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## **November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989**

For over a quarter of a century the city of Berlin Germany was split in two; physically, culturally and economically, by a cement wall. The Berlin Wall was built on August 13, 1961 with the help of East German workers and troops. It symbolized, as Winston Churchill first coined it, the German Democratic Republic's "Iron Curtain;" a political and cultural divide between the two halves of Berlin dominated by the Superpowers of the United States and Russia. Churchill was not only referring to Berlin at the time but the Soviet alliance of countries it had procured around itself. Among these countries were: Albania, Poland, Yugoslavia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and most of what today is considered Eastern Europe. To vocalize a divide between all of Europe in two words is hard, but building a wall is easy when the resources of multiple countries are at one's disposal. Our report will cover the creation, meaning, and fall of the Wall. To fully understand the meaning of the Wall we must return to its beginnings.

The division solidified by the Berlin Wall had its origins in the Allied Control Council, which split the defeated Germany into four separate regions to be governed jointly by the winning nations: The United Kingdom, Russia, France and the United States. Tensions soon between the Allied Forces soon rose, because the capital from which the Allied Control Council

ruled was deep in Soviet territory. It was agreed that the capital city Berlin was to be governed in four separate quadrants but soon France, Britain and the United States consolidated their territories effectively creating West Berlin and East Berlin (Soviet territory), causing even more tensions to rise.

On June 15, 1961 the First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, a man by the name of Walter Ulbricht, announced publicly that the GDR had no intentions of building a physical barrier between East and West Berlin. On Saturday August 12 of the same year, Ulbricht signed the order to close the border and erect a wall. The Wall went up almost overnight as most Berliners who still remember that day describe it. The Wall was originally meant to keep the East Berliners from entering or perceiving West Berlin. The Socialist GDR Communism did not want its citizens seeing the decadent, free market capitalist lifestyle of the West Berliners. So the first and most use of the Wall was to keep the economic principles of Socialism Soviet and Western Capitalism separate in the minds of the East and West Germans. However, the Wall's existence meant more than just a barrier against cultural influence. It split families and friends apart, not allowing people with close relations to see loved ones for almost 25 years. The Wall took on an emotional dimension for the people of Berlin and created resentment. The number of people who died trying to cross the border between the two states is between 136 and 192 (Berlin Wall Online) and over 100 people were injured (u-s-history.com).

There is a museum close to the Alexanderplatz in Berlin that commemorates and enshrines the lives of those that crossed over or died trying to get to West Berlin. The museum shows details of some of the border crossing attempts. For example, one person tried to cross in a friend's car and had wedged himself into the space between the outer and inner part of a car door. Inventions, even such ideas as homemade flying machines, were utilized to no avail. Hang-

gliders were even used as modes of transportation to get over the border: one would simply stand on a rooftop and jump and hope their trajectory was sufficient to clear the no man's land between the two walls. This method of crossing was quickly dismissed as the soldiers in the towers on the eastern side had orders to shoot any "defector" on sight. No matter whether one wanted to see family on the other side of the Wall or was trying to escape persecution, she or he was labeled a defector if discovered in the zone between the two walls. Those who were found trying to cross were almost always never heard from again. When the Wall fell it paved the way for the unification of Germany as well as heralding the imminent demise of the USSR

The most successful means of escape was through building tunnels. One tunnel in particular saved 29 people from East Germany. It was located in the basement of a house at 60 Westerstrasse. These tunnels were built mostly by college students and located in graveyards throughout East Berlin (Berlin Wall Tunnel Escapes). Other forms of escape were climbing or flying over the Wall. For instance two families saved up small pieces of cloth and built their own hot air balloon; after their successful escape to West Berlin the GDR started monitoring purchases of cloth (Flying over the Wall).

