Union to tear down the Wall. Constant pressure from dissent in the GDR, Western diplomacy and the global pro-democracy clamor soon took its toll. One drizzly evening in November 1989, the unthinkable happened: the gates were opened and Germany was reunited at last.

The world rejoiced with Berliners as the Iron Curtain, an international symbol of tyranny and a constant reminder of the insanity of the Cold War fell. A closer look at the German people reveals a multitude of responses to the fall. Contrary to the common misperception that the entire population of Berlin was present at the Wall's destruction, the majority of East and West Berliners were not even aware of the situation. Many Berliners intentionally stayed home due to the ambiguity of the television announcement made earlier that night by Günther Schabowski (First Secretary of the East Berlin SED).

In a press conference called to publicize forthcoming loosening of immigration policy, Schabowski, perhaps inadvertently, announced the official new immigration regulations on 9 November at 7 PM. Although the official plan was to open the gates the following day, Schabowski, under the twin pressures of media and months of dissent, Schabowski opened the Wall "effective immediately".



Newly united Berliners celebrating their newfound freedom in Berlin

Although the fall of the Wall was anticipated by some citizens, a significant portion of Berlin's population was oblivious to events of 9 November until the following morning. East Berliners in particular, as a result of the lack of free and independent mass media, were sheltered from the news of dissent and revolt throughout the summer of 1989. Not only was the accessibility of reliable news severely limited, but demonstrating interest in the revolutionary currents sweeping through the communist world in 1989 could easily result in harassment by the *Stasi*. As the report of the Wall's collapse reached the citizens of Berlin, it was met with a variety of responses ranging from complete incredulity to sheer exhilaration. Many Berliners joined the excitement in the streets whereas others—those who supported of the Soviet ideals, those hardened by years of false promises or those afraid of tribulations forthcoming—did not revel in the events of 9 November.

The Unaware

Among those who were unaware of the jubilation of 9 November was twenty-five-year-old Oliver Hahn. Hahn led a comfortable life as a West Berliner. For him, the Wall provided clarity of sorts, because the partition of Berlin was normal and natural to him. This was his world and it seemed to be crashing down on him. His comfort and security, symbolized by the boundaries of the Wall, were well in hand, and in reflection, Hahn is still unsure of the consequences that accompanied the fall of the Berlin Wall:

On 9 November, I spent a quiet evening at home without any TV or radio. So we found out about what happened the next morning when the clock radio turned on. Of course we couldn't really believe it. I later went to my office on a bus along the Ku-Damm. The atmosphere was very friendly and exciting that day. People were partying in the streets. Most if not all of the West-Berliners were trying to help and assist their new neighbors in every way they could. Still my emotions were mixed because I was not sure where all this could possibly lead to. Before 9 November we were living in a rather comfortable situation that was sort of clear—we at least knew how to deal with it. With a government imploding right next to you things to come are more or less uncertain.

Bettina Brandt-Prietzl, a West Berliner who lived in the American sector, also had mixed views of this moment in history. She was born only months after the Wall was constructed, so her view of Berlin was always one of a divided city:

That night, my husband and I came back from work very late. We were so tired that we went to bed pretty early. We slept through the night without recognizing what was going on. Only the next morning when we heard the news, it was as total shock. I had an interview that morning at the newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*. Their office was located close to Potsdamer Platz (near the Wall). It was almost impossible for me to get there on time by using public transportation. There were people everywhere. When I got there, every

employer in the building seemed to be running around without any system. Everybody was confused and excited.

Brandt-Prietzl is another Berliner who went to bed late without a notion of the fall, or even any kind of expectation that such an extreme political change was imminent. It seems unimaginable that not every citizen of Berlin knew of the magnitude of this event. The interviews demonstrate that a surprisingly high proportion of those who were simply oblivious to the events of 9 November.

Moritz Müller provides an example a citizen who was unaware of the events of the evening, as he spent the night preparing for a trip to Moscow with his wife. Müller, then thirty-four years old and living in West Berlin, was highly skeptical when he was informed about the fall of the Wall. However, when he was certain that the fall had taken place, he rejoiced in the surprise:

We went to bed late and didn't watch television or listen to the radio so we didn't know what was already going on at the borders. But in the morning when we were picked up by our friends to go to Moscow, everyone was completely enthusiastic about what had happened. As a matter of fact, my wife and I did not believe what we were told and we were extremely surprised. On the way to the airport, the most amazing thing was to see how East German cars with completely happy and laughing East Germans were driving from the East to the West. We were the only ones going East!

The historic events became increasingly apparent as they continued their eastward drive against the flow of the world. It was clear to Müller that the Berlin Wall had fallen, and that the city, the country and the entire global order had been irreversibly altered.

Dietrich Ponick-Starfinger, likewise a resident of West Berlin, explained his experiences during the first week of November. For a period of time after the fall, the atmosphere was very emotional and super-charged with hope:

I found out the next morning when I went to work so I completely missed it. We were asleep. Two days later, we went to the border in the evening. And I was carrying my daughter Nicola (she was one year old at the time) and we were walking along Brandenburg Gate where the people were hammering on the Wall. We had a look at the checkpoint at Hauptbahnhof and at the Invalidenstrasse where people were welcomed and cheered. It was a fantastic atmosphere and even for months afterwards this atmosphere persisted in the city.

Ponick-Starfinger waited a couple of days before paying a visit to the Wall where he was greeted with a remarkable celebration. November 1989 was a month of hopeful festivity but also a month of remembrance.

The Biggest Party Ever?

A significant proportion of GDR citizens had come to accept the possibility of the Wall's permanent presence. Trying their best to adjust to the circumstances of living in a divided country and under a repressive regime, many were resigned to their fate as subjects. In part, because of this sense of resignation, many Berliners had no faith in Schabowski's announcement. Due to years of subjection to media propaganda and false promises, they simply could not hear that they were free to travel "effective immediately". Moreover, according to many viewers of the press conference, Schabowski's statements were unclear because they doubted that a statement of such magnitude would be made in a seemingly humble press conference. As a consequence of the hopelessness following decades of seemingly ineffective protest, most Berliners chose not to capitalize on the moment and by partaking in the celebrations of 9 November.

