Remember the History of Berlin Divided: Monuments, Memory, and History

By Ethan Han

The Cold War is perhaps the closest humanity has ever come to extinction. With newfound weapons of mass destruction, humankind gained the power to annihilate itself for the first time in history. Nowhere else in the world was this tension felt more than in Berlin. Split into two halves by foreign intervention and clashing ideologies, Berliners were forced to suffer decades of isolation. With Germany also divided, Berlin became a microcosm of the entire conflict. In the space of the city, Western-backed free market capitalism was set uncomfortably close to USSR-backed communist policies. The physical division of these two spheres was the Berlin Wall, a concrete barrier built in August of 1961 as a symbol of three decades of insufferable separation.[1] In this way, the wall also came to symbolize Europe's unending struggle in the aftermath of World War II and the world's unanswered question. But nearly thirty years after its fall, the Berlin Wall has become a monument which displays both the memory of one of Europe's darkest times as well as a pathway to a more unified city, Europe, and world.

The role that Berlin has played in twentieth century history has had a significant impact upon the discipline of history. The study of the city as a microcosm of the Cold War has influenced scholars to rethink paradigms of history. Questions that scholars have asked in the wake of the Cold War include: What is history? What is the relationship between history and memory?[2] What should be remembered, and in what way? Monuments hold the answers to all of these questions, and with the Berlin Wall being one of modern history's most influential monuments, its symbolic weight is immense. In the following paper, I will examine the meaning of the Berlin Wall as a monument in the contemporary city. In order to do so, I will first offer a description of

[1] Pertti Ahonen, "The Berlin Wall and the Battle for Legitimacy in Divided Berlin," *German Politics and Society* 99/29 (Summer 2011), 40–56.
[2] See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989), 7–24.

the political history of divided Germany followed by a comparison of daily life between East and West Germany. Thereafter, the paper will draw upon recent theory of monuments in order to provide an analysis of the tensions and possibilities that the Berlin Wall has evoked for Berliners and Europeans today.

Political History of Divided Berlin

In order to approach an analysis of the Berlin Wall, it is necessary to begin with the background of the history that led to the period of the divided city. After World War II, Germany was divided into four occupation zones by the Allies at the Yalta Conference.[3] Berlin was divided in a similar manner; the east side was controlled by France, Britain and the US, while the west was controlled by the Soviet Union.[4] The Allies then tried to deal with the millions of refugees created by the war. Germany was in ruins and the Allies were slow to provide aid, so many people went hungry during the initial period of reconstruction. In July 1945, Allied leaders Harry Truman (US), Clement Attlee (UK), and Joseph Stalin (USSR) met at Potsdam to discuss how the German occupation should proceed.[5] Eastern Europe was also brought up, and the US and UK failed to shake Stalin's control over the region. The three powers agreed to focus on their own zone's rebuilding.[6] Differences quickly developed, as the Soviets were much firmer with denazification. Many former Nazi officers were tried and sent to reeducation camps or executed. All remaining factories and banks in East Germany were nationalized, and private agricultural land was redistributed.[7]

---

[3] Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany* (3rd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 480.
[4] Jason P. Coy, *A Brief History of Germany* (New York: Facts on File, 2011), 196.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Fulbrook, A Concise History, 484.
[7] Harry Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations*, 1953–1961 (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 15.

Eventually, a communist party was established to manage the region known as the Socialist Unity Party, or SED.[8] This new communist regime set out to create a Marxist utopia, establishing institutions like the Free German Youth organization and the Democratic Women's League to indoctrinate young men and promote women's rights respectively. West Germany developed in a slightly different direction. Multiple political parties were permitted, the first being the Christian Democratic Union, or the CDU. A Social Democratic Party (SPD) also formed, becoming the voice of socialism in West Germany. The Allies tried 22 former Nazi officers in Nuremburg, where 12 of them received the death penalty.[9] Besides two acquittals, the rest received life in prison. In the spring of 1949, the Western Allies created a singular West Germany from their three separate zones. They constantly butted heads with the Soviets, and this was the precursor to the Cold War. After Churchill spoke at a US college about the totalitarian Eastern European regimes, US president Harry Truman issued the Truman Doctrine, which promised US aid to anyone trying to resist the spread of communism. The US announced the Marshall Plan in June 1947, which provided billions of dollars of economic aid to European countries so they could rebuild.[10] The USSR did not allow its satellite states to participate in this economic recovery plan.

