

The Berlin Wall: Commemorating the Isolation and Captivity of East Berlin and its Citizens (1945 - 2019)

Abstract:

In this research project, I explore the impact of the Berlin Wall on the citizens of East Berlin, all of Germany and other parts of the world. Historical and cultural scholars argue that the Berlin Wall represents more than an inanimate object, it signifies a tragedy in its creation and purpose. Every other large-scale wall built serves to protect the country and citizens by keeping people outside the wall. However, the intention of the communist government of East Berlin was unique, building the Berlin Wall to create a prison for the citizens of East Berlin. My research utilizes numerous books, articles and news sources from 1945-2019 to show how the fall of the Berlin Wall was celebrated throughout the world. Moreover, I analyze the commemorations of the Berlin Wall to show how the wall was ultimately a failure. This topic is relevant in modern-day American political debates about constructing a large-scale wall. The Berlin Wall offers a chance to learn from the past and not repeat it.

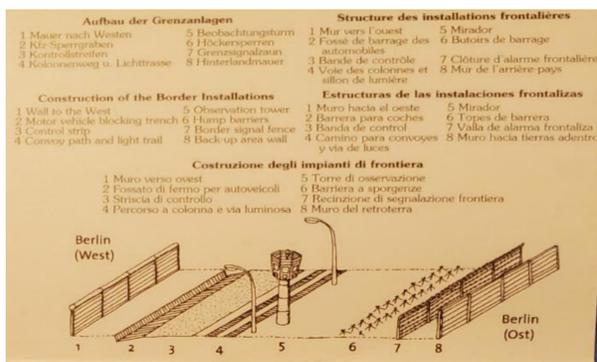


Fig. 2 (above) Post card flip book obtained while visiting Berlin. It shows the several layers of the Berlin Wall, in multiple languages.



Fig. 3 (above) Map of Germany while the Berlin Wall stood. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/architecture-design/late-modernism-post-modernism/a/the-berlin-wall-as-a-political-symbol-edit>

Historical Content:

The communist government of the Soviet Union sought control over the people and territory of East Berlin, On August 13, 1961 construction of the Berlin Wall began, with the intention to keep the citizens of East Berlin from escaping. It took only two weeks to build to preliminary 87-mile-long wall, thereafter they worked on reinforcing and strengthen the prison they were creating for the citizens of East Berlin. Stiver and Carter (2017) explain how there were 12 checkpoints along the Berlin Wall to allow limited passage through the wall. The most famous was the American Checkpoint, named Checkpoint Charlie, which was also the first checkpoint built as the wall was being constructed.



Fig. 7 (above) Graffiti from the Berlin Wall showing how some appreciated the U.S. occupation in Berlin. <https://steller.co/sticks090460/>



Fig. 4 (above) Commemoration of the Berlin Wall built in Portland, Maine, so people would not forget the atrocities of the wall. <http://en.the-wall-net.org/portland-me/>

Stevens Point Journal

East, West Berliners dance on wall



EAST AND WEST BERLINERS crowd the wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate today, facing to the West. Thousands came to the West during the night after the border gates were opened.

Fig. 1 (above): Headline the morning after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on November 10, 1989. This depicts how this moment in history was celebrated halfway around the world.

Literature Review:

Historical, cultural and anthropological scholars agree that the existence of the Berlin Wall made an already tense situation significantly worse. Jean Smith (1963) discusses how the Soviet Union sought to control East Berlin citizens, while allies in the West where trying to free them. Curt Riess (1952) tells of the horrors that occurred in East Berlin prior to the wall's construction, events that lead to approximately 3.6 million people fleeing East Berlin before there were confined by the wall. Similarly, Honoré Catudal (1971) discusses the tragedy on a smaller scale, discussing the town of Steinstücken on the border between East and West Berlin that was in constant turmoil with leaders constantly fighting over to which side the town and the citizens belonged.

