

Berlin Since the Wall's End

Berlin Since the Wall's End:
Shaping Society and Memory
in the German Metropolis since 1989

Edited by

John Alexander Williams



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*This book is dedicated to the memory
of Professor John Tricamo (1926-2007), loyal friend
and tireless supporter of Bradley University's Berlin Seminar*



American sculptor Jonathan Borofsky's *Molecule Man*, commissioned by Allianz and erected in the Spree in 1999. Its three figures symbolize the meeting of the districts of Kreuzberg, Friedrichshain and Treptow.

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INTRODUCTION

JOHN A. WILLIAMS

On the evening of 9 November 1989, the communist government of the German Democratic Republic announced that, “GDR residents wishing to leave the country can do so at all border crossings of the GDR into the FRG, effective immediately.”¹ Taking advantage of what was apparently a blunder on the part of the authorities, East Berliners swarmed through the border checkpoints into West Berlin. They were welcomed with open arms. Few West Berlin politicians were as eloquent about this situation as Willy Brandt, the man who had been mayor of the city when the Wall was erected in 1961 and who had later been West Germany’s Chancellor. Brandt put it this way on November 10:

Much depends on whether we Germans—on both sides—prove capable of coping with this historic situation. Germans coming together—that’s what it’s all about. Germans are coming together differently than most of us expected. And no one should act as though he knew exactly how the people in the two German states would come to have a new relationship with one another. The important thing is that they will indeed develop a different relationship to one another, that they meet in freedom, and that they can grow together.²

In the nearly nineteen years since the breaching of the Wall, Germans have struggled with the challenge of “coming together.” The task has been daunting—unifying two countries with a common cultural background but antipathetic political and economic systems. Contrary to the optimistic predictions of 1989/1990, reunification has deepened Germany’s economic problems in an era of increasing globalization. Berlin, divided epicenter of the Cold War, Germany’s largest city and the capital since

¹ Quoted in Konrad Jarausch and Volker Gransow, eds., *Uniting Germany: Documents and Debates, 1944-1993* (Providence, 1994), 77.

² Quoted in *ibid.*, 80. On the process of reunification, see Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford, 1994); Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, 1999).

1999, has experienced both the benefits and the difficulties of reunification with particular intensity. East and West Berlin were ideological showcases that enjoyed massive subsidies from both German states before 1989. This support, however, quickly evaporated in the course of reunification. Moreover, the task of reuniting Berlin has coincided with rapid economic globalization, to the detriment of many. Since 1989 the city has lost some 220,000 industrial jobs. Economic deterioration has particularly affected eastern Berliners and the citizens with immigrant backgrounds, who comprise one-fourth of the population.³ Some of the political consequences of this economic decline include consistently high votes for the successor of the GDR communist party, to an ongoing debate about the deficient cultural integration of Turks and other non-Germans, to right-wing violence against minorities.⁴

The time is ripe for a close look at contemporary Germany in the microcosm that is Berlin. This volume is a collection of essays by German and American scholars and activists, all of whom contributed to the 2006 session of Bradley University's annual Berlin Seminar. Each summer since 1981, the Bradley Department of History has sponsored this faculty development seminar for university educators from North America. In the 1990s we forged a relationship with the European Academy in Berlin-Grünwald, a prominent meeting place for educators, journalists and politicians.⁵ One result of this fruitful collaboration is the interdisciplinary set of essays that comprise this book, which six participants in the seminar kindly agreed to write.

³ On 1 July 2008 the Berlin Statistical Office and the Senat's Representative for Integration and Migration revised their figures on the immigrant population, which in 2007 had been given as around 13%. The authorities announced that Berlin is more strongly influenced by immigration than the simple number of foreign residents would indicate. The new official definition of the term "migrant background" includes not only foreign residents, but also those who have taken German citizenship, those who are considered to have German ancestry and have received citizenship after moving from Russia (*Spätaussiedler*), and the offspring of immigrants. By this definition, no fewer than one in four inhabitants of Berlin have a migrant background. Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, Pressemitteilung vom 01.07.2008—Nr. 170. Note that this revision in the official statistics does not significantly change the analyses by Hanns-Uve Schwedler and Dorothea Kolland in this volume, which were written in 2007.

⁴ On the issues surrounding ethnic diversity and immigration, see, among others, Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling and Anton Kaes, eds., *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005* (Berkeley, 2007).

⁵ See www.bradley.edu/academics/las/his/Berlin. For the 2006 programme, see Appendix A.