It is astounding how many Berliners were oblivious to the events of the evening of 9 November. However, it is more remarkable to discover that many, though fully aware they were at the crest of a great historical wave, chose to not engage in the festivities of the evening. Many were scarred by years of political oppression in the GDR and believed it was too dangerous to go to the Wall. Others were simply uninterested. Manfred Puche (whose family left East Berlin in 1960, though he returned to Berlin in 1977 to study at the Technical University) was overwhelmed to hear such an unusual statement made on a news channel. Living in the West side, Puche found himself in a state of disbelief concerning Schabowski's announcement:

First I listened to weird announcements on TV—but it wasn't clear what exactly had happened—whether the Wall was opened for good or only for a brief period of time. Later that evening friends of mine from East Berlin knocked on the door of my West Berlin flat, and you may guess the degree of my excitement.

Puche's decision to not immediately go to the Berlin Wall as soon as he heard seems almost unbelievable to the modern ear. During the time of the Wall's existence, there were many protests, and, most likely, Puche thought the newscast was a false announcement.

Rainer Hoedt, who was born and raised in West Berlin and was thirty years old in 1989, recalls watching the event on television. Like many others, Hoedt's experience, in defiance to the conventional assumption that all of Berlin was partying at the Wall, is characterized by a decision to maintain a healthy distance from the potentially volatile situation at the Wall. "I was watching it from TV and that was an amazing sensation. It was the biggest party ever." Hoedt reveled in the joy from the comfort of his living room. He chose to stay at home and view "the biggest party ever" for plausible reasons. Like many other

Berliners, he was under the assumption that the television announcement was fictitious.

Even though the fall was anticipated by some, it was still a revelation to most Berliners. Willi Kundra, a pastor in East Berlin, predicted that the Berlin Wall would outlive him. Fortunately, he outlived the Wall and he was able to experience the moment for which he had longed:

When we found out that the borders were really opened, we started to cry from joy. I lost faith that the Wall would ultimately come down. I had calculated that I would have to live with the Wall until the end of my life. I had counted on it opening up a little bit, but not that the Wall would disappear totally. This terrific experience of a long, cold division ceased. The next day I drove to my sister, who lives in Marienfelde, Berlin [West]. The feelings we had that day are indescribable.

Kundra was among the majority of Berliners who had become convinced that the Wall's permanence would outlive them. The Wall had an incredibly demoralizing effect on the people of Germany. Others found various reasons not to attend the celebrations of reunification.



Berliners hammering away at twenty-eight years of oppression

Patrick Vonderau, a twenty-one-year-old a student living in the West at the time, was involved in a film project when the Wall collapsed. “We were working on that film all day, and I remember that quite late at evening somebody came in, shouting: ‘Hello, did you hear, the Wall fell down!’ And we were kind of surprised but nobody really was shaken and the director even said, ‘Well that’s interesting, but let’s continue with our project.’ So we didn’t go.” Vonderau went on to explain that he chose not to take part in the celebrations because the media took advantage of the situation:

The media capitalized on the situation by reporting extensively about it, so I felt skeptical about this whole media coverage and decided not to go there and not to be involved in this kind of media event being staged for the masses.

Some days later, Vonderau passed the site of the deconstructed Wall while visiting the East. He came to realize that, though the media most certainly capitalized on the event and utilized it to their advantage, the reunification was real—German history had been radically altered. There is much truth to Vonderau's analysis of the media circus, as evidenced by the mass of Berliners choosing to follow the events of the evening on their television sets. Can Topuz, then a sixteen-year-old Berliner of Turkish ancestry, lived on the western side of the Wall (in the Neukölln neighborhood) and recalls the coverage of the collapse he witnessed on television:

I saw it on TV. I remember people celebrating on the streets and climbing up the Wall. My relatives just walked over the checkpoint and started looking at the West because they have never seen it before. They were amazed; they saw things they never saw before. And I remember that every citizen of the eastern part got 100 *Deutsche Marks* as a present, welcome present.

Topuz is one among many Berliners interviewed for this book who shared stories of how the “other side” was revealed to him and to his loved ones. Such stories of revelation are of great curiosity insofar as they demonstrate a convoluted paradox. Berliners came to find that while the two distinct cultures had certainly been created during partition, these two cultures perhaps had more in common than they both believed.

Many citizens of Berlin—generally East Berliners—caught their first glimpse of the other side while visiting the border a few days later. At first, Martine Schmidt, who was born in East Berlin and is now a teacher at the Nelson Mandela International School, was understandably distrustful of the media coverage of Schabowski's press conference and the ensuing events. However, she was reassured when, bewildered, she called her mother for confirmation. Twenty-nine years old, and obliged to supervise her children, she did not attend the events directly:

I remember it was a late evening. I saw the news on TV and there was a report with a, who was that? Well some politician [Schabowski] who said the citizens could travel. I didn't know what that meant. I think everyone felt that way. No one understood what that meant. Did this mean I could pack my belongings and leave? No one would've thought that the Wall had fallen. No one would have guessed it. No one had any idea that this was happening. There were all these stories of Russia and Slovakia but that this was really happening here in Germany, no one knew. 'You can go now.' No one thought that this would be the consequence of the Berlin Wall falling. I have to say to that...

My grandmother went to West Germany seven years before for living there. She lived in East Germany, then she retired then she went to West Germany I had a permit to visit her for her birthday. Her 80th birthday I could visit her. I visited her three times before the Wall came down. It was my first experience

in West Germany. It was an unknown land to me. I visited her for maybe a week at a time and the first idea in my head when the Wall fell was that I could visit my grandmother whenever I liked. And that was the greatest for me at that time and the first thing I remember I went to a phone outside (I didn't have a phone in my flat) and I called my mom and asked her: Is it true? Can we go to West Berlin? And what does this mean?...

At that time, I lived alone with my children. I have two children and they were very small, six and seven years old in November 1989. And so I couldn't go at night and visit the Wall. I had to stay at home and take care of my children. Next day I went to school and the school was empty. They had gone to West Berlin...

I tried to go to visit the Wall and find out is it true or not? I thought it was very dangerous to go with small children. People were in the city and there was a lot of chaos and I thought it was not a good idea to take children and go to the Wall. I waited for maybe a week and then my father, my children and I went to Neukölln and it was very exciting. It was so full of people I thought this is terrible but on the other hand I loved it and thought it was great.

