

I chose the Berlin Wall for my topic as the wall itself symbolically and physically changed Europe for almost three decades. I decided to choose this topic because I have family members who lived in Germany at the time of the Berlin Wall.

Before beginning the final steps of my paper I found what still needed to be done, what needed to be improved on, and where I should focus the majority of my time. First and my biggest problem was the lack of diverse sources I needed. So I began finding more primary sources, broad context sources, and a scholarly journal article. After finding these missing sources I focused on the issues brought up in a discussion about my project. Exploring certain details into more depth and gathering sources more attuned to my revised thesis. My biggest challenge I ran into was when I forgot to quote my sources while writing my paper. So as I was finishing up I needed to go back through my sources and find which quote correlated with each source.

I plan to work on a research paper for my project and while having my paper based off my topic of the Berlin Wall I need to include its relation to the downfall of communism.

45 years after the end of World War Two, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991 broke barriers in Germany as it led to German reunification, after tearing down the wall Germany challenged the world as the horrors of World War Two was fresh in other countries minds, a reunified democratic Germany challenged barriers in Europe and became an economic powerhouse and a country with a safe military strength despite the scar The Berlin Wall had left on Germany and the opposition to the idea of a reunified Germany.

Breaking Down the Wall

At the end of 1945 the whole world had been left scarred and bruised by the deadliest military conflict in human history. The global conflict that had taken place for the past six years had resulted in an estimated 70-85 million deaths, around three percent of the world's population at the time. The victors of the conflict had divided Germany and its capital into four different military sectors, inevitably merging into a western and eastern German state. Due to the difference in ideologies between the victorious occupiers, a twelve-foot-high and ninety-six-mile-long barrier was constructed nearly twenty years after the war, dividing the capital of a ruined German state. Through great sacrifice and tense times, Germany eventually reunited and became a peaceful and influential global power with the modern world. Forty-five years after the end of World War II, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991 broke physical barriers placed in Germany and led to German reunification. After tearing down the wall Germany challenged the world as the horrors of World War Two was fresh in other countries' minds. A reunified democratic Germany challenged barriers in Europe and became an economic powerhouse and a country with a safe military strength despite the scar the Berlin Wall had left on Germany and despite the opposition to the idea of a reunified Germany.

Following the end of the war and two years into the Cold War, allied nations France, Great Britain, and the United States agreed to merge their three German occupation zones into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In opposition to this action the Soviet Union decided to form the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and create a German state that would be an allied communist nation with the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion in Germany left many Germans afraid of Joseph Stalin and sovietization since the end of the war. By taking advantage of the zonal border between occupied zones in Germany an estimated 2.5 million East Germans decided to migrate and leave the GDR, escaping the wrath of the Soviets in their eyes. This massive immigration problem plagued the GDR as it caused a “brain drain” within Eastern Germany due to absence of many scholars and skilled laborers who left the German state during this time period. Majority of those who left fled to gain a better life for themselves with the economic prosperity the west had to offer. But many also left after specific social and political events such as the imposition of collective agriculture and when living conditions deteriorated throughout East Germany. On 15 June 1961, Walter Ulbricht, the first Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party and GDR State Council chairman, stated in an international press conference, "Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten!" (No one has the intention of erecting a wall!) (Rottman). Walter Ulbricht however had conceived the idea of a wall after stating how “a blockade will be imposed.” (Ulbricht, notes Khrushchev with Ulbricht) on the West and East

German borders in a conference with soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev went on to give the initiative for the construction of the Wall on August 1st, 1961. From August 12, 1961 to November 20, 1961 the first of the four phases of the Berlin Wall was constructed in what the GDR claimed to be an “anti-fascist protective rampart”. On the second day of construction, in front of the Brandenburg Gate, spectators gathered in shock as a line of East German police sprawled across the border. The crowd soon burst into chanting and any and all approaches or objections were met with East German water cannons. (Motion Picture 111) Throughout the walls existence, from 1961 to 1989, at least 140 people were killed or died at the Wall in connection with the East German border regime. (Fatalities) On June 12th 1987, President Ronald Reagan standing in front of the Brandenburg Gate famously called out the leader of the Soviet Union demanding that “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” (Reagan) Even though Peter Robinson almost cut out this famous line from the iconic speech, after debriefing with President Reagan, Reagan exclaimed “That wall has to come down. That's what I'd like to say to them (referring to the East Germans and Russians)” (Robinson) It would only take 2 years afterwards until the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany would break down the physical barrier placed between the two states. The beginning of the end began on August 23, 1989 when Hungary removed its border restrictions with the country of Austria. This event caused 13,000 East German tourists to escape