Rather than attempting to cover the entire range of issues involving contemporary Berlin—which in any case would be impossible—the essays focus on two broad themes.⁶ Part I, “Social Reunification and Diversity,” concerns the tasks of merging East and West Berlin and coming to terms with the city’s multi-ethnic character. In chapter one, “Mission Accomplished? Berlin Society and the Challenge of Reunification,” Eckart Stratenschulte, Director of the European Academy, offers an overview of recent Berlin history with a particular emphasis on the years since reunification. This essay, which is written more for a general audience than a scholarly one, shows how West Berliners’ expectations of a relatively easy reunification were dashed by fundamental social, cultural, and psychological differences with the East. Such disparities surfaced soon after the Wall’s end in the stereotypes of “complaining Osis” and “arrogant Wessis”; and although the city has gradually reunited, contrasts remain. Stratenschulte describes some of these differences, focusing on political behavior and other factors. He concludes on an optimistic note, arguing that Berlin is retrieving its status as a world-class center of cultural innovation.

In chapter two, “Overcoming Spatial and Cultural Barriers: Urban Planning and Management in Berlin since Reunification,” Hanns-Uve Schwedler, director of the European Academy of the Urban Environment, discusses two important challenges of post-unification urban planning. First he traces the processes by which the infrastructures of former East and West Berlin have been reunited and the center revitalized. Schwedler provides a detailed account of the diverse interests and planning mechanisms that turned the city into the largest construction site in the world during the 1990s and early 2000s; and the historical controversies surrounding the uses of urban space is a central theme of his analysis. In the second part of his essay, Schwedler describes how ethnic and class inequalities have led certain neighborhoods into decline and how urban planners, in alliances with state and with citizens’ groups, have tried to reverse this process. He shows how Berlin since 1989 has become a testing ground for ethnic integration and multiculturalism in Germany.

Chapter three, “Immigrants in Berlin,” continues the theme of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. Dorothea Kolland, Director of Cultural Affairs in Neukölln, traces the history of immigration to Germany and analyzes contemporary ethnic relations within her local setting, the

⁶ The reader will need to look elsewhere for discussions of such subjects as political extremism, gender relations, non-ethnic subcultures, and crime and violence. For some suggestions, see the selected bibliography at the end of this volume.

poorest district of Berlin. She uncovers the popular attitudes that have hindered acknowledgement of Germany as a country of immigrants and shows how this has contributed to the failure of ethnic Germans to question their racist concepts of national identity. Only very recently have laws changed to reflect the reality of ethnic diversity and immigration, forcing Germans to decide whether they are in favor of a more pluralistic and multi-ethnic national identity. Finally, Kolland describes how her cultural office has worked with local grass-roots initiatives to develop programs that are designed to introduce the ethnic groups to each other and foster an ethos of embracing diversity. Her essay indicates that such projects are helping to make life better for Berlin's immigrants and their children.

Part II, "Historical Memory," focuses on the various ways of commemorating Germany's twentieth century since the 1980s. Germany continues its struggle with the horrific legacies of the recent past. Controversies over Günter Grass's membership in the Waffen-SS, the German/Polish relationship, and "informal co-workers" of the Stasi have periodically made clear the inescapability of history. Perhaps the most pressing need is to find a way to commemorate that appeals to people raised under post-Nazi Germanies that were both democratic and dictatorial. How can the nation remember the legacies of two dictatorships and at the same time not lose sight of the much wider arc of German history? The comparability of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic is itself a matter of ongoing debate because of differences in the origins, extent and consequences of each dictatorship's criminality. As Salomon Korn, vice president of the Jewish Central Committee of Germany puts it, "When one compares Hitler's Germany and the GDR, one sees in the former an unprecedented inferno and in the latter a great injustice, but an injustice without the will to annihilate specific minorities or other peoples."⁷ This has not kept some figures on the political right from equating the two regimes and others on the left from downplaying the crimes of East German communism.

Berliners live their lives surrounded by the scars of the twentieth century. Some thirty-five monuments commemorate the crimes of the Third Reich, ranging from the hundreds of "stumbling stones" (*Stolpersteine*) that mark the former homes of murdered Berlin Jews to the more conspicuous and abstract Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe at the city center. Most recently, mayor Klaus Wowereit opened the memorial to the gay victims of Nazism in June 2008; memorials to

⁷ Quoted in "Diktaturvergleich jetzt!," *Die Zeit* (15 November 2007).

disabled victims and the Sinti and Roma are also planned. Many young Berliners have been engaging directly with the Nazi past, such as the students of the Leibniz-Gymnasium in Kreuzberg, who in 2005 undertook to find out what happened to their Jewish forerunners during the Third Reich.⁸ By contrast, there is much less knowledge of the East German dictatorship among secondary school students. According to a study carried out from 2006 to 2008 by the Free University, two-thirds of the 5,200 teenage respondents complained that they were learning too little about the GDR; and in the former east, this lack of knowledge appears to have encouraged a tendency to view communist East Germany in positive terms. Only half of the subjects in Berlin and Brandenburg even acknowledged that the GDR was a dictatorship.⁹