I was scared my children and I would get separated. That was my biggest fear and it was most important to me at that moment. Not to lose my children. I thought that if the Wall really fell you can make a trip there next month too. But if my children get lost or something happens to them then it's worse. My grandmother was very happy. When the Wall came down and we could visit each other it was great for my family.

Her maternal better judgement prevented her from becoming part in the movement that inspired the fall of the Wall. The period of the Wall may have diminished relationships between families and other loved ones, but the distance and separation which accompanied the Wall strengthened their appreciation for one another. Even though Schmidt was anxious to travel to the West after many years of separation, her commitment to the safety of her children overpowered her wish to travel freely.

A Part of Living History

9 November 1989 is part history and part folklore, myth and legend. Whereas many had legitimate reasons not to partake in the festivities of reunification, others did not resist the temptation to be an active part of living history. What follows are some of the stories that emerged from the interviews which illustrate the experiences of those who attended the festivities of 9 November. These are the stories of just a few of the tens of thousands onlookers who felt they had to see the spectacle with their own eyes. Rushing to the Wall, many of them joined friends and family. This is where the magic happened—hugs and handshakes, champagne bottles, police officers cautiously averting their eyes.

Among the stories of participants in the demonstrations of 9 November is that of West Berliner Susan Volkmer who recalls her experiences:

November was politicized. We had been watching television, watching the *Montags-Demonstrationen* [large protests held every Monday in late 1989 in the GDR] watching the people flee over Hungary, watching the whole GDR disassemble before our eyes but nobody knew when or what was going to happen. I had a very politically-oriented boyfriend who watched every news on the ninth of November ... we watched Schabowski stumble and misinterpret the things he was supposed to say.

So we got dressed and then we went to Wedding [district in north-central Berlin], to the border, just fifteen minutes before the border gates opened. It was extremely peaceful before it came all we saw was masses of people. We were one of the first ones there—we were directly in front of the fence. I was even on top of the fence watching and you could see the masses of people on the other side but everything was very peaceful, a bit pushy, but much less pushy than at a big rock concert or something similar.

Suddenly the *Grenzbeamten* [border control officers] came and they opened the big gate and the people just started rushing through, first just people by foot and then Trabis [an East German automobile] overfilled with people—people sitting on top of them hanging out. Everybody was drinking *Rotkäppchen Sekt* [brand of sparkling wine] or something similar and screaming and clapping and yelling. It was very happy atmosphere and it was really, really chaotic.



Celebrants standing atop the Wall, proudly displaying a sign that reads, "Germans United for the Fatherland"

Despite chaos, people experienced an overwhelming sense of unity that evening which contributed to the peaceful nature of reunification. Walter Salzmann, an Austrian national in the employ of the U.S. embassy in West Berlin, witnessed

the moment at the Wall and watched as absolute strangers embraced each other in joyous disbelief, completely overcome by the surrealism of the night:

I remember the 9th of November very clearly. I was having an American friend staying with me at my apartment in West Berlin. We were watching the news together and we were seeing the top of the Wall. And he said to me, 'Walt let's get to the border, let's participate in this go see it.' And I was hesitant to go because it was half past nine and I knew I was going to work the next day. It would be a sort of a hassle, but then we went to the Wall, and we went to the former checkpoint in Berlinerstrasse.

East Germans came out in the little cars and people were touching their cars, and hugging and embracing each other, opening up champagne bottles. And later that night we went to the Brandenburg Gate where we climbed up the wall, 3 meters high...And we were there!

Karen Blaesing, fourteen years old at the time, had the honor of being part of living history. She and her parents were among many who heard rumors prior to the actual event, yet just brushed this off as speculation. When her family was convinced that the Wall was opening, they went to bear witness and she reflects on the moment she arrived at the Wall that evening:

There were still police guarding the Wall and you weren't allowed to climb on the Wall, you weren't allowed to chip off pieces...but we did it anyway (laughs). It was very, very intense. People that had just been split up for so many years were all of a sudden free. And I remember the police, usually very strict, were not giving parking tickets for weeks! They were just so happy. Everyone was so happy. And everyone was friendly to one another, when it did come down; it was just a great big shock to everyone.

Italian-born Paola Telesca and her family immigrated to West Berlin in 1985. She had always been a staunch opponent of the Wall and could not pass up the opportunity to watch it fall with her own eyes:

I remember going down to the Wall, mounting it and chipping it with a huge sledge hammer that someone had passed on to me. The general atmosphere was that of a friendly revolution. The people could now do things they were shot for only a few days earlier, without having to face any penalties. I remember it being extremely pleasant to actually hit the structure of the Wall—the Wall that had caused so much grief among German families. Up to this day I marvel at the fact, that no person was killed or even injured.

It is impossible to describe the atmosphere to anyone who wasn't there. Imagine all people being friendly and cheerful, sharing their exuberance with any stranger. West-Berliners used to gather at the inner-city border checkpoints in the night, greeting East Berliners with *Sekt* [sparkling wine] and applause. It was unlike anything I had experienced before or since.

Dr. Walter Peterson, an American-born instructor of history at the John. F. Kennedy German-American School in West Berlin, was as taken aback by the suddenness of the event like many others who never dreamed of seeing the end of an era with their own eyes. Though Peterson did not attend the mass celebrations on 9 November, he describes his experiences the next morning:

I went to bed on November 9th the world was still intact, and on the morning of November 10th I was to teach a course so at 6 in the morning I awoke to listen to BBC and they were talking about how the Wall had opened. I had a conversation with a friend that morning and we concurred that this can't be — that this is sort of a war of the worlds and that this is absolute nonsense and so we shifted the channel to a German one and indeed the same nonsense was coming through and I couldn't believe my ears ... On my way to school, found that, in the town, people were driving around in Trabis with the stinking gas coming out.

I got to school, and this is one of the things that I regret was that, because the high school principal demanded that we continue instruction—to hold students in class as opposed to doing what I should have done which was to use my senses and say 'let's get the heck out and go with everybody to the happening.' But I didn't and we had class.

Having mentioned that, the other memory I have of that day, November 10th, is getting out of school as fast as my feet could travel, and making arrangements to go to the Wall and to see the meeting with Kohl who flew in from Poland. Willy Brandt was there as was the mayor of Berlin. Kohl of course spoke. I listened to them and then went back to my house where there was a big unification party. Well it wasn't really a unification party it was an opening of the Wall party—we still didn't know what that meant, and then after that ... We went downtown to actually cross the border.