When the plan was implemented in 1948, Western Europe experienced explosive economic growth. This also unified Western Europe, and the possibility of a European Union being formed in the future grew. The Soviets tried to prevent the economic aid from the Marshall Plan from reaching West Germany by blocking off all road access into Berlin. Stalin hoped this would pressure the west into pulling out of the city all together. However, the Allies decided to bring in

[8] Coy, *A Brief History*, 200.
[9] Ibid, 201.
[10] Fulbrook, *A Concise History*, 492.

supplies by air, and the Berlin Airlift sustained the city from June of 1948 to May of 1949.[11] The Soviets then reopened the roads to Berlin. The Western powers decided to draft a constitution for the governing of West Germany. This constitution established the government until West Germany was ultimately reunified with the East. It included a president, a chancellor, and two legislative bodies in the Bundestag and the Bundesrat. During West Germany's first elections, the CDU barely got more seats in the Bundestag than the SPD. The CDU's leader, Konrad Adenauer, was elected chancellor.[12] Theodor Heuss, a liberal, was elected as the new nation's first president. In the East, the Soviets established their own German government, the GDR, on October 7th 1949.

The Western powers denounced this new government, calling it a Soviet puppet regime and did not acknowledge its legitimacy. With the east and west becoming separate countries, Germany was now truly divided. In the 1950s, both Germanies benefited from strong leaders. In the West it was chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who was determined to rebuild Germany's ruined economy and restore its reputation. The failures of the Weimar Republic previously led to the rise of the Nazis, so Adenauer had to convince the people that this time it would be different. In the East, it was Wilhelm Pieck who was elected to become the new leader of East Germany, becoming its first president in 1949. Assisted by Otto Grotewohl, they set out to build a communist state with a state run economy and a totalitarian political system. The most influential man in East Germany was not either of these men though, instead it was Walter Ulbricht, leader of the Socialist Unity Party.[13]

---

[11] Coy, *A Brief History*, 203.
[12] Fulbrook, *A Concise History*, 498.
[13] Ibid, 499.

In response to the Marshall Plan, the Soviets created COMECON, or the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance to coordinate economic planning between the satellite states.[14] They tried to implement Five Year Plans similar to those of Stalin, but these efforts to rapidly industrialize failed miserably.[15] The responsibility of meeting these new quotas fell heavily on the GDR's workforce. When the quotas were once again raised in 1953, the workers rioted. With the help of the Soviet military, the revolt was violently suppressed, providing a precedent of how future uprisings within the Soviet Union would be dealt with. Even though the first Five Year Plan's quota led to a strike, the Ulbricht government implemented a second, more aggressive Five Year Plan. This time, the plan focused on heavy industry and collectivization of agriculture, the two areas which the first Five Year Plan failed to address. By now, people realized that the Marxist-Leninist economy of East Germany could not surpass the capitalist economy if its western counterpart. It did provide stable employment to the workers of East Germany, it could not replicate the economic recovery that capitalism offered to the west.

West Germany fared far better. Using the massive funding provided by the Marshall Plan, the West German administration was able to reintegrate millions of refugees, foster capitalist investment, and create a welfare system that promised a large range of benefits. The miraculous recovery of West Germany is considered an "economic miracle", and by the mid 1950s, the country was one of the world's leading economies.[16] West Germany also made strides diplomatically. In order to make up for their predecessors mistakes, West Germany paid billions of dollars to Israel to compensate for the Holocaust. The West German chancellor Adenauer also

---

[14] Coy, *A Brief History*, 206.
[15] Fulbrook, *A Concise History,* 554–555. For further on the role that the COMECON played in attempts to develop the economy of post-war Berlin, see Jenny Brine, *COMECON: The Rise and Fall of an International Socialist Organization* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1992).
[16] Coy, *A Brief History*, 207; Fulbrook, *A Concise History,* 499..

announced that the Ruhr, a region bordering France, would be controlled by France, Germany, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and the US. This was to repair German diplomatic relations with its neighbors and to open up future economic opportunities. West Germany's efforts were rewarded in 1950 when they were allowed to rearm and join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[17] The purpose of this mutual defense alliance, founded in 1949, was to provide security amid the rising cold war tensions. In 1952, at the Bonn-Paris conventions, a series of agreements were reached between the US, France, and West Germany which allowed West Germany full sovereignty by 1955. When that finally happened, West Germany joined NATO as a fully sovereign nation. As the country rearmed, it made the promise that its military would not operate unless one of its allies was attacked.