There is also an ongoing debate over what to do about the architectural remnants of the GDR, such as the Palace of the Republic and the few surviving pieces of the Wall, as well as the many areas of wasteland or run-down buildings along the former inner city border.¹⁰ The most recent such controversy surrounds “Mediaspree,” a massive corporate project of building up the former border area along the banks of the Spree River in Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. A local citizen’s initiative called *Mediaspree versenken* (“Sink Mediaspree”), managed to bring the question of development to a district referendum in July 2008. *Mediaspree versenken* proposed to greatly limit construction in order to make permanent the “strand bars,” ramshackle clubs, and public access to the river and to forestall gentrification. Of the 19% of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg’s residents who cast a vote in the referendum, 86% rejected the original plan in favor of the demands of *Mediaspree versenken*. As a result, representatives of the citizens’ initiative joined a special district planning

⁸ Stefan Jacobs, “Vertrieben, ermordet—ins Gedächtnis zurückgeholt,” *Der Tagesspiegel* (17 October 2006). On commemoration, see also Brian Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago, 1998); Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis, 2005); Jennifer Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond* (Stanford, 2006); Johannes Heesch and Ulrike Braun, *Orte erinnern: Spuren des NS-Terrors in Berlin* (Berlin, 2006, second edition).

⁹ Cited in Mirja Brücker and Verena Hasel, “Diktatur in Plüsch,” *Der Tagesspiegel* (26 July 2008).

¹⁰ Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*; Dirk Verheyen, *United City, Divided Memories? Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin* (Lanham, MD, 2008).

commission, proclaiming the demise of the Mediaspree project. The cost for breaking the contracts is an estimated 160 million euros.¹¹

The Mediaspree controversy was only one of a number of historically charged events and discussions that were ongoing in Berlin at the time of writing this introduction (July 2008). One of the loudest such debates surrounded the question of whether Barack Obama should be allowed to speak in front of the Brandenburg Gate, which is simultaneously a symbol of Prussian militarism, Cold War division and post-1989 reunification. Chancellor Angela Merkel was upset with the American presidential candidate for requesting this landmark at the center of Berlin to give a campaign-related speech, and Obama quickly decided to speak instead at the Victory Column. Shortly before this controversy broke out, a man from Kreuzberg ripped off Adolf Hitler's head at the just opened Madame Toussaud's Wax Museum on Unter den Linden. Political cartoonist Klaus Stuttmann juxtaposed these two events in the daily *Der Tagesspiegel*.



Fig. A. Barack Obama speaks at Madame Toussaud's Wax Museum: "Why must it be the Brandenburg Gate?! There are plenty of other symbolically charged places in Berlin!!" Cartoon by Klaus Stuttmann in *Der Tagesspiegel* (11 July 2008), reprinted by permission of the artist.

¹¹ Stefan Jacobs, Matthias Jekosch and Ric Graf, "Sieg für 'Mediaspree versenken,'" *Der Tagesspiegel* (14 July 2008).

Spectacular events and controversies notwithstanding, the painful process of “working through” the history of state crimes and popular complicity in the two German dictatorships is a burden that many Germans are increasingly reluctant to shoulder. In chapter four, “Memory Wars: German Debates about the Legacy of Dictatorship,” Konrad Jarausch, history professor at the University of North Carolina and the Center for Contemporary Historical Research at the Universität Potsdam, critically analyzes how memories of the modern dictatorships have been reshaped in German culture since reunification. Jarausch shows that the discourse of remembering and teaching about the Third Reich and the GDR has become a field of public posturing in which questions of personal and collective complicity in the regimes’ crimes are paramount. The most pressing issue regarding the Third Reich lies in transmitting critical memory to future generations who will lack any direct connection to Nazi crimes; and the problem with communist East Germany is that an analytically valid discourse of public memory has yet to emerge. Jarausch also argues that the exclusive focus on brutal dictatorships has largely precluded the more positive sense of democratic national identity that young Germans crave. Such an historical identity, he maintains, could be founded upon the successful postwar democracy of West Germany and the peaceful East German revolution of 1989.

The remaining two chapters are comparative case studies of institutionalized historical memory before and after reunification. In chapter five, “Remembering Nazi Crimes Ideologically: East and West German Exhibits at Sachsenhausen,” Astrid Ley of the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum in Oranienburg offers a comparative case study of how Nazi crimes have been commemorated by the GDR and the Federal Republic. Her study of the use of barrack 38 at Sachsenhausen compares the GDR’s exhibit during the 1980s, which emphasized Communist resistance, to the exhibit that opened in 1997 and which tells the story of Jewish prisoners and places their fates within the larger context of Nazi genocide.¹²

Chapter six, “The Presentation of History in Berlin’s Armory, 1987-2006: From *Museum für Deutsche Geschichte* to *Deutsches Historisches*

¹² Readers may wonder what Sachsenhausen has to do with Berlin. Oranienburg is only twenty-one miles from central Berlin; but more significantly from an historical standpoint, by 1944 the camp had no fewer than twenty-one subsidiary camps and work details within the environs of the capital city. Sachsenhausen was intimately connected in its everyday workings with Berlin. Günter Morsch and Astrid Ley, ed., *Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, 1936-1945: Events and Developments* (Berlin, 2008), 166-67.