The resentment that East Berliners felt toward the GDR was intensifying. Declining socioeconomic conditions made citizens from the East revolt and decide to risk everything to be freed from their oppressors. The GDR was spreading propaganda that the Wall was there to protect the East Berliners from the unemployment and chaos of West Berlin; the GDR was "protecting Heimat," and trying to convince the citizens that the West was the "enemy." From the perspective of the East Berliners there were mixed feelings. In August of 1962 Peter Flechter, an 18-year-old bricklayer, tried to cross the Wall and was immediately shot by the patrolmen. The shots didn't immediately kill him and he stumbled backwards and fell on the East side of the

border. Many people from West Berlin wanted to save the young man but the patrolmen were ordered to shoot anyone that came too close to him. Everyone had no choice but to watch him die a slow death.

This incident remained in the minds of East Berliners making them question their government more. The knowledge that the government was restricting them from seeing family members contradicted the feeling of “Heimat” and love for their home (Davey 80). A more modern and prosperous state was on the other side of the Berlin Wall. West Berliners were a liberated people. They had an economy resembling that of countries belonging to the European Union. West Berlin was becoming increasingly popular with its economic status and growth. In December of 1972, both German States signed the Basic Treaty, also known as the Treaty concerning the basis of relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. The treaty committed both states to develop normal relations on the basis of equality, guaranteeing their mutual territorial integrity as well as the border between them. They also agreed to recognize each other's independence and sovereignty (Berlin Time Line). Additionally they agreed to the exchange of “Permanent Missions” in Bonn and East Berlin to help further relations (Berlin Time Line). Eventually in 1989 Hungary opened its borders to Western Europe. When Hungary did this East Berliners gained access to Western Europe and West Berlin, since movement through communist countries was allowed. This along with the protests being held that year pressured the East German government to reform (Events Leading up to the Fall of the Wall).

The Berlin Wall was redesigned four times before its fall on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989. The first Wall was 107 kilometers long and 4 meters high; it was made mostly out of concrete elements and square blocks. The Wall was redesigned in June of 1962. The GDR made it more

difficult to escape to West Berlin. In order to reduce the number of successful escapes by means of driving through the Wall, the GDR dug trenches. They also added a number of watchtowers and increased the number of armed guards. The first and second generations were almost identical. The third generation was built in 1965 and consisted of concrete slabs with a steel girder and a sewage pipe on the top of the Wall. They added the sewage pipe in order to make it more difficult for people trying to climb over the Wall. The Sewage pipe was 40 meters around.

The fourth and final generation was constructed in 1975, also known as Grenzmauer 75. It was made of concrete segments for increased durability to withstand vandalism and the environment (Berlin Wall History: Facts). It was 155 kilometers long and 3.6 meters high when it was taken down. There were two sections to the Wall; the section further in on the Eastern territory had a touch-sensitive automatic firing system. This section was made of L-shaped sections of pre-cast concrete used by farmers to build open silos. This section prevented people that were going to attempt to climb over the Wall from actually getting to the border (Berlin Time Line). Both sections of the Wall were 3.6 meters high and 1.2 meters wide and they were topped off by a smooth asbestos-concrete pipe 40 centimeters in diameter. The GDR had watchtowers and bunkers along the length of the Wall (Basic Facts of the Berlin Wall). When the Wall fell it was reportedly because Günter Schabowski, an official in East Berlin, opened the border for “private trips abroad” (the Fall of the Berlin Wall). The event paved the way for the unification of Germany. After Hungary removed its border restrictions with Austria, many East Germans fled there. From there, they demanded entrance into West Germany.