Similar to the Soviet response to the Marshall Plan, the USSR responded to NATO by creating its own treaty organization officially called the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), or the Warsaw Pact.[18] Founded on May 14th, 1955 with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, the Warsaw Pact bound the Soviet Union and its satellites, which included East Germany, in a military alliance closer than before. With the west a part of NATO and the east a part of the newly formed Warsaw Pact, hopes of unification seemed all but lost.[19] When in 1954 the Soviets announced that East Germany had gained full sovereignty, West Germany refused to acknowledge East Germany with the Hallstein Doctrine.[20] In it, the Bonn government insisted that the only sovereign Germany was West Germany and it would not engage in diplomatic relations with any nation that considered East Germany a country. East

[17] Coy, *A Brief History*, 208.
[18] Ibid, 209.
[19] Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955–69* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 39.
[20] Coy, *A Brief History*, 209.

Germany countered with the Ulbricht Doctrine, which encouraged strengthening bonds between the Warsaw nations along with not recognizing West Germany's sovereignty until East Germany's was respected.[21] These open hostilities between the two Germanys pushed them even further apart.

Facing open opposition, Adenaur sought to strengthen West Germany. Despite protests from the West German left, he further pursued rearmament and introduced conscription in 1956. By signing the Treaty of Rome in 1957, West Germany played a key role in integrating the European economy.[22] This new agreement allowed unimpeded trade and joint nuclear energy regulation between France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. A new commission was created, called the European Economic Community (EEC), to administrate this new trade agreement.[23] With West Germany prospering, Adenaur and the CDU won 43 percent of the votes during the 1957 elections, establishing a solid majority in the Bundestag along with its allies, the CSU. Things would quickly change for the west from here.

In November 1958, the new leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, demanded that the allies leave Berlin, threatening to retake the city by force if they did not comply. When NATO refused this option, Khrushchev presented another: a permanent division of Germany and Berlin could remain a demilitarized city. NATO refused this motion as well. By 1961, East Berlin was dealing with a unique problem. During the 1950s, almost 2 million East Germans fled to West

[21] Fulbrook, *A Concise History*, 501.
[22] Coy, *A Brief History*, 211.
[23] Ray C. Rist, "The European Economic Community (EEC) and Manpower Migrations: Policies and Prospects," *Journal of International Affairs* 33/2 (Fall/Winter 1979), 201–208. For further on the origins of the EEC, see Wilfried Loth, "60 Years ago: The Foundation of EEC and EAEC as Crisis Management," *Journal of European Integration History* 23 (2017), 9–28.

Germany.[24] Over 400,000 East Germans made the trip to West Germany to escape communist oppression in 1953 alone. This communist oppression in East Germany was best exemplified by the Ministry for State Security, a secret police organization also known as the Stasi. Founded in 1950, its original head Wilhelm Zaisser was ousted by his subordinate Erich Mielke in 1957, who would run the Stasi until the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Stasi created an elaborate network of agents involving tens of thousands of informants to monitor their fellow East Germans. During the early 1960s, the Stasi cracked down on dissenters harder and the number of defectors increased dramatically, draining the country of young talent.

Faced with this crisis, Khruschev authorized the construction of the Berlin Wall, a physical concrete barrier between East and West Berlin that would stand for three decades.[25] A hundred people were killed in attempted crossings, while others had their families torn apart by the wall. The mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt, sought aid from the allies to prevent his city being cut off from the rest of the world. After the Soviets issued an ultimatum ordering West Berliners to leave the city, American and Soviet troops confronted each other for 22 months. US president John F. Kennedy went to Berlin and made his famous "Ich Bin Ein Berliner" speech on June 23rd, 1963, showing his support for the people of West Berlin. After seeing the American determination to not give up the city, the Soviets chose not to send in the troops.