through Austria, breaking the Soviets' Iron Curtain. More nations around Germany were opening up their borders to travel and while the East German government tried to prevent the new migration they had ultimately failed and by September of 1989 mass demonstrations against the East German government began to take place. Symbolically the Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989 when the East German Minister of Propaganda at a press conference misspoke due to a lack of information and stated that people would be able to pass with proper permission "immediately, without delay" (Günter). The minister's mistake led to tens of thousands of East Berliners to storm the gates at the wall, causing one man to cave in and allow people to pass with little or no identity checks. That man, Lt. Col. Harald Jaeger, later went onto an interview with Reuters in which he stated "My world was collapsing and I felt like I was left alone by my party and my military commanders," (Kirschbaum) as for hours he tried to make contact with his superiors but eventually caved into the mob of twenty thousand Germans and decided to give the order to open up the border.

This incident set Germany onto the road of reunification as after this event, with permission from the Soviet Union, East and West Germany took the first step toward German reunification. In Elizabeth Pond's book, *Beyond the Wall Germany's Road to Unification*, she described the event of the wall's symbolic collapse as "Die Wende(dee vende)- the turnaround" as it described the East Germans' reaction and new found hope for a better life with "the

disintegration of the communist party and paralysis of the *Stasi*". (Pond,130) West Germans and West Berliners were allowed visa-free travel starting December 23, 1989. Christina Martsch in an interview with *tell history* described the reactions of her East German family members to life in West Germany after the walls symbolic collapse in 1989. She described it as an "exciting experience" and her family members were astonished and said "it was the first time for ages that they could get green beans in a can." (Tell History) On June 13, 1990, the official dismantling of the wall by the East German military began while in November 1991, it ended with the military only leaving some parts as memorials.

Germany had been justifiably accused and blamed for starting two of the worst military conflicts the world had ever seen, World War One and World War Two. So understandingly countries who had been a part of these conflicts were hesitant and sometimes all out against the idea of reunified German state with control over their own economy and military again. On July 1, 1990 the GDR adopted the West German currency, all border controls ceased, and German reunification had fully begun. Many countries were initially opposed to the idea of a united Germany as the horrors of WWII were still fresh in their minds. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir speculated that a country that "decided to kill millions of Jewish people" in the Holocaust "will try to do it again". Britain, one of Germany's greatest enemies in both world wars, openly stated how they were against a reunified Germany. Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, British

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev that neither the United Kingdom nor Western Europe "Want a united Germany". The British Secretary of State for Trade and Industry Nicholas Ridley suggested that the European Union "was a German racket" intended to take over the continent. Margaret Thatcher believed that Germany "would once again dominate the whole of Europe." (Simms,) Margaret Thatcher openly voiced her concerns of a reunified German state on numerous occasions, even far as to keeping a map of Germany's 1937 borders in her handbag. In 1990 she even convened a special conference of experts to the Prime Minister's country residence of Chequers to brief her on whether a united Germany could be "trusted." Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet leader feared that the "rejection of the post-war realities, that is the existence of two German states," threatened "destabilization... not only in Central Europe, but on a larger scale." Finally, it was also alleged that a representative of French President François Mitterrand told an aide to Gorbachev, "France by no means wants German reunification, although it realizes that in the end, it is inevitable." On January 20th, 1990, French President Mitterrand told Thatcher that a unified Germany could "make more ground than even Hitler had". The major European powers involved in both world wars, even though they had not wanted it originally, knew that German reunification was inevitable. To ensure the best possible outcome for everybody in Europe these worried countries had a small effect on German Reunification and made Germany's European integration a radical

one. Britain, at first, was fearful of these hindering policies towards Germany as Margret Thatcher believed these policies would one day empower Germany. However, the United States and France persisted. The mighty Deutschmark was replaced with the universal Euro and the central bank of west Germany, Bundesbank, “appeared to be superseded by that of the new European Central Bank” (Simms) The process of reunification was mitigated by other factors as well. First Germany showed no hegemonic tendencies as they struggled at first to incorporate the failing east German economy with the prosperous west German economy. Allowing other countries to economically prosper before Germany did. Second, the newly founded democracies of the old Soviet Bloc were added into NATO by the United States at the aid of Germany and “these measures were not accompanied by a sustained push for a matching political union” (Simms), going against what the majority of the German population supported and believed to be best. The ultimate reason why these European powers had their worries put to rest was due to the simple fact that the German people had no interest in becoming a dominant and leading power in Europe. They had learned to atone from their experiences involving World War Two and Nazism, and genuinely believed it was time to ““work together” with their European “partners.”” (Simms).