Museum” by David E. Marshall, history professor at Suffolk County Community College, traces the changes in presentation at the Berlin Museum of German History from the late GDR era to the present. He describes the ideological slant of exhibitions before 1989 before moving to a discussion of the post-1989 museum’s attempts to distinguish itself from its East German predecessor. Marshall’s chapter concludes with an analysis of the permanent exhibition that opened in summer 2006, which attempts to cover the entire span of German history.

No anthology of this size can hope to touch on all, or even most, facets of a complex city like Berlin. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that this book will spark students, academics and the general public to inquire further into the ways in which the people of the German metropolis are trying to move toward a better future in the post-Cold War world.

PART I:
SOCIAL REUNIFICATION
AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED? BERLIN SOCIETY AND THE CHALLENGE OF REUNIFICATION

ECKART D. STRATENSCHULTE

Almost everyone in Germany over the age of thirty still remembers where they were and what they were doing when they heard THE news on November 9, 1989: the Berlin Wall has come down. But since this date a new generation of students has crowded into the lecture halls of German universities, and they only know of the event from history books or from stories told by older people. The Wall has vanished, and the last remnants of it are cordoned off as museum objects. Has Berlin society overcome its divisions since reunification? This is the question to be addressed in the chapter below.

In order to understand Berlin and its unity, it is necessary to look briefly into the past. The city of Berlin is approximately 800 years old; the first known document reference dates back to 1237. However, the city only came to prominence with the rise of the state of Prussia under King Frederick the Great, who ruled his country from 1740 to 1786. Along with the increasing importance of Prussia in Europe, its capital city began to take further shape.

When the Second German Empire was constituted in 1871, in which Prussia was a major component, the King of Prussia became the Emperor (with the title of William the First), the Prime Minister of Prussia became the Chancellor (Otto von Bismarck), and the capital city of Prussia (Berlin) became the capital of Germany. After victory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, reparation payments flowed towards Berlin, contributing to the building of the national parliament building (the Reichstag) among others. The city also profited tremendously from industrialization, and it grew rapidly in size and population.

Berlin continued as the capital after Germany's defeat in the First World War. During the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) Berlin became one

of the most attractive and lively metropolises of the world.¹ This period ended with the National Socialists seizing power on 30 January 1933. Hitler's movement celebrated its victory with a torchlight parade, passing through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. (This had to be repeated the next day so that it could be recorded on film for Nazi propaganda purposes, because the light had not been sufficient for the cameras.) Berlin was the capital city of Adolf Hitler even though, having been born in Austria, he never really felt comfortable in this Prussian metropolis.

As early as 1944, when the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War was becoming increasingly evident, the prospective victorious powers of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union were considering how they should approach the question of a defeated Germany. They decided to divide Germany into occupation zones: one American, one British and one Soviet zone. Later France, at the insistence of Great Britain, was included in the group of victorious powers and allocated a comparatively small occupation zone of its own. The alliance had been held together by its members' opposition to Hitler, yet mutual mistrust soon took hold. For there were very few shared ideas about the future development of Germany that went beyond the desire to crush the Nazis.

"If it had been up to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Berlin would now be in that location in which many in America assumed it to be, i.e. on the border between the Federal Republic and the GDR." So wrote the historian Peter Bender during the era of division in his book about West Berlin.² But it was not up to Roosevelt, and the postwar Soviet zone of occupation surrounded Berlin. However, since the joint administrative body for occupied Germany, the Allied Control Council, was to be located in Berlin, the city was given a special status. Geographically speaking, the city was in the center of the Soviet zone, yet it did not constitute part of that zone. On the contrary, it had the status of a jointly-administered zone, "a special Berlin area which will be under joint occupation by the three Powers," as it was phrased in the Protocol of London dated September 12, 1944.³ For this purpose the Berlin Kommandatura was founded, to which

¹ On culture during this era see, for example, Joseph Roth, *What I Saw: Reports from Berlin, 1920-1933* (New York, 2002); Rainer Metzger, *Berlin in the Twenties: Art and Culture, 1918-1933* (London, 2008).

² Peter Bender, *Wenn es West-Berlin nicht gäbe* (Berlin, 1987), 9.

³ "Protocol on Zones of Occupation in Germany and Administration of the 'Greater Berlin' Area, Approved by the European Advisory Commission, September 12, 1944, United States, Department of State" in U.S. State

the commanders of the four military forces belonged. In order to avoid conflicts in everyday matters, sectors were established in which each of the Allied military contingents was responsible for maintaining law and order. Thus Berlin was administered by the four Allied generals and commanders, each of whom was governor of his respective sector.