I remember getting lost. It was amazing, masses of people out there it was a happening, and somehow we got separated and I wound up in the Tiergarten. There was a part of the Wall and a bridge going over to the other side, I can't exactly remember where the location was, but there were lights and I remember seeing a West German border guard handing a cup of coffee to his East German counterpart.



Flooding through the newly opened Wall, 10 November 1989

Andreas Ramos, a Colombian-American who was visiting Berlin at the time the Wall fell, wrote a letter to his mother describing what he saw in Berlin that evening:

We finally reached the border just after midnight. The East German border was always a serious place. Armed guards kept you in your car, watching for attempts at escapes. Tonight was a different country. Over 20,000 East and West Germans were gathered there in a huge party: as each Trabi came through, people cheered and clapped. East Germans drove through the applause, grinning, dazed, as thousands of flashbulbs went off. The traffic jam was spectacular. The cloud of light turned out to be the headlights of tens of thousands of cars in a huge cloud of Trabi exhaust fumes. We got out of the car and began walking. Between lanes of cars, streams of people were walking, talking together. Under one light, a group of musicians were playing violins and accordions and men and women were dancing in circles. Despite the brilliantly cold night, car windows were open and everyone talked to each other.

We walked through the border. On both sides the guard towers were empty and the barbed wire was shoved aside in great piles. Large signs told us that we needed sets of car documents. The East German guard asked if we had documents. I handed him my Danish cat's vaccination documents, in Danish. He waved us through.

Hundreds of West German police stood in rows with their tall shields. On top of the wall stood East German soldiers with their rifles. Groups of West Germans stood around fires that they had built. No one knew what was going on.

Everything was out of control. Police on horses watched. There was nothing they could do. The crowd had swollen. People were blowing long alpine horns which made a huge noise. There were fireworks, kites, flags and flags and flags, dogs, children. The wall was finally breaking.... To get a better view,

58 9 November 1989

hundreds of people were climbing onto a shop on the West German side. We scampered up a nine foot wall. People helped each other; some lifted, others pulled. All along the building, people poured up the wall.

Looking around, I saw an indescribable joy in people's faces. It was the end of the government telling people what not to do, it was the end of the Wall, the war, the East, the West.¹

For days, the streets of Berlin were filled with onlookers and citizens of the once divided city. They created an atmosphere never felt before: a mixture of excitement, joy, disbelief and anticipation. Berlin buzzed with powerful emotions. Reactions ranged from astonishment and doubt to triumph and exaltation. Only seldom was the impression made that citizens disapproved of the opening of the Wall. The global impact was almost as immediate as the local impact. All over the world, people watched in awe as the Iron Curtain crumbled under the tenacity of the German people and the free world. On 9 November 1989, the world rejoiced with Germany. Karen Blaesing captures this:

People were crying and hugging each other. It was very emotional. And I remember the next day, the schools closed. Everyone just refused to go to school because it was such great news. I clearly remember November 9th. I mean it was just... it was like...you can't even put it into words or it would lose its meaning. I mean, it was just so emotional. It was very, very intense.

Chapter Four

Defining Unity: Challenges Ahead

Nicholas Anania & Anna Zychlinsky

“I remember telling my American friend, Shawn, when we were at the Wall, when I saw people kissing and hugging each other and embracing each other and celebrating, that maybe this German-German love may not last forever. You know, once it comes to problems, it’s going to be difficult,” Walter Salzman remembers. The many jubilant celebrations following the demolition of the Berlin Wall masked the inevitable fact that Berliners on both sides of the city soon had to face the challenges of reconstruction and attempt to share the burdens. As the excitement of the festivities waned, obstacles to a seamless reunification loomed on the horizon. The four major challenges the state of Germany, and specifically the city of Berlin, had to overcome after unification were: merging the infrastructures, balancing economic instabilities, remedying lingering feelings of separation and integrating fundamental ideological differences between East and West. While some of these issues, such as merging infrastructure, have been properly addressed, there remain many hurdles on the path to a unified Germany.

Political Challenges

A common misconception about the fall of the Berlin Wall is that its demolition meant instant unification; that a united Germany was established on 9 November 1989. In fact, the legal unification of Germany did not occur until 3 October 1990 and was the result of various factors and much careful diplomacy. West German authorities were simply not prepared for an opening of the borders, let alone unification. With commendable foresight, the Adenauer administration had advocated the adoption of Article 23 in the West German constitution, which provided for the entrance of other states into the Federation of Germany. Shortly after 9 November, the government under Chancellor Helmut Kohl created a plan for unification. The program included a transitional period of four to five years and promised that all regions would have their voices heard equally in the reunification process. The problem with this approach was that Kohl assumed East Germany could function as a separate state until the collaboration between them became a full-fledged union. However, the GDR regime had collapsed, and the dissident groups within Germany lacked the strength, unity, experience and political wherewithal to lead East Germany. Furthermore, the majority of East German citizens favored unification, whereas many rebel groups advocated a separate, independent East German state. Because the East Germans were so eager for Westernization, and because the East German revolutionaries could not offer an equally appealing solution, the West largely filled the power vacuum left by the toppled Communist regime. In 1989-90 most Germans were pro-unification. According to one poll, 75 to 80 % of West Germans were in favor of absorbing East Germany.¹ The international community also demonstrated its support for a united Germany. Gorbachev endorsed German unification and informed Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher that Russia would not interfere in any way. Furthermore, U.S.

President George H.W. Bush praised the resilience of the German people and asserted that a united Germany would foster global cooperation.²

After the GDR's first free elections on 18 March 1990, deliberations between the GDR and FRG culminated in a Unification Treaty. At the same time, negotiations between the GDR and FRG and the four occupying powers resulted in the Two Plus Four Treaty granting dominion to a unified German state.³ The West German *Deutsche Mark* was introduced to the East in July, and the official unification celebrations were held in October. Various concerns, however, remained to be addressed. For example, the question of abortion—for which there were different policies in the East and the West—required a few years of negotiations before a nationwide policy could be agreed upon. Another sensitive issue which required discussion that transcended the timeline for reunification was the question of how to handle confidential *Stasi* documents.¹ Such tangential issues, however important, did not interfere with the unification process in general.