West Germany's chancellor, Konrad Adenaur, was forced to resign that same year, due to a scandal involving a West German magazine *Der Spiegel*.[26] In order to cement his victory in the 1961 election, Adenaur worked out an alliance between the conservative Christian Democratic

[24] Coy, A Brief History, 211.
[25] Ibid, 211.
[26] Ibid.

Union and Christian Social Union and the liberal Free Democratic Party.[27] Shortly after his reelection, the magazine *Der Spiegel* criticized Adenaur's security measures by writing about weaknesses in the army. Adenaur's response was extremely rash; he had the magazine's office raided, and its publisher Axel Springer charged with treason. The public backlash was enormous, leading to his already fragile network of support to collapse. Adenaur would later apologize for his actions, but the damage was done. In January of 1963, Adenaur's government signed the historic Élysée Treaty with France.[28] This treaty brought the two nations closer in matters concerning diplomacy, trade, and security. Adenaur would retire on October 15, 1963.

On East Germany's end, the Five Year Plans they had tried to implement were failing. Desperate to improve the situation, they switched to a less rigid annual system of quotas at the regional level. Despite these changes, East Germany's economy continued on a downward trend, forcing the government to change once again to more centralized planning.[29] In West Germany, Adenaur's absence created a political void that needed to be filled. The Christian Democratic Union's Ludwig Erhard, a trusted advisor of Adenaur, was chosen to be chancellor. Erhard immediately tried to improve relations with Warsaw countries. While having some success in Berlin, Erhard was unable to mend the damage created by Adenaur's administration. He was once again tested when France's President Charles de Gaulle opted out of the NATO alliance. Forced to either live up to its promises to France or NATO, Erhard resigned in November 1966 during an economic recession in West Germany which led to the dissolution of the CDU/CSU/FDP political alliance when the FDP withdrew its support.[30]

---

[27] Fulbrook, A Concise History, 488.
[28] Coy, *A Brief History*, 212.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Fulbrook, *A Concise History*, 488.

In December, West Germany had Kurt Georg Kiesinger as chancellor, supported by his own Christian Democratic Union and the SPD. Kiesinger's history as a former Nazi Party official would come to plague his political career.[31] His political allies were branded as traitors for supporting a Nazi, and the East German press created massive amounts of propaganda highlighting the fact that the West had allowed a Nazi to rise to their highest seat of power. Despite these challenges, Kiesinger was a competent administrator, able to curb the rising tensions with several Warsaw nations including Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. His cabinet enacted a series of policies that brought West Germany out of its economic recession in 1968.

Later that year, radical protests would sweep over West Germany. The protests that occurred in West Germany followed suit after the US and French versions. Witnessing firsthand the horrific bombing codenamed "Operation Rolling Thunder" during the Vietnam War, protests on college campuses became increasingly frequent. Compounded by the overall leftist discontent in West Germany, student led groups organized violent demonstrations throughout West Germany, berating what they thought of as the defects of German society.[32] Citing reasons such as the morally bankrupt government, blind faith in capitalism, and Germany's failure to atone for its Nazi past, these students demanded democratic reforms in the West German political system.[33]

As protests increased, police and the demonstrators clashed more and more often during the late 1960s. In May 1968, the government passed the Emergency Acts, an amendment which allowed the executive branch to act without the legislative branch's consent, suspend certain

[31] Coy, A Brief History, 213.
[32] Coy, A Brief History, 214.
[33] Ibid.

constitutional rights, and use military force when necessary.[34] With the memories of Hitler's use of a similar bill to obtain power fresh in their minds, the protestors fiercely resisted the bill in vain. Despite all the backlash, the Emergency Acts went into effect in June. There were many reactions to the rising unrest in West Germany. The student movement was radicalized when an unarmed 26 year-old graduate student protester, Benno Ohnesorg, was shot and killed by the police. This incident along with Marxist theory spawned the "urban guerrilla" organization known as the Red Army Faction (RAF), also known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, led by its two cofounders Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof.[35] Under this alias, the RAF committed bank robberies, arson attacks, bombings, and assassinations in the 1970s and 80s in the name of an armed struggle against "fascist imperialism."[36]