This joint administration of Berlin functioned about as well as it did for the whole of occupied Germany—that is, rather badly. In 1948 the Allied Control Council for Germany split in two. It became more and more evident that two states would emerge out of the four occupation zones. A key cause of this division was the currency reform of June 1948 in the Western zones, which introduced the German mark (*Deutsche Mark*). The Soviet Military Authority reacted by initiating its own currency reform and unsuccessfully attempting to have their East mark (*Ostmark*) accepted as the currency for all of Berlin. Now there were two currencies in the city. Another sign of increasing division in 1948 was the action of a group of professors and students at Humboldt University in eastern Berlin, who left the Humboldt and founded the new “Free University” in the western part of the city.

The western zones of Germany controlled by the US, Great Britain and France were developing into a Western-oriented parliamentary republic, while the eastern zone under the Soviet Union was becoming a Stalinist state. As the division grew apparent, Berlin itself became a problem. Because of its location in the Soviet zone (rather than on a border between East and West), it was not possible for each developing state simply to annex “its” contiguous part of Berlin and leave it at that.

In 1948 the Soviet Union attempted to force the Western powers out of Berlin. To this end it used the agreements about provisions for the city, which stated that each occupying power was to supply its own sector. This made the western sectors entirely dependent on deliveries of food and goods from western Germany, which had to be transported through the Soviet zone of occupation. On June 24, 1948 the Soviet Union blockaded all the access routes to Berlin over land and by inland waterway, with the result that West Berlin was cut off from food supply deliveries. The Western Allies, in particular the Americans, reacted to this by instituting the famous Berlin Air Lift (in German: “Air Bridge”), which supplied the western sectors with food, coal and other necessities. The Air Lift enabled economic survival for eleven months up to the end of the blockade on May 12, 1949.

Department, ed., *Documents on Germany, 1944-1985* (Washington, n.d.), 1-3, at www.ena.lu/mce.cfm. This was before the addition of France.

One can hardly overstate the significance of this event for the development of German-US relations. Enemies during the war, the two nations became allies in opposition to the obvious threat from the East. Even small gestures during the Air Lift played a part in changing the emotional landscape. An American pilot, Gail Halvorsen, began at first on his own, then with the help of other military personnel and civilian helpers, to tie candy to homemade parachutes and drop these on his approach route into Tempelhof airport. This military operation, “Little Vittles,” increased to as many as 6000 drops per day, and it was the only chance that many Berlin children had to obtain a piece of chocolate.⁴ The “Candy Pilot” is a fixed part of the city’s cultural memory and has done more for German-US relations than many a high-powered public relations campaign launched by an American president. The hero of the Air Lift was General Lucius D. Clay, then the military governor of the US zone of German occupation. Interestingly, Clay himself did not believe that the Air Lift could succeed. In vain he demanded from his government, as a token of its military determination, that they initiate an armed convoy to drive through the Soviet zone.⁵ When the Air Lift finally broke the Soviet blockade after all, the Free University awarded General Clay an honorary doctorate, and he was given the key to the city. There is still a main boulevard after him.

By the end of the blockade, the situation in Berlin had changed radically. In an autonomous action on November 30, 1948, the elected deputies of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), an eastern Communist party kept on a short rein by the Soviet authorities, had completed the administrative division of the city. In an unauthorized session of the city parliament at which only members of the SED were present, the party declared that the existing administration of the city, the Magistrat, was no longer in power. Of course the authority of this decision, which is known as the City Hall Putsch, only reached as far as the protection of the Soviet Union. Thus beginning in November 1948 there were two city administrations, each of which claimed authority over the entire city but were de facto restricted to their “own” sectors. Yet although the city was now politically divided, people could still move freely from West to East and vice versa. Many East Berliners were working in the West, and there were also cases where the reverse was true.

⁴ Ann and John Tusa, *The Berlin Blockade* (London, 1988), 268 ff. For a differing view of the Airlift’s significance, see Paul Steege, *Black Market, Cold War: Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946-1949* (Cambridge, 2007).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 149 ff.

In 1949 the two German states officially came into being. The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was founded on May 23 and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) on October 7. The GDR incorporated East Berlin as its capital. This was to a large extent authorized by the Soviet authorities, although they kept for themselves their own rights as well as those of the other Allies. So, for example, military patrols (*Patrouillenfahrten*) by American, British, and French personnel took place in East Berlin until 1990.⁶ For geographical reasons, incorporating the Western sectors into the Federal Republic was more difficult. Moreover, the Western Allies did not desire complete incorporation, because they wished to maintain their rights with respect to Germany as a whole and to Berlin specifically.