An important factor in the peaceful revolution in Germany was the approval it received from foreign nations. The blessing of the two superpowers, Russia and the United States, made reunification significantly easier than it would have been without their support. Although France and England were at first apprehensive about unification, Kohl's deft political maneuvering smoothed out what could have been a more diplomatically challenging situation.

In the end, like so many political conundrums, it all came down to money. The East was already heavily indebted to the West, and even after 9 November, Hans Modrow, the last Communist Premier of East Germany, asked Bonn for \$15 billion. As Serge Schmemmann stated in *The New York Times*, “[t]o begin the process, Bonn approved a supplementary budget of \$4.1 billion, most of it to shore up East Germany until reunification could be achieved.... The aid package included a reserve fund of \$1.2 billion (2 billion DM), and \$1 billion for East German immigrants arriving in West Germany. An additional \$1.4 billion was designated for immediate use for specific purposes, ranging from credits for small and medium-size businesses to currency exchange for East German visitors.” Modrow was clearly frustrated by Mr. Kohl's refusal to grant the full 15 billion Marks that they had requested in “solidarity aid”. Asked directly if he was dissatisfied, Modrow answered, “If you say it that way, yes.”⁴ This incident shows how desperate the East was. The prospect of joining up with a vastly richer state, which had benefited greatly from the Marshall Plan and the Organization for European Cooperation and Development (OECD), was an enticing offer which most East Germans were eager to accept. However, the economically depressed East placed great strain on unified Germany, and especially on its new capital, Berlin.

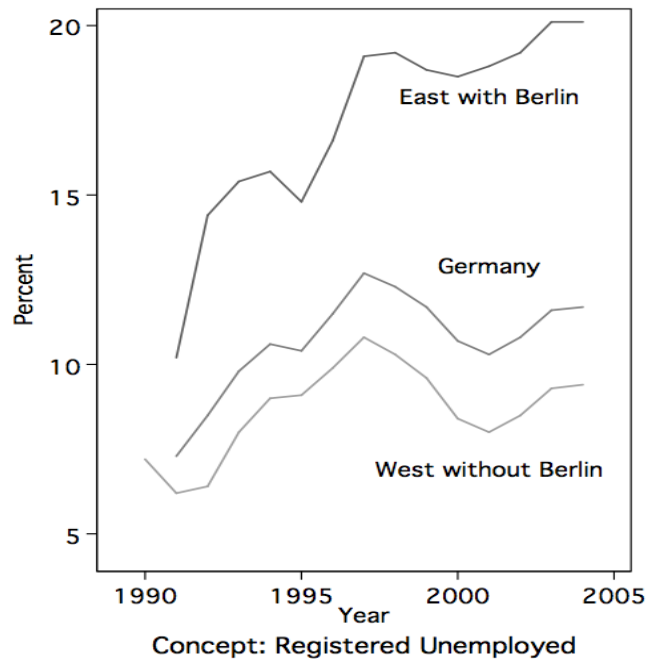
Economic Struggles

One of Berlin's most overwhelming obstacles was, and is, a lack of money. The city's current economic struggles result mainly from three interrelated legacies of partition. First, after reunification, the wealthier West was forced to bear the East's financial burdens by means of the Solidarity Tax. Second, the various financial incentives (most notably tax breaks) that Berlin enjoyed during its isolation, to encourage people to live there, were revoked, and many companies that were dependent on them folded or moved elsewhere. Third, partly due to its long period of political instability and resulting lack of economic viability, Berlin lacks a healthy industrial sector.

Significant sums of money have been spent to bring the East up to Western standards, as decades of communist rule left the East bankrupt and underdeveloped. According to the Free University of Berlin, the costs of reunification totaled 1.5 trillion Euros.¹ This enormous sum meant a decline in federal financing for states in western Germany. The cost of this endeavor has been a constant cause of resentment for many West Germans. Volker Heinz notes how:

It became quite clear that unification was a very costly affair. The transformation from a communist economy to a market economy basically destroyed the already weak GDR economy which meant that the West German economy would have to invest huge amounts of money to pay for the transformation. That very soon led to the introduction of a special unification tax which is still being paid today.

As Heinz suggests, the switch to capitalism had an immediate and devastating effect on the dilapidated East German economy. With Western products flooding East German shelves, East German companies were pushed into obscurity. Approximately 60 % of the industrial plants on previously-GDR soil were forced to close their doors. As a result, the Gross National Product (GNP) of the newly added states fell about 30 % in 1990 and 1991.¹



Source: *The Economics of German Reunification*⁵

However, these states were now under the responsibility of the West German government, and investments prompted a rapid rebound and further growth of the East German GNP which lasted until 1996 when growth slowed. During that time, economic growth in the East German states was much more dramatic than in the West.¹

In addition to taking on the economic responsibility for millions of East German citizens, the West was forced to rebuild public institutions in the East, as well as finance new ones. A large portion of these costs were covered by West German citizens via an assortment of increased and new taxes, while the rest of the money was borrowed. These taxes included a new 7.5% Solidarity Tax tagged onto the income tax, a 63% increase in oil prices, and the increase of tax rates on insurance policies from 7 to 15%. These taxes were distributed across all income demographics, and by 2000, the net cost of unification had surpassed \$700 billion for West Germany.¹ These tolls helped to catalyze the integration of East Germany into the rest of the country after reunification.¹

These efforts had a profoundly positive effect on the Eastern economy. By 1999, the average East German citizen's buying power had risen by almost 50%. One year later their buying power had risen to 75% of their Western counterparts. There were major increases in the business sector as well. While East German productivity was only 28% of West German productivity at the time of reunification, that figure rose to 60% in 1998. The gap between wages also decreased to varying degrees depending on the financial sector in consideration. The public sector led the charge in narrowing the wage gap

between Eastern and Western residents. However, these increases meant that East German workers were being paid more relative to their productivity. It is very likely that these ratios will remain similar for at least another decade or until the technological and infrastructural capacities of both sides of Germany become balanced. For the time being, the West continues to assist the East economically.¹

Prior to reunification, West Berliners enjoyed various tax exemptions. After these exemptions were revoked, and other taxes such as the Solidarity Tax were imposed, West Berliners had to pay far more than was previously demanded of them. Ergo, net income of the average West Berliner decreased, creating bitterness about reunification. These sentiments were exacerbated when numerous companies that had moved to West Berlin to take advantage of subsidies collapsed or relocated after some of the government support was withdrawn. This further damaged the already unstable industrial job market. Claudia Himmelreich explains the consequences of these actions:

People were paid very well in West Berlin and many companies received subsidies, and all these were removed after unification. Many companies had to close down because they really relied on those subsidies, so maybe 30-40% of the industrial jobs in West Berlin got lost.