Germany in its time of rebuilding and unifying has managed to become one of the most economically successful countries in the modern world and provide protection to many other

countries with its stable and strong military through their own choice and in assistance to NATO's new rapid-response force. After German reunification, the country built up its entire economy through trading and exports causing the country today to become the fourth biggest economically successful countries in the modern world and the most valuable European partner to the United States. Germany's economic success can be described as a modern success story, going from a demilitarized broken two state country to a reunified economic powerhouse. At first, "Eastern Germany went into a deep recession during the first phase of unification, while the western German economy went into a small boom." (Wikipedia, Economic Reunification) The newly opened market for West German goods founded this boom as East Germans understandably wanted better quality goods than the ones they had access to in East Germany. By the middle of 1991 West Germany had a growth of over 1 percent in its workforce, being described "as sharp an increase as since the days of the economic miracle." (Wikipedia, Economic Reunification). To prevent the inflationary effects of the sudden economic growth in the west, The Bundesbank raised the average rate of short-term interest from 7.1 percent in 1989 to 9.5 percent in 1992. The Bundesbank permitted rates to begin falling again only in 1993—to 7.3 percent (Wikipedia, Economic Reunification) This tight squeeze in fact caused a slight depression within Germany leaving an all time high of four million Germans unemployed. John Hall and Udo Ludwig, in their journal published a graph stating, a total of thirty-three billion

Deutschmarks was infested into East Germany from West Germany. Sixteen billion more than all of Germany's total foreign direct investment. To this day, only 37% of East Germans believe their economic conditions are getting better while 49% of west Germans believe their economic conditions are getting better. (Archer). Despite numerous countries worrying about Germany's military actions Germany's economic success led to Eastern Europe's economic growth. In 2014, 10% of imports for Germany's automotive industry came from Eastern Europe, 6% higher from 2010. By 2014 as well 15% of German machinery and equipment was being exported to Eastern Europe, more than the United States and China. Eastern Europe has become an important market for selling goods. "Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania all owe their spectacular recent economic growth at least in part to Germany", a Bloomberg article states. "German companies have integrated these countries into their export-oriented production chains, helped drive down unemployment rates and set standards for labor conditions and quality." Collectively, these five countries' trade turnover with Germany reached 325.3 billion euros (\$360.8 billion) last year, 63% more business than Germany did with China and for all five economies, Germany is the biggest export market. These five countries depend on Germany for their economic success and now these countries are trying to veer away from German dependence to prevent any economic hardship caused from Germany. In 2019 when the German economy had shrunk, or did bad for a period of time, some of these countries were hit as well as

Germany. People still debate about whether or not Germany and the European Union have an economic domination over the former Soviet Bloc.

Germany's surprising economic and military success was truly an outstanding and extraordinary example as they challenged and broke many barriers placed before them by others and themselves in this unprecedented situation. After Germany broke down the physical barrier that the allies had put up, which left Germany divided and scarred for over 45 years, they overcame and exceeded all the challenges placed against them. Britain, France, and the dying USSR had tried to delay the process of reunification for Germany in private for years before the process of reunification finalized. Germany broke all expectations by becoming an economic powerhouse as well. Instead of conquering Eastern Europe like many feared, Germany's economy has allowed Eastern Europe to thrive. However, many people today in east Europe believe Germany economically dominates over Eastern Europe while the Germans believe they are helping the former Soviet Bloc prosper. Germany's military is a major asset to NATO's rapid response forces and help out the world for good instead of committing genocide. Germany has become a democratically elected democracy, using its resources to rebuild and atone for their past mistakes while leaving parts of the Berlin Wall standing today to remind them of the scar that they themselves had caused.

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