Indeed up until 1990, when Germany was united and Allied rights and responsibilities ceased, West Berlin was only treated *as if* it were one of the states of the Federal Republic—a small, but juridically significant difference. In fact, West Berlin was no such thing, and the Allies reinforced this special status, as a number of examples demonstrate. When official state visitors arrived by airplane in West Berlin, they were greeted first by Allied officers and then by the Governing Mayor. Berliners had no normal personal identification cards like other West Germans, but rather “provisional identity cards” (*behelfsmäßige Personalausweise*) without any state insignia or coat of arms. The Federal Interior Ministry issued passports to West Berliners that were stamped with the words “In accordance with the Four Power Agreement on Berlin” (*In Übereinstimmung mit dem Vierseitigen Abkommen über Berlin.*) Men were exempt from West Germany’s compulsory military service. Finally, because the FRG’s laws did not apply automatically to West Berlin, each one had to be passed again by the city parliament. These examples notwithstanding, West Berlin was supported financially by the Federal Republic.

Berlin was a politically and economically but not *physically* divided city after 1948. Two members of the West German Bundestag even lived in East Berlin. The physical division only occurred when the Wall was built in 1961. Each year prior to that, hundreds of thousands of GDR inhabitants had been leaving their country, simply because they could see

⁶ The Western Allies drove through East Berlin in military vehicles and in uniform. They never did anything actively beyond occasionally taking photographs, however, as the purpose was merely to show their presence. The Russians did the same thing in West Berlin, sometimes joining official motorcades (e.g. during visits from the FRG’s president), whereupon the Western military police carefully pushed them away again.

no future for themselves in the socialist dictatorship. The least dangerous way to escape was to travel from East Germany to East Berlin and then to cross the sector boundary on foot or by railway. When Soviet demands that the Western side keep people from crossing over failed to produce a reaction, the GDR authorities, with Soviet approval, slammed on the emergency brakes and erected a barrier wall with military enforcement against their own citizens. The building of the Wall commenced early on Sunday, August 13, 1961.

Even though many people were still able to escape from East to West during the following few weeks, East Berliners were now no longer able to visit West Berlin legally. More than 50,000 people in the East were cut off from their jobs or places of work. Families were split up, and friendships ceased. Anger towards the Soviet leaders and their GDR puppets was tremendous; so was disappointment over the American reaction. Three days after the Wall's construction began, Willy Brandt, Governing Mayor of West Berlin, wrote a letter to President John F. Kennedy to criticize Allied inaction, which he said aroused "doubt about the ability to react and the determination of the three Allied Powers."⁷ Indeed, the triumphant reception that welcomed Kennedy to West Berlin in June 1963 was by no means a matter of course. In an excellent speech Kennedy spoke directly to the hearts of the Germans—without making any promises—and gave them confidence. His declaration of solidarity, "*Ich bin ein Berliner*," has remained a standard idiom in the country to this day.

After the Wall was erected, the two parts of the city developed with their backs to one another. Admittedly, some infrastructural elements could not be completely severed, but mechanisms were created that enabled inhabitants to stay out of each others' way as much as possible. For example, two subway lines and trains on the light transit railway traversed East Berlin territory to get from one part of West Berlin to another. In the eastern part of Berlin, however, it was not possible to board these trains, and stations were boarded up and guarded by the special forces of the GDR transport police. Occasionally during the 1960s, there were brief periods when West Berliners were given special transit passes to visit their relatives in East Berlin. The reverse process was not permitted at all. Thus family get-togethers of East and West Berliners frequently took place in Prague or Budapest.

Many interpersonal, informal contacts between West and East Berliners continued. After the Four Power Agreement on Berlin came into

⁷ Quoted in Eckart D. Stratenschulte, *Kleine Geschichte Berlins* (Munich, 2000, second ed.), 103.

force in 1972, visits from West to East became somewhat easier, although they were still complicated enough. It took more than ten years to reach this agreement, which only became possible within the framework of the European detente policy. Now West Berliners could apply for a one-day visa, which they would obtain two days later. At the checkpoint they had to exchange a certain amount of West German money into East German “marks.” Since they were not allowed to change this money back, they were supposed to spend it in East Berlin. Every year after the agreement, there were more than 2 million such visits; from a statistical point of view every person in West Berlin went over to the East once a year. In fact, a number of Westerners visited the other half of the city frequently, while at the same time a whole generation was growing up in the West who had no contact of any kind to the eastern districts. Moreover, there were no official contacts between East and West Berlin. Matters affecting the city were either addressed by the two German states in negotiations; or the *Senat* of West Berlin (the public administration) dealt with the government of the GDR. At the local or city levels, negotiations would fail before they started, merely because it was impossible for both sides to agree on the status of Berlin. Whereas the West did not accept the claim of East Berlin to be the capital city of the GDR, the authorities in East Berlin insisted on treating West Berlin as a separate political entity—that is, as a third German country distinct from the Federal Republic. As late as the Gorbachev era of the late 1980s, an agreement on inland waterways between the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union failed to come into existence because the USSR declared that West Berlin vessels must fly the flag of Berlin, while the FRG insisted they fly the Federal German flag. This is a particularly ironic example of the tortuous and absurd situation, because on inland waterways there is no requirement to fly any flag at all!