The loss of subsidies seriously harmed the city's industry, which was not particularly strong to begin with. Because Germany already had comparatively stable financial centers like Frankfurt and Stuttgart, few wanted to invest in geographically inconvenient, politically unstable and relatively underdeveloped Berlin. After reunification, few companies sought to relocate to the city, when they were already established in other places and one of the main advantages to Berlin—the government subsidies—had been removed. The only real advantage was the close proximity to the government and, thus, perhaps an increased likelihood to achieve political support for a financial endeavor. Himmelreich explains how this lack of industry, partly resultant from government's end to Berlin tax breaks, was and is a vexing problem:

Berlin is economically struggling. In a way, that is due to the partition because much of the industry that Berlin had before the Wall was subsidized...it was artificially kept alive and efficient. Once this industry left it became very difficult to attract new industries because Berlin doesn't only have to compete with locations elsewhere in Germany, but also with the Eastern European neighbors that Berlin is very close to....No one feels obliged anymore to create jobs in Berlin, mainly because this is a front-chair city. That is something that needs to be done. More jobs have to be created in Berlin. The city has to be made economically more viable. It is culturally and artistically very attractive. It is a thriving metropolis, but it is economically not really viable.

Himmelreich voices the concern of many Germans: Berlin's isolation has made it dependent on federal funds because it cannot survive on its own economically. Another issue which contributes to Berlin's fiscal problems is its position as the capital of Germany. Federal institutions use services provided by the City of Berlin, which strains the city's economy. In other words, the city is responsible for certain federal costs, for example, police protection for visiting heads of state and the upkeep for federal buildings and monuments. Unless Berlin becomes a kind of "Berlin D.C." and is artificially kept alive through federal funding, this dilemma could prove detrimental to Berlin's economic, and by extension, cultural sustainability. These financial problems clearly demonstrate the challenges presented to Berlin as a result of Germany's reunification.

Merging Infrastructures

The merging of infrastructures was among the most immediate issues that had to be dealt with by the authorities after reunification. At the time, Berlin had two distinct transportation systems, airports, health care systems, school systems, water service systems and sewage systems. Though the merging of these institutions may have seemed a daunting task at the time, politicians and bureaucrats rose to the challenge and, at the very least, offered viable short-term solutions. In the long term, however, many of their decisions lacked foresight and resulted in a complete transfer to the Western system, whether or not that system was superior to the discarded one. This manifested in resentment among Easterners who felt that their values and well-being were not considered. It should be noted, however, that, in many instances, the Western system *was* superior to that of the East. For instance, the more advanced West German health care system resulted in an immediate improvement in the quality of medical treatments offered to East Germans. The consequences of these decisions, whether good or bad, would not be realized until years later and were difficult to foresee. The response of the authorities in relation to the merging of infrastructure after the fall of the Wall was efficient and logical, whatever the eventual effects of those early decisions were. Himmelreich offers insight regarding the successes and failures of reunification of the infrastructure:

A success was obviously infrastructure. That was really a comparatively easy thing to do—to connect the streets and the train system, the subways and all the mass communication. A more difficult thing was to integrate public services and institutions on both sides of the country. Education was an area where the West German system was just imposed on the East German one and many people now think that the system in the East was actually better and should have been kept.

As Himmelreich describes, although East Germany, by some accounts, had a more equitable education system, it was nonetheless discarded in favor of West Germany's controversial divided-secondary school structure, which splits

students into categories based on academic performance before adolescence.¹ Though Communist governance had created a respectable primary education system, it is important to take into account the radically different curricula fostered in the respective education systems. Moreover, the lack of free speech and press in the GDR most certainly hindered some arguably essential lessons. The abolition of the GDR school structure was, and still is, a cause for resentment among former East Berliners. Sylvia Iden, who at the time of reunification was a teacher in East Berlin, speaks of the seemingly unquestioning adoption of West German education:

We just took over everything we heard from the West. ‘Ah! *Realschule* we have to have that, too. Ah! *Gymnasium* we have to have that, too.’ Not that we wanted to have it, we just got it. ‘You have to make it like that,’ so we made it like that. Now they are trying to build some of those ten-class schools again.

Fortunately, not all establishments were integrated as clumsily as the school system. East Germany lacked certain modern “luxuries” that were commonplace in the rest of the developed world. For instance, East Germans lacked the benefits of an extensive telephone network and used coal-burning heat in their apartments. The reconstruction, or in some cases, installation of these utilities was handled expertly, albeit expensively. When asked if the united German government favored the East in spite of the West, Christiane Jontza, a television journalist from West Berlin, makes it clear that:

The East was favored, or at least had a lot more attention and investments from the state because you had to renew and rebuild everything in the East, absolutely everything! Not only the houses, not only the things above the ground. You had to start under the ground. The entire underground supply system had to be renewed, all those wires and pipes. The telephone cables had to be renewed and in some places even installed for the first time. In the East, almost nobody had a telephone. Maybe every seventh person had one. So if you wanted to talk to somebody, you would have to walk to their house and hope that he would be home. So it started under the ground. Then came the streets and then finally the houses and the rest. So all the money that was planned on being invested in West Berlin got redirected to the East. Everything! So all this means that the East got rehabilitated and the West broke down slowly or at least couldn’t maintain their standards anymore. And then after a while they realized that this is extremely unequal and you have to start caring for the West again as well. For many years all the money went to East Germany, especially in Berlin.