Works Cited:

Catudal, Honoré Marc. *Steinstücken: A Study in Cold War Politics*. New York: Vantage Press, 1971.
Figure 1: No author named, "East, West Berliners Dance on Wall, Borders are Opened in a Dramatic Turn of Events." *Stevens Point Journal* November 10, 1989, Sec. 1.
Figure 2: Herst. u. Verlag SCHÖNING GmbH & Co. KG. *Berlin Wall Postcard Flip Book*, Undated.
Riess, Curt. *The Berlin Story*. New York: Dial Press, 1952.
Stivers, William, Carter, Donald A. *The City Becomes a Symbol: The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Berlin, 1945-1949*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2017.
Smith, Jean Edward. *The Defense of Berlin*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963.

Abstract, Auf Deutsch:

In diesem Forschungsprojekt untersuche ich die Auswirkungen der Berliner Mauer auf die Ostberliner Bürger, ganz Deutschlands und andere Teile die Welt. Wissenschaftler argumentieren, dass die Berliner Mauer mehr als ein lebloses Objekt darstellt: es bedeutet eine Tragödie in ihrer Erschaffung und ihrem Zweck. Jede andere großflächige Mauer wie z.B. die Große Mauer in China, dient dem Schutz des Landes und der Bürger, denn es hielt Menschen außerhalb der Mauer. Die Absicht der sozialistischen Regierung Ostberlins war jedoch einzigartig: man baute die Berliner Mauer, um ein Gefängnis für die Ostberliner Bürger zu schaffen. Meine Forschung verwendet zahlreiche Bücher, Artikel und lokale Nachrichtenquellen von 1945 bis 2019, um zu zeigen, wie der Fall der Berliner Mauer weltweit gehört und gefeiert wurde. Dafür möchte ich die Gedenkfeiern der Berliner Mauer analysieren, um zu zeigen, wie die Mauer letztendlich scheiterte. Dieses Thema ist für die heutigen Vereinigten Staaten und die aktuelle politische Debatte über den Bau einer großflächigen Mauer an der Grenze zu Mexiko relevant, da man vielleicht in die Vergangenheit schauen sollte, um zu lernen, dass dieses Konzept noch nie funktioniert hat.



Fig. 5 (above) Graffiti from the Berlin Wall expressing that no more walls like this should be created, instead we should embrace one another and live united. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/dancing-for-freedom-jolly-kunjappu/7AG40QMmi3iy9A>

Analysis and Conclusions:

The Berlin Wall stood just over 28 years and cost incalculable amounts of money in its construction, border control, and gate securities. Yet in the end, the Berlin Wall was an ultimate failure, shown by its fall on November 9, 1989. Citizens on both sides began to trickle and then flood the wall not only to pass through it, but to destroy it with any household items they could find. When the Berlin Wall fell, it was a moment rejoiced around the world. The graffiti that stretched the entire face of the wall, not only indicated commemoration during the wall's existence, and how people wanted the wall to fall, but also how they did not want others to repeat this mistake. Fig.9 (bottom right) depicts protesters in 2016 creating a mini-wall in the same place the original wall stood, and then they destroyed the wall, in protest of the U.S. considering building a wall. Some of these people lived during the Berlin Wall and others live in the aftermath of ongoing struggles. The commemorations that occur to this day, just over 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, speak volumes of its failure and desperate desires to avoid this mistake from occurring again.



Fig. 6 (above) Graffiti from the Berlin Wall. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/258816309809137455/>



Fig.8 (above) Graffiti from the Berlin Wall, showing that even then Berliners knew the wall would fall. <https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2009/11/09/9-november-1989-something-there-is-that-doesnt-love-a-wall/>



Fig. 9 (right) Anti-Trump Protesters in Berlin 2016. <https://www.thelocal.de/20160923/anti-trump-protesters-tear-down-symbolic-wall-in-front-of-the-brandenburg-gate-avaaz>