The first official contacts between West and East Berlin occurred not long before the Wall came down, in May 1989. In that month the Governing Mayor of (West) Berlin was invited by the Lord Mayor of (East) Berlin to attend a concert given by the (West) Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in East Berlin.⁸ Although there was no provision for political discussions to take place between these two official representatives, the visit, which consisted only of the concert followed by a reception, was a sensation.

After the Wall came down, several politicians and political scientists appeared on talk shows and stated that they had known it was about to fall.

⁸ See Peter Pragal and Eckart D. Stratenschulte, *Der Monolog der Lautsprecher und andere Geschichten aus dem geteilten Berlin* (Munich, 1999), 162 ff.

In actual fact no one in Berlin or Germany had counted on the Wall's end. Admittedly, the political situation in the GDR had sharpened dramatically in the course of 1989 following the decision of the Hungarian government to cease acting as jailers on behalf of the GDR leaders and to open their country's borders with Austria for people with an East German passport. The leaders of Czechoslovakia, although far less liberal than their Hungarian counterparts, also no longer felt like continuing to sort out the GDR's problems. Following negotiations between West and East German leaders, the Czechs permitted GDR citizens who had been occupying the FRG embassy in Prague to leave for West Germany. The GDR government insisted that this emigration take place through East German territory. However, they did themselves no favors with this stipulation. During the transit many GDR inhabitants came to the railway line and wanted to board the train.

These escapes of 1989, and the lack of will in their neighboring socialist governments to prevent them, forced GDR authorities to take action. In October 1989 the long-standing head of state and the SED, Erich Honecker, was forced by his own government to step down. He was replaced by his deputy or "crown prince" Egon Krenz, who had previously distinguished himself by his loyalty to Honecker. Krenz believed that the situation might be brought under control by allowing those citizens to flee who were already on their way or who had chosen to escape through neighboring countries. During internal discussions, however, it became clear that it was not feasible to allow citizens to leave the GDR for good while simultaneously prohibiting short-term visits of a few days.⁹

Thus on November 9, 1989 the GDR government, acting upon a request from the SED, passed a motion to authorize "private journeys to other countries" without the stipulation that the travellers had to demonstrate compliance with certain conditions. The Party spokesperson, Günter Schabowski, announced this decision during an international press conference in the early evening of November 9. Due to Schabowski's unprofessional and bureaucratic manner, even many of the journalists failed to recognize the dynamite nature of this announcement. Nevertheless, from 8 PM onwards all German news broadcasts were reporting that the GDR intended to permit its citizens to leave the country.

Then something amazing happened: inhabitants of East Berlin went to have a look. As the crowds streamed to the border crossing points, they attracted more and more people. Guards met them at the border and

⁹ For detailed description and documentation of the Wall's end, see Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Chronik des Mauerfalls: Die dramatischen Ereignisse um den 9. November 1989* (Berlin, 1996).

reported in panic-stricken tones to their commanding officers that people were standing in front of them and demanding to pass through. The GDR authorities were in no way prepared for this flood, and after a short time they issued instructions that the people who were insisting most forcefully were to be allowed to leave, but that their identity documents should be invalidated. These “belly-achers” would thus lose their citizenship without even realizing it. However, when the waiting crowds saw that some of their number were passing through, pressure and dissatisfaction mounted. At 10:30 PM the border crossing point at Bornholmer Strasse in Berlin was the first to open completely. There was no longer any checking or holding back. The Wall had in effect come down.

Among the GDR leaders, chaos reigned. They had imagined the border opening in such a way that inhabitants would apply for a passport, collect the document weeks later, and then apply for permission to emigrate. Now they had been overtaken by events. Egon Krenz likes to claim that it was he who opened the Wall.¹⁰ What is true is that he had no idea what he was doing—and a good thing this was, too! The minutes of the SED Central Committee meeting that took place at the time is a tragic-comic document of contemporary history. SED members resumed their meeting on November 10, 1989 as if nothing had happened. Using standard Party gobblede-gook, they discussed the (miserable) economic situation in the GDR, related the mistakes that had been made (mostly by other people), switched one or two official positions within the Politburo, and proposed drawing up an action program.¹¹ The real “action” was not taking place in their meeting room any more, but outside in the streets. In the days that followed, anyone from the GDR or East Berlin was able both to leave and to return. Border checks remained, but there was absolutely no comparison to those that had taken place before November 9. And in a matter of days, additional crossing points had been set up.

The city was in a state of euphoria. Hundreds of thousands of East Berliners and GDR inhabitants travelled to West Berlin and received a warm welcome there. West Berliners stood by the crossing points and greeted anybody coming from the other side with hearty applause. The *Senat* paid a “welcome” premium of 100 marks to East Berliners. The Philharmonic Orchestra under its conductor Daniel Barenboim gave a free concert for those with GDR identity papers. Ordinary members of the public made coffee and stood at the roadside with thermos bottles and

¹⁰ Egon Krenz, *Wenn Mauern fallen—Die friedliche Revolution: Vorgeschichte—Ablauf—Auswirkungen* (Vienna, 1990).