Daily Life in Divided Berlin

Having given an overview of the political history of divided Germany, the following section will compare the two sides of the Berlin Wall with a focus upon daily life in both countries. The most obvious difference between the two Germanies has to be their economic systems. East Germany pursued a perfect Marxist utopia, while West Germany sought to rebuild their country under capitalism. With differing economic systems, we should expect to see some striking differences between the two Germanies, and we do. Out of 8,445,300 economically active people in the GDR in 1983, only 397,100 of them were involved with private business.[37] Compared to West Germany, where the vast majority of capital was still in private ventures, and you could see the

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, 215.
[36] Fulbrook, *A Concise History*, 509.
[37] Ibid, 504.

economic divide rather clearly. This gap between public and private ownership also showcased the difference in ideologies. Despite West Germany being seemingly more "advanced" economically, there were some sectors in which East Germany had more laborers. One such trade was agriculture: while the west only had 5.9% employed in that field, the east boasted double that, at around 10%.[38]

Another interesting statistic was population density. West Germany was a far more urbanized country than its eastern counterpart, with only 6% of West Germans living in communities with less than two thousand inhabitants by 1980.[39] 24% of East Germany's population was still in smaller rural neighborhoods during this time. Looking at the overall population, East Germany experienced a small rise and subsequent decrease in population that led them to 16.7 million people in 1980, the same amount they had over forty years ago in 1939.[40] For comparison, West Germany had a population of 43 million in 1939, and by 1980 that number had grown to 61.7 million.[41]

After looking at some numbers, I want to tackle social inequality next. This is one of the few times where capitalism and communism directly clashed, and through analyzing how "equal" these two countries were can provide clues as to if the communist East Germany lived up to its creed. Some people have argued that 1970 West Germany is a "classless" society. Although the aristocracy was not as distinct as in a country like Britain, it still existed in West Germany, and several aristocratic families still asserted their social superiority. East Germany was commonly

[38] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 184
[39] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 184
[40] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 184
[41] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 185

separated into two groups of people: the working class and the bourgeoisie. Although this sharp division is not entirely fair, there are some truths to this statement. It is true that the vast majority of people living in East Germany were considered working class. The aristocracy didn't survive as much as it did in the west; those who were wealthy were mainly the politically privileged. Many East German factory workers were in similar if not identical situations and those in West Germany, however they may have been more willing to work because of socialist ideology. When thinking through the lens of unification, these two relatively different Germanys pose a problem. After their forced separation, the two nations had grown to become exactly that: two different countries.

One of the most obvious conclusions that can be drawn is that there were more consumer goods to buy in West Germany. By nature of being capitalist, their capacity to produce various types of goods or acquire them through trade was far superior to their eastern counterpart. This meant that, overall, consumers were happier in the West. West Germany also had a higher average income rate, but almost as a byproduct of capitalism, the gap between the rich and poor was larger.[42] East Germany had its own set of advantages. Although East German workers had no right to strike, they were guaranteed employment. Another thing to keep in mind is that many families in East Germany were two income families, meaning both parents worked. This meant that money was not the biggest issue in the east, but the lack of consumer goods to spend said money on became the problem.

As time went on, the disparity between East German households and West German households gradually shrunk. When comparing average four member households in both West and East

[42] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 188

Germany, in East Germany in 1988, 99% of households had a washing machine and a fridge, 96% owned a television, and 52% owned automobiles. Compared to West Germany's 99% for washing machines and fridges, 98% for televisions, and 97% for automobiles, you can see that the difference in material wealth in households is not that large.[43] With material wealth being very similar, another very important commodity is food. With everything subsidized in East Germany, food was extremely cheap. Even though there was little variety, people did not go hungry in the GDR. Curiously, by the mid 1980s people in East Germany had a higher average caloric intake than those living in the west, eating more meat, eggs and dairy, but less fruits and vegetables.[44] The image of people lining up for food every day is more associated with Poland, both those in the GDR generally did not have to queue for food, unless it was an exotic item like bananas. There were issues along with the advantages in the GDR, namely the regulation of certain goods. Oftentimes when purchasing a big-ticket item, like a car, normal citizens would need to sign onto a waiting list. There was also the issue of access to Western currency in East Germany. Many luxury goods could only be purchased using Western currency, and it was later that the so-called Delikat or Exquisit shops opened to the general public, selling the same goods but using East German currency.[45]

Another important point is healthcare and welfare. Due to government ownership of many industries in the east, healthcare was covered by the state, and there were many maternity benefits as well.[46] Retirement plans were also quite good, as pensions along with a generally low

[43] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 188
[44] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 188
[45] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 189
[46] Fulbrook, *A History of Germany*, 189

cost of living provided enough for people to comfortably live out their lives. Rent was also quite cheap, although the quality was sometimes questionable.