Throughout the days after November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989, people used whatever they could to tear down the Wall, like a sledgehammer. They slowly worked away at the Wall, chipping at it piece by piece. Little of the Wall is left today. Even the watchtowers that once stood in East Germany

are gone ([destination360.com](http://destination360.com)). Most of the Wall was destroyed except for three locations: near the Postdamer Platz, along the Spree River near the Oberbaumbrücke also known as “East Side Gallery,” and in the north at Bernauer Strasse. The part near Bernauer Strasse has been a memorial since 1999. It is also where the official destruction of the Wall started ([spiritus-temoris.com](http://spiritus-temoris.com)). The most recognized is the East Side Gallery, where there are 106 paintings ([aviewoncities.com](http://aviewoncities.com)). Another large part of what is left of the Berlin Wall is the Berlin Wall Museum. The museum has stories of escapes, the history of the Wall, and exhibits ([destinatio360.com](http://destinatio360.com)).

People were crowded in the streets of Berlin on the night the Wall came down. This was a big step for each side of Germany. Andreas Ramos traveled to Berlin the night the Wall came down. Normally an eight-hour drive from Denmark to Berlin, Ramos and his friends took another five hours because of all the traffic going into Germany. The only thing that was talked about on the radio was Berlin. People were heading to Germany from Belgium, France, Sweden, and other European countries. They were all just coming to see the Wall be brought down. Over 20,000 Eastern and Western Germans were gathered by the Wall, celebrating an impromptu party with champagne. The guard towers were empty and large piles of barbed wire were pushed together alongside the Wall. Ramos and his friends eventually walked to the Potsdamer Platz, where they found the next place the Wall to be torn down. “From the East German side we could hear the sound of heavy machines [ . . . ] at one point, a few Eastern German soldiers looked through the narrow holes. We reached through and shook their hands. Someone lent me a hammer and I knocked chunks of rubble from the Wall” ([www.andres.com/berlin.html](http://www.andres.com/berlin.html)). The crowds were wild with people climbing over the Wall. Some even stopped to have their picture taken. The police could not do much. Many Western Germans were very nice to the Eastern

Germans who came over; some even let them borrow their cars. When it was time to head home, Ramos had no trouble getting past the border, because there were no more guards.

In the next few days, over one million East Germans went into West Germany. Over the next year, many discussions about a reunification between the two Germanys took place. The final unification treaty was over 1,000 pages and was approved by most of the German political groups on September 20<sup>th</sup> 1990. However, it was not until October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990, when the German Democratic Republic joined the Federal Republic of Germany, that Germany was truly unified. Celebrations were held all across Germany after this ([www.countrystudies.us/germany/73.htm](http://www.countrystudies.us/germany/73.htm)).

2009 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Wall and has been named the “Year of Remembrance.” Throughout the year there will be many events to celebrate this occasion including exhibitions, talks, and guided walks. On the actual date the Wall fell, something very special is planned: a huge series of domino-like stones are going to be set off so that they topple, just as the Wall did many years ago ([www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)).

The Germans have every right to celebrate, for they have achieved so much since the Wall was brought down. A survey in September of 2004 reported that 25% of West Germans and 12% of East Germans wish the Wall was still up ([www.spiritus-temporis.com](http://www.spiritus-temporis.com)). While it may be strange now to hear after seeing how everyone celebrated the fall of the Wall, Germans still have their own opinions. However, when the 9<sup>th</sup> of November rolls around, all of Germany will be celebrating.

East Germany’s socioeconomic transition into a land of democracy and capitalism has been a struggle. The East Germans have had a hard time adjusting to the new political system implemented by the West. In spite of the struggle Eastern Germans have had with the transition, they are making progress. An example of the struggle of transition for the people of Eastern

Germany appears in the film *Goodbye, Lenin*, when an infirm woman does not know that the Berlin Wall has come down, and her friends and family try to keep her from knowing. A trend that exemplifies the East's struggle is the economic situation in contemporary Eastern Germany. The Easterners have not yet recovered from Russia's occupation and the influence of socialism. An important trend that needs to be addressed is that political systems, historically, take many years to be fully functional. A country usually makes its own rules to gain political stability. The former Eastern states could take decades for not only the economy to adjust but for the people themselves. The Western system of government has developed over more than fifty years, giving people of the West time to adjust and accept the political change that occurred. However, with the radical change that came to Eastern Germany, the people of the East experienced a type of political shock (Garcia-Zamor 2). Radical political change in East Germany has not been an easy task, but to this day it is becoming more accepted.