¹¹ Hans-Hermann Hertle and Gert-Rüdiger Stephan, eds., *Das Ende der SED: Die letzten Tage des Zentralkomitees* (Berlin, 1997), 380 ff.

cups to host East Berliners. This was a welcome refreshment for these people who had only a very small amount of Western currency.

However, this euphoria soon began to give way to a certain degree of irritation. The “Wessis” became annoyed by these “Ossis” who were standing around, in the way, without any sense of direction and holding up traffic, especially because they could not understand so many things that were quite natural to Westerners. The Ossis reacted unhappily to the fact that all the Wessis were taking it upon themselves to explain the facts of life to every Ossi. Soon the term “Besserwessi” was coined, which was a play on the German term *Besserwisser* or “know-it-all.” West Berliners started to refer to *Jammerossis* (“complaining Easties”), because they had the impression that East Germans were only interested in complaining that they had had a worse time of it. “After all, we had a hard time and did nothing but work for 40 years”—this was the tone of the West Berlin man in the street’s pronouncements, as if the East Germans had spent the last forty years lounging on the beach.

Behind these minor malicious remarks loomed on both sides huge disappointment over the very fact that the others were *other*, i.e. different. The Wall that had separated people for 28 years had also, in a manner of speaking, kept them together. Through highly ritualized forms of encounter—the Westerners came to visit the Easterners, they brought presents with them and needed to be back at the crossing points before midnight—a feeling of intimacy had been maintained, yet bit by bit it had lost all substance in reality. When the Wall was built, it divided brothers and sisters. With its collapse, Germans were reunited who had been socialized in very different ways. As a political cabaret group sang in 1990, “What unity we had when we were still divided!” (“*Was war das für ‘ne Einigkeit, als wir geteilt noch waren!*”)¹²

Even after the Wall fell in November 1989, many Germans failed to predict that the two German states, and with them the two parts of Berlin, would rapidly unite. For example, when GDR border guards in one district of Berlin set about demolishing the Wall and replacing it with a metal mesh fence in January 1990, the local press and other commentators, including Governing Mayor Walter Momper, interpreted this not as an absurdity (which it was), but as a major step of progress.¹³ A border between East and West, between the two states with differing economies and currencies, was still thought to be necessary and normal; and most

¹² Quoted in Peter Bender, *Deutschlands Wiederkehr: Eine ungeteilte Nachkriegsgeschichte, 1945-1990* (Stuttgart, 2007), 269.

¹³ See Walter Momper, *Grenzfall: Berlin im Brennpunkt der deutschen Geschichte* (Munich, 1991), 267 ff.

envisioned reunification as a long process. Not even Chancellor Helmut Kohl realized how fast it would happen. His Ten Point Program called for a gradual progression from cooperation to a federation of the two states, with unification as the last step.

In March 1990 the first free elections since the Weimar Republic were held in the GDR. The Christian Democratic Party (CDU) gained the most votes and named the lawyer Lothar de Maiziere Prime Minister of East Germany. The most important item in his political program was the rapid dissolution of the state that he headed. This ended efforts to develop the country into a second democratic German state that could remain independent instead of being absorbed into the much larger and more affluent Federal Republic. The majority of the citizens, in voting for the CDU, had voted for German unity.

Local elections took place in East Berlin on May 6, 1990. As a result the West Berlin city government now faced a democratically elected, Social Democratic government of East Berlin. Because it was obvious that when the two German state were reunified, the two halves of Berlin would merge, the West Berlin *Senat* and the East Berlin *Magistrat* met from this time onwards as one body (soon known as the “*Magi-Senat*”) and tried to harmonize their policies. The term “*Magi-Senat*” caused some amusement, because Maggi is the brand name of a soup and food seasoning manufacturer.

On July 1, 1990 the Deutschmark of the Federal Republic was introduced in East Germany, and everyone exchanged their East marks for it. This spelled the political end of the GDR at the same time as it destroyed in one stroke the ability of East German industry and commerce to survive. On the same day, border controls between East and West Berlin ceased. On the evening of October 2, 1990, privately, quietly, and without ceremony, GDR flags were taken down from the governmental and public buildings of this deceased state. At midnight the German flag was solemnly raised on the flagpole in front of the Reichstag building. Germany was now united in the Federal Republic, and Berlin was once again a single city.

Berlin continued to face unique problems, however. Before reunification the GDR Chamber of Deputies had passed an act by which the former governmental regions were subsumed into five federal states. This led to a problem for unified Berlin. Since the GDR had no control over West Berlin—in fact, they had none over East Berlin either, but such questions of status no longer played a part in their deliberations—it was not possible to combine Berlin and its surrounding region into one federal state. Thus the state of Brandenburg came into being in the territory