

The Berlin Wall: A Historical Artifact

Torrential downpours filled the preceding days, but this August day is clear and hot. There is nothing disturbing about the sight of cranes and concrete slabs quietly resting near the edge of the city. As darkness falls, it seems like a thousand other evenings.

At midnight, Saturday, August 13, 1961, East German soldiers begin sealing off the city. First, they string miles of jagged barbed wire (bought inconspicuously from West Berlin firms). This wire will soon be replaced by a much more ominous and lasting presence--the Berlin Wall.

The Berlin Wall curls through Europe's third largest city. The Wall is a motionless concrete snake raising ten to thirteen feet high. It winds and bends through Berlin, crossing streets and backyards. If straightened, the Berlin Wall would measure nearly one hundred miles long.

Behind the Wall, a hundred yards into Communist East Germany, is another concrete barrier almost as formidable--the leveled area between -- flat, desolate and dangerous. This is a "no-man's land," which is constantly patrolled by armed guards and unrestrained dogs, covered by automatically triggered machine guns, and in some places sown with land mines. Some 285 elevated watch towers thrust up ominously above "no man's land," punctuating this scene of dread.

The Eastern side of the Wall is especially smooth and clean. The rounded top edge is difficult to grasp. Weak spots are constantly being improved, upgraded, reinforced, and rebuilt. The entire edifice is meticulously maintained.

The creation of the Berlin Wall comes about because of a panicked country desperate to retain its citizens who are fleeing at an astonishing rate. Even after the erection of the Wall, a few still manage to slip by, going over the five-foot thick wall, under it, around it, and a few even crashed through it.

Not until November 9, 1989, did the people of both East and West Berlin together dance along the top of the Berlin Wall. Reunited families and friends sing and embrace, cheering, "The Wall is gone!" People suddenly feel freedom along this deep, shivering scar from the Cold War.

Berliners from both sides fill the streets, like eager kids at a carnival, glimpsing wide-eyed at their neighbors' foreign land. They drink champagne. They rejoice through the night. They heal old wounds.

With hammers, chisels, fingernails and an overwhelming sense of hope, Germans from East and West begin tearing down the Wall, creating new openings. "The Wall is Gone!" From this rubble rises a new symbol for tomorrow, an icon for future generations, the Berlin Wall...dismantled.

History is a look backward, a reconciliation of times and lives gone by. We face the glowing view before us. It is a vast and unknown landscape. It is the stuff of dreams. Blue-sky sails just out of view. Pass through the wall – experience your own "breakthrough."

As you do, touch the wall and in your hand is the past and the future. Let your fingers wander slowly across its battered surface. You can feel the balance of our lives. You can feel the struggles and the triumphs, the grief and the joy, the hope and the fulfillment. You can feel the distant tremor of tomorrow's history gently unfolding in the palm of your hand.

Please click [here](#) to find out how pieces of the Berlin Wall came to Westminster College in the form of the "Breakthrough" sculpture.