Jontza’s analysis clarifies how overwhelming the challenges in modernizing and unifying the German infrastructure were. She also notes that, though their efforts were noble, the unified government lacked some of the prudence (and perhaps some of the resources) needed to balance the needs of both sections of Germany. When asked if she felt that the unified government was trying to

expedite unification by offering a disproportionate and unhealthy focus on the East, Jontza replied:

Yes, of course. They wanted unification to happen as quickly as possible. To manage this task was extremely difficult also because you had a West and East police. The East policeman had a 42 hour week and only received 85% of the money where the West policeman had a 38.5 hour week and received 100%. And both of them patrolled together, in the same car. This was one of the remaining segregation issues East and West had to face.

Clearly, the merging of infrastructure was closely related to the disparities between East and West as well as the lingering resentment between former GDR and FRG citizens. Of course, the challenges of allocating funds for reuniting and revitalizing the German infrastructure were exacerbated by pragmatic political problems.

Germany needed to augment its infrastructure in order to get the economy on strong footing. Unfortunately, at the same time, Germany needed a stable economy in order to afford an infrastructure that would help them to compete in the global marketplace. This was, and still is, the crux of the political problem faced by the German leadership. Exorbitant spending was necessary, and this was impossible to do with limited capital reserves. Though the gaps between the two infrastructures have been mended so successfully that the average Berliner does not see the seams, most are keenly aware of the economic legacy of reunification. Heinz offers insight into the ongoing processes of merging infrastructures:

The federal government invested vast sums of money into infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, telephone systems etc, thereby facilitating transport and communication. That certainly helped unification. It certainly also helped that the federal government allowed East Germans to exchange their currency into the Western currency at a very favorable rate, but the East Germans experienced by far more severe changes than the West Germans. The process of ultimate adaptation is still not finished. One must not forget that the East German industry was basically destroyed and a huge process of restitution of properties had set in and that East Germany suffered under severe levels of unemployment.

Heinz is wise to make special note of the implications of the failures of East German industry on the economy of unified Germany. Since the collapse of the USSR, it has become increasingly evident that the productivity levels and safety regulations of Soviet industry were, to say the least, suspect. The legacy of Soviet haste to industrialize dealt a serious blow to the processes of German reunification. However, had physical obstacles been the only problems facing reunification, the situation would not be such a profound dilemma.

Lingering Feelings of Separation

It is inevitably complicated for a divided people to reunite as one community in a short time. As such, lingering feelings of separation remain prevalent in Berlin, and in Germany as a whole. As is common with colliding cultures, people are prone to fall prey to prejudices which can seriously impede social understanding. Himmelreich encapsulates these social impediments:

From 1989-90 on, people started speaking about the 'Wall in the Minds.' I don't think this is gone even today. It is very strange how even kids, like teenagers who were born after the Wall, still speak of *Ossis* (Easterners) and *Wessis* (Westerners) and still differentiate between people from the different parts of Berlin although they've never seen it divided. Germany has not completely grown together.

With the terms *Ossis* and *Wessis* still used to differentiate between East and West Berliners, it is evident that the legacy of a separated Germany lingers. Himmelreich's description of "The Wall in the Mind" is an appropriate way of illustrating the mindsets of some citizens. Although the Wall is gone, some deeply-ingrained prejudices continue to be perpetuated in everyday life. Topuz illustrates these prejudices when he states:

Today, there is still a gap between East and West. People say 'ahh the East.' They called the people *Die Ostler* (the ones from the East). Although there is no Wall, it seems sometimes that there is still a Wall, because the people from the West don't like to enter into the East part. And I think it's the other way around, too, but I don't want to generalize. I think there are also other examples because in some parts you don't even recognize that there was the East before, but I think there is a lot of frustration with the politics, and people are searching for answers, and they say the reunification is one of the reasons why we have problems.

The fact that some West Berliners continue to avoid traveling to the East and vice-versa is evidence that there is still progress to be made. Himmelreich speaks optimistically to the prospects for diminishing prejudices like these when she says:

It's a generational thing, I would say. Elderly East and West Germans who grew up under totally different systems and who've led separate lives still feel pretty separate. They know they are reunited, but still they don't share the same experiences; while with young people who've grown up in the same country and share a lot of experiences, I think they feel more united.

She implies that another generation may pass before the lingering feeling of separation subsides. Like Himmelreich, Marcus Gladrow is acutely aware of the Wall in the Minds:

If it is outward things like infrastructure or business or repairing of buildings and roads and so on, I think the integration is well on its way and there is not much difference left behind between both sides. But if it comes to the thinking and the socialization of people or the social upbringing of people, there is still a big difference in the way they think and the way they approach life. It's still visible, you can still feel it and there are still some noticeable prejudices. They have prejudgments about the other side. It's *Wessi* and *Ossi*; if you use these terms, it's critical, so the Westerners think the East side is spoiled through all the help they got from the West. They think that they should shut up and be content with what they have.

These discriminatory prejudices are based on broad stereotypes and need to be addressed by the German people. Until these feelings fade away, Germany cannot be truly united. The fact that the post-Wall generation still possesses this chauvinism may be an ominous indication of the future of a united Germany and stands contrary to Himmelreich's optimism. If youth inherits their parents' intolerance, and in turn passes this on to its children, then the enmity will never pass, and Germany will remain segregated.

It is heartening to discover, therefore, that some people persist in fighting the East-West intolerance. Dr. Walter Peterson, recalls an anecdote where he was compelled to, tongue in cheek, tear down the Wall:

I have an Eastern license plate, because I have a house in the East, (former East) in the state of Brandenburg, and I once parked here [in the West] and somebody screamed at me as an '*Ossi*' and I turned and said, 'But I am an American *Ossi*.'

When confronted with blatant prejudice, Peterson responded with humor, while attempting to alter the perception of this particular Berliner. Incidents like these are in the spirit of unification and represent what is best of Berliners, both *Ossis* and *Wessis*: their liberalism and sense of humor. Moments like these show how many Germans will stand up against prejudice. Such lingering feelings of separation are impediments to unification. However, clashing ideologies likewise pose a profound threat.

Clash of Ideologies

The greatest challenge after unification was, and still is, clashing ideologies. Communism and capitalism are separate worlds, with different sets of values, priorities and fundamental views. The merging, voluntarily or otherwise, of these ideological differences into a single country and under a single system resulted in dissatisfaction, resentment and outright hostility. Differences in cultural character and upbringing sometimes run too deep to be overcome. In this aspect, perhaps more than any other, Berlin is still in the process of uniting. Salzmann makes it clear that integration will not come easily:

Germany is still not completely integrated; this will take a long time. I mean it takes years. It's so much better than what it used to be. But in the former East, if you had been indoctrinated or you had a philosophy for forty years, it's your way of life, your way of thinking. You can't sort of get rid of it immediately... the young folks have a big advantage.