After hearing about what East German life was like, some may begin to think that life was not that bad after all. And they would be partially correct. The nail in the coffin that drove many people to search desperately for a route to the west was simply East German citizen's access to western media. Every night, an East German worker would come home to western television, read western magazines, and long for the comparatively more luxurious life. Life in the GDR was not terrible, but West Germany just looked better.

Analysis: The Berlin Wall as a Monument of History

Using the city of Berlin as a model for historical enquiry allows us to reexamine the foundations of the discipline of history. What does it mean to reconstruct the past? Whose past? Which memories are considered worthy of reconstructing? Given Berlin's deep and turbulent past and the fact that it continues to be a "lived" city, how do we think about the intersection of past and present in a material form?

Now that I have given you a comparison between East and West, I want to explore how New Berlin choses to remember its divided past. What we get by offering such a detailed glimpse of Divided Berlin in the first two parts of the paper is an opportunity to see how the memory of Berlin in its present day monuments is just as much about forgetting as it is remembering. The city chose to keep a few buildings, art pieces, and areas which they believed to be essential to

telling the story of divided Berlin intact. With the city now considered as one of Europe's cultural centers, how does it embrace its history of separation? As the city was being reconstructed, many different architectural groups wanted to participate in the rebuilding of Berlin. In order for newer buildings to be constructed, older establishments had to be either remodeled or destroyed. In the present section, I will describe some of the questions that have arisen as New Berlin has attempted to embed the past of Divided Berlin into its current cityscape.

The first problem that arises in thinking about how modern Berlin emplaces a monument like the Berlin Wall into its cityscape involves how a monument might evoke very different memories.[47] What I mean here is that any monument that correctly or truthfully represents Divided Berlin would have to evoke the two perspectives on the different sides. The Berlin Wall represents the division of a city along social, political, and economic lines. As a result, any monument that attempts to evoke the memory of the wall must consider how it was perceived by people who lived in both East and West Berlin. One challenge then that this aspect of monumentality raises has to do with what exactly the Berlin Wall is in the memory of contemporary inhabitants. Are the remnants of the wall symbols of West Berlin triumphalism? Are the remains of the Berlin Wall symbols of oppression and a time better forgotten? These questions require the contemporary inhabitants of the city to ask the deeper historical question of whose memory of the wall should be embodied in the current city. For example, if an East Berliner has to wake up every morning to the sight of the Berlin Wall, the structure which had utterly isolated him from

[47] Anna Saunders, "Remembering Cold War Division: Wall Remnants and Border Monuments in Berlin," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17/1 (2009), 9–19. See also Leo Schmidt, "The Berlin Wall: A Landscape of Memory," in *On Both Sides of the Wall: Preserving Monuments and Sites of the Cold War Era* (eds. L. Schmidt and H. von Preuschen; Berlin: Westkreuz, 2005), 11–15.

the rest of the world, his appreciation for the monument may not be as strong compared to a tourist from a country free of communism. This reality of having such a stark reminder of a not so distant past at your doorstep may unsettle those who must live with it, and it is a question like this that must be tackled in order for monuments to achieve their intended effect. The period of division might have seemed normal, just that there was a section of the city that one could not access. However, for someone who experienced East Berlin, their story might reflect a less economically prosperous reality. This duality of memory is critical when considering the impact of monuments in modern cities.

