

The Berlin Wall

A BARRIER TO FREEDOM—1961-1989



PART 2 — THE WALL COMES DOWN

For nearly three decades, the Berlin Wall was both a physical division between West Berlin and East Berlin and East Germany and a symbolic boundary between democracy and **communism** during what is called the **Cold War**.

By 1989, communism was faltering in parts of the Soviet Union and border restrictions were eased, opening a hole in the **Iron Curtain**.

East German citizens began protests called the **Peaceful Revolution**.

On Nov. 9, 1989, the East German government announced that it was easing restrictions on

the border into West Berlin. People from both sides began crossing. There were celebrations with people hugging, crying and cheering as the Berlin Wall, a barrier to freedom, fell.

East and West Germany reunified into a single German nation, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Berlin became a single city on Oct. 3, 1990.

The Berlin Wall was officially demolished beginning in June of 1990, although pieces small and large became collectibles and can be found in homes and museums.

“General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”

—U.S. President Ronald Reagan, West Berlin, June 1987



WORDS TO KNOW

Communism—political and economic systems where all property is public and people work and are given things by the government according to their needs.

Cold War—state of political hostility between countries characterized by threats but not military

action. This type of rivalry existed between the Soviet Union and the U.S. after World War II until the late 1980s.

Iron Curtain—barrier to communication or information that includes censorship and secrecy; used to describe the boundary between democratic

and communist countries.

Peaceful Revolution—protests by East German citizens that led to elections, the transition to parliamentary democracy, and the reunification of Germany.

FASCINATING FACTS ABOUT THE BERLIN WALL

■ Official demolition of the Berlin Wall started on June 13, 1990. Parts had been chipped away for souvenirs beginning on Nov. 9, 1989. People who did this were known as “wall woodpeckers.”

■ The longest surviving stretch of the Berlin Wall is a 1.3 km-long (almost one mile) painted stretch along the Mühlenstrasse in former East Berlin. It is the largest open-air gallery in the world with 105 paintings by artists from all over the world, painted in 1990 on the east side of the Berlin Wall.

■ After the reunification of Germany, it took 65 cranes, 175 trucks and 13 bulldozers to remove the 204,100-ton barrier that was the Berlin Wall. More than 40,000 segments were crushed to make materials, primarily for building roads.

■ Segments of the Berlin Wall were auctioned as art objects, purchased or donated to museums and institutions around the world. At least 50 are on display in the United States.



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