As Salzman states, the great difference in “philosophy” and “way of life” prevented many Easterners from easily integrating into West Berlin, and, to a lesser degree, Westerners from doing the same in East Berlin. It is commonly thought that Easterners had a harder time assimilating than Westerners due to the complete eradication of the communist system in favor of the capitalist one. Many consider the imposition of one world onto the other a source of resentment, and maintain that the government should have tried, instead, to merge the two systems more delicately and equitably. Salzman also touches on another conventional belief: that only those who do not remember the Wall will be able to overcome its lingering boundaries. This attitude is shared by many Berliners, including Manfred Puche who hypothesizes, “I think the East and West are united [but] I think we have to wait for two generations for all the things to be equal.” An equally disturbing and likewise problematic fact is that even Berliners too young to remember the physical separation continue the ideological one. Although this is understandable, as children tend to mirror the basic ideologies of their parents, it could pose a serious hindrance for Germany in the future. Though the Wall is gone, the separation between Germans remains, and the differences are being passed on through stereotypes such as “*Ossis* wake up early” and “*Wessis* throw everything away” into the next generation.

The Wall in the Minds keeps Berliners in separate neighborhoods, separate social circles and separate lives. Part of this polarization stems from resentment. There is resentment in the West for the Solidarity Tax and for the East Berliners taking over their city, driving cars on their streets and shopping for exotic items in their stores. Then there is resentment from East Berliners about the demolition of their world in favor of capitalist practices. Rainer Hoedt speaks empathically about the lingering ideological divisions:

The West Berliners didn't really have a big problem with the fall of the Wall. The integration was definitely much harder for the Eastern Berliners because they had to give up their jobs and forget what they used to do... The failure is definitely that many West Berliners still feel as if they're the winners and the Eastern Berliners as losers. That's not really integration.

As Hoedt explains, the government did not fully respect the wishes of East Germans and simply imposed the Western system onto the East, which caused mutual antipathy. Some of those original decisions are now being reconsidered, and some citizens are in favor of a return to the more positive aspects of East

Berlin. Himmelreich further reveals her perceptions in regards to infrastructure: “Health care was a very well-run system in the East, which was totally smashed and is now being partly rebuilt after it has turned out that it wasn’t all that bad.” The sentiments expressed here may partially stem from nostalgia for the “Old East”. Though Himmelreich’s assertion that discussions are being held to seriously reconsider the decisions made in 1989-1990 might be an overstatement, it is true that such concerns have been raised. While the German government’s reconsideration of various socialist policies may help mend old wounds among some East Berliners, the damage, to a great extent, cannot be undone. The resentment—the sense of being considered a second-class citizen, the feeling of not being heard—lingers and manifests itself in various forms. So long as these impressions are fueled by mutual ill will, Berlin will never unify, regardless of how much time elapses since the Berlin Wall’s demolition.

The two major differences in ideology and character between East and West Berliners are generally considered to be their work ethics and their expectations from the government. Many West Berliners are prejudiced in these regards and criticize East Berliners harshly for their naiveté and their dependence on the communist regime. Charles Johnson, for example, speaks of East Germans in such terms when he asserts that East Berliners “weren’t willing to work for anything. And they expected to have everything that everybody had on the West side.” Johnson describes an unfortunately common opinion: that East Berliners were indolent and dependant on the government. Although this view is shared by many, the exact opposite perception is likewise common: that while West Berliners only do as much as necessary to make money, East Berliners do their jobs well as a matter of duty, a remnant of communist-era culture. If anything, Johnson’s sentiments demonstrate the attitudinal differences between East and West more than any actual work habits of either culture. His negative outlook on the East is also displayed in his impression of their expectations from the government:

The West people don’t like the East people. And if you talk to a person from the East all they can do is tell you how much greater it was when the Wall was still up. And the reason for that is that they didn’t have to work for anything. It wasn’t a challenge—they were given jobs, they were given everything. They didn’t have to really struggle at all because they knew no different than what they had. And then all of a sudden, that government security blanket wasn’t there anymore. They actually did have to go and look for a job; well then they didn’t like that. And the people from the West, they don’t like the people from the East because they came and, you know; they were handed everything. People from the West were never benefited from “Oh here” 100 Marks just because you crossed the border.

The contempt for East Berliners demonstrated by Johnson is the voice of many who stereotype and ridicule those who are now their neighbors and countrymen. Such prejudices, beyond argument and reason, keep Germany from

unifying completely. These pervasive sentiments are the essence of the Wall in the Minds.

Fortunately, while some maintain their prejudices, the majority of West Berliners recognize the efforts among Easterners to adapt to a foreign system and offer well-deserved credit for the protests in the East that were crucial to the fall of the Wall. Manfred Puche expresses his gratitude: “We have to thank the East Germans that the Wall fell down.” This appreciation for the compromises made by the East Germans, and acknowledgement of their role in the fall of the Berlin Wall, is contrary to the prejudices Johnson describes and the perfect antidote for such politically unhelpful sentiments. These perspectives on Germany’s turbulent past will influence its course in the future. The bitterness people hold onto may seriously impede the nation’s unification and therefore its success, while the mutual empathy and understanding Puche advocates represents the country’s best hope for uniting and moving forwards.

After all, Berliners have lived through mass bombing campaigns, seen their homes turned to rubble, faced starvation during the Airlift and lived for decades in a divided city. Berliners have constantly adapted to adverse circumstances and will continue to rise to the occasion as the challenges of unification persist. As Can states, they know that “if people stand up they can really achieve something. It was mostly the people that made the Wall come down—not the governments.” Can goes on to commend young Berliners who, “really appreciate the freedom of their country and the opportunity a unified Germany offers them.” Many Berliners have reveled in the opportunities of the renaissance wrought by unification. Though prejudices remain, a mutual understanding among former East and West Berliners increases steadily as children from different backgrounds go to school together, date, marry and have children who reflect a merging of their parents’ diverse German heritages. One day in the near future, Berlin will be a single, unified city in every sense of the word.

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