What the previous observation leads to is the larger and perhaps more difficult question of who is engaging with an aspect and a material form of history.[48] Who is the Berlin Wall for in the contemporary era? Citizens of Berlin? Citizens of Europe? Tourists? This is the second question that Saunders seeks to explore. When someone who lived in West Berlin views the Berlin Wall, it may not evoke as strong a reaction as someone from East Berlin. For those on one side the period of separation might have felt something like a relatively brief and painless span of years, but for those on the other it may have been an insufferable three decades of oppression and isolation. However, the number of wreaths that are placed annually at the Bernauer Straße monument showcases how remembrance has become somewhat of a civic duty, similar to observing fireworks on the Fourth of July in America.[49] Why is this ritual important to Berliners? This ritual reminds people who do not live in Berlin that a large part of the monumentality of the Berlin Wall is deeply attached to its location in a specific city. So maybe the question of who the Berlin Wall is for and the difficulties involved in answering this question actually points to a

[48] Saunders, "Remembering Cold War Division," 12.
[49] Ibid, 12.

significant part of its monumentality. The wall serves as a monument to history because so many different people both within Europe and within the broader world find their own stories within its history. Not everyone can claim to have lived in a physically divided city, but the idea of being cut off resonates with citizens of other Soviet satellite states who have experienced similar alienation firsthand. In addition, as many people experienced the Cold War throughout the world the Wall also became a monument to the tensions between the Soviet Union and the West.[50] In this way, many others around the world who did not inhabit the city also were able to relate to the wall in a more distant yet still meaningful way.

Since monuments are always physical locations, that is, they are grounded in specific places, they require consideration of how they interact with and interfere with other sites of memory.[51] This is one of the more difficult issues with history as monuments. When we think about history as memorials or monuments we must contend with the reality that when we form history we inevitably make decisions about what to cover or withhold another part of history. We might have infinite room to write on paper or better on the internet but in a city we have very limited space. This is compounded by the fact that Berlin today is a cultural center of Europe, making this issue of space even more grave. Some people may even argue that this incessant clinging to the past is counterproductive, and instead prevents any forward progress. Furthermore, limited space in the city usually necessitates that some other preexisting building must be sacrificed in order for new monuments to be constructed. Another problem is proximity. Unfortunately, Berlin's separation is not the only tragedy that it is obligated to remember. The Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe is also an immensely important piece of history, and having these two

[50] F. Baker, "The Berlin Wall: Production, Preservation and Consumption of a 20th-century Monument," in *Landscapes from Antiquity* (ed. S. Stoddart; Cambridge, UK: Antiquity Publications, 2000), 289–315.
[51] Saunders, "Remembering Cold War Division, 12.

monuments too close may be seen to create an undesirable overlap of interest that is difficult to remedy in physical space.

Conclusion

Human memory is ultimately flawed because it is finite. Our brains can only retain so much information deemed as "important" before it reaches saturation. The next time an idea is judged to be important enough to be remembered, by nature another previous memory must be forgotten. This fact is the very reason that since ancient times humans have strived to preserve their knowledge either through oral tradition, literature, and more recently databases on the internet. This act of ceaseless preservation is an effort to ensure that future generations can look back upon the successes and failures of their predecessors and learn how they might move forward. Naturally, this is the case with monuments as well. Being the physical manifestation of human memory, there can only be so many monuments in a functioning modern cityscape. Therefore, the memories that we choose to immortalize as monuments should be carefully selected and considered before constructing them. Even so, the Berlin Wall is essential to our understanding of the modern era. The violent and abrupt division caused by radically different ideologies which the wall embodies is an important message for generations to come. As the monument of the Wall now highlights the openness between East and West, it has become a symbol of hope for human progress not only in Europe but also in the larger world.

Ethan Han is a junior at Boston Latin School where he enjoys learning history, economics, and computer science. In 2020, Ethan was the recipient of the Massachusetts Historical Society's National History Day Special Award for his essay "The Spanish Flu: How the 1918 Influenza Pandemic Impacted Boston, the US, and the World." Ethan enjoys volunteering with the Red Cross, Boston Cares, local news station WGBH, and is the founder of BLS Connect, a community outreach organization that bridges the Boston Latin student community with the Brighton Civic Association.

Works Cited

Coy, Jason, *A Brief History of Germany* (New York: Facts on File, 2005).

Fulbrook, Mary, *A Concise History of Germany.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. *History of Germany, 1918–2014: The Divided Nation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2014).

Kimmelman, Michael, "For Berlin Museum, a Modern Makeover That Doesn't Deny the Wounds of War," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2009.

Ladd, Brian, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Saunders, Anna, "Remembering Cold War Division: Wall Remnants and Border Monuments in Berlin," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* (April 2009).

Till, Karen, "Memory in the New Berlin," *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2005.

Verheyen, Dirk, "United City, Divided Memories? Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin," 155–162.