The former bureaucracies of Eastern Germany have had a hard time adjusting. Bureaucracies are an effective measure of progress when it comes to determining the success of a country. Using bureaucracies as a marker of progress is effective because they are a level of government with a common structure in any type of government. In Western Germany, the bureaucrats were and still are selected by qualification, whereas in the former East Germany, bureaucrats were selected by party ideals and loyalty, a common feature in a Socialist society (Garcia-Zamor 1). When government offices in the former East can be run by people who are selected by merit and can successfully carry out the will of the government, the former Eastern states will have proof of a functional democratic government.

Another measure of the success of German reunification could emerge from reports on the socioeconomic situation of different areas in the East. Along with reports on conditions in



Eastern Germany, surveys of individuals from different parts of the social spectrum could ask for their opinions on how effectively the new government is carrying out the business of the country. A barrier to this method of measuring governmental success is the cost and complexity of surveying people in the East. However, if more surveys were circulated in Eastern Germany, results would be clear in time. After a number of surveys (as stated by the Central Limit Theorem in statistics) reliable answers would emerge.

Before the reunification of East and West Germany, the former Soviet-controlled Germany had a declining GDP along with substandard living conditions. The East German government was not delivering results the East German people were led to expect. After the fall of the Wall, in 1990, West Germany had about a 6% increase in GDP whereas East Germany had about a 16% decline in GDP (Garcia-Zamor 158). In 1995, five years after unification, West Germany saw about a 1% increase in GDP while East Germany experienced about a 4.5% increase in GDP (Garcia-Zamor 159). The increases in GDP show the progress East Germany has made, despite the economic slump of that time. Further analysis into the given figures illustrates Eastern Germany's potential for economic growth using the democratic structure of the West. An argument could be made that Eastern Germany's GDP reflects the funding given to Eastern Germany at the time for reconstruction efforts.

An issue that East Germans currently face is resentment from West Germans. On the one hand, West Germans feel as though the people in the East are ungrateful for the generous funding poured into the former GDR. “[West Germans] criticize [ . . . ] former East German civil-rights activists, who [ . . . ] were involved in the state-led processes [ . . . ]” (Cooke 142). On the other hand, the East Germans feel as though West Germans have come through and taken over their state. Most politicians in East Germany at the time of unification were replaced by

West Germans, making the East Germans also feel resentful. An argument could be made that West Germany should have executed a different policy for appointing public officials in the newly democratic East Germany. Westerners, on the other hand, feel as though Easterners should be appreciative that they are steering them toward a brighter future.

East Germany has seen much progress since the fall of the Berlin Wall in the area of modernization. Though the former Eastern states are still not up to the economic standards of the rest of Western society they are definitely making strides in that direction. These states have recovered some of what was lost when the Soviet Union occupied them. The Soviet Union basically packed up industrial machinery and sent it to Russia (Roskin 175). Within the coming decades, Eastern Germany will hopefully attain the economic standards of the West. Eastern Germany will rebuild its industry so that it is no longer needs as much financial assistance from the federal government and will no longer be plagued by economic stagnation.

Eastern Germany's modernization so far was made possibly by the fall of the Berlin Wall, which can be regarded as a symbolic fall of the then Soviet influence in Germany. The planned economy used by the GDR no longer hinders the chance for entrepreneurial creativity to blossom in a place where a free market had not been present for almost an entire generation. The people of Eastern Germany were not used to capitalism when the Berlin Wall came down and are obviously still adjusting to the new system. Only through time can East Germans become accustomed to Western life. The former East is now a land where cultural barriers no longer block capitalism and democracy, which leaves adjustment to the new system as the last step. Each side of Germany will need to exercise cooperation and the virtue of patience.

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