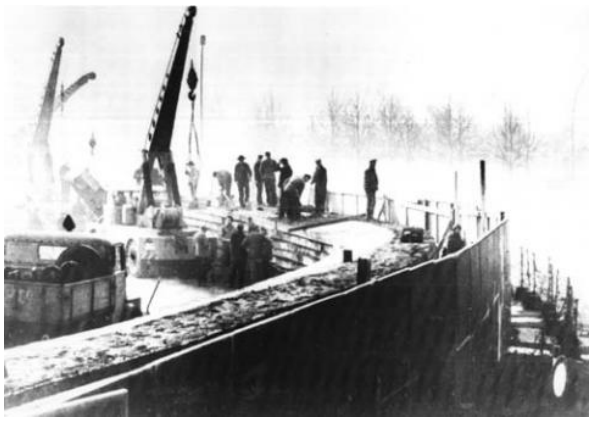
AWESOME stories

A DIVIDED CITY



0. A DIVIDED CITY - Story Preface

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As tensions increased during the Cold War, the divided city of Berlin had a change of landscape. This image depicts East Berlin construction workers erecting the "Berlin Wall" on the 20th of November, 1961. Image online via the U.S. National Archives.

Russians left Berlin's U.S. sector in July of 1945. Not long thereafter, people who did not wish to live under communist rule in East Germany also left (or tried to leave).

Many cities and towns in the German states of Saxony and Prussia were no longer German after Potsdam. Most of the territorial shift was in favor of Poland - depicted in grey - then under Soviet occupation. The USSR did more than occupy one of its western neighbors. It also annexed a significant portion of Poland's eastern lands.

George Keenan, one of Truman's advisors who lived for 101 years, became very suspicious - and extremely worried - about Soviet intentions in the occupied territories, including Berlin. In February of 1946, just seven months after the Potsdam conference, he wrote a detailed telegram expressing his concerns.

The following month, as the Soviet grip tightened on Berlin (and other major European cities), Churchill gave a famous speech (on the 5th of March, 1946) at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri (Truman's home state). He observed that "an Iron Curtain" has descended across the continent."

At Potsdam, the Allies decided each occupying country had to agree on all important decisions impacting Germany. An impossibility from the start, the various governments were soon at complete odds with each other. By the summer of 1948, Berlin was caught in the cross hairs.

Attempting to control the entire capital, by starving the people and disrupting their businesses, Soviet forces cut-off ground traffic to and from West Berlin. The Allies responded with the "Berlin Airlift" which provided supplies to the people inside the encircled city.

As the years passed, hundreds of thousands of people fled East Germany, thereby depriving the GRD and Berlin - its capital - of human and financial resources.

Beginning on the 13th of August, 1961 - when members of the "Combat Groups of the Working Class" physically closed the border - the Soviets built a wall to end the exodus. Two days later, an East German soldier - assigned to guard the construction - escaped by jumping over the wall (which was then a barbed-wire fence).

On the 17th of August, the next year, East-German border guards shot and killed 18-year-old Peter Fechter. What was his crime? Attempting to reach Berlin's western sector by crossing over the Wall.

The infamous wall was erected, among other places, near the Brandenburg Gate. That famous gate - long a Berlin landmark - was closed, and the wall divided the city into East and West, physically separating East and West Berliners from each other.

A political hot button for both "the East" and "the West," the Berlin Wall was widely covered on radio and television. American presidents used the wall as a backdrop for speeches.

Five months before he was assassinated, John F. Kennedy visited the divided city. Standing on a platform, overlooking the wall and the closed Brandenburg Gate, JFK delivered one of his most-famous lines.

Using his notes, to help him correctly pronounce a German phrase he intended to use, the president said:

There are many people in the world who really don't understand what is the great issue between the free world and the communist world - let them come to Berlin!

There are some who say in Europe and elsewhere we can work with the communists - let them come to Berlin!

All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin.

And, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words 'Ich bin ein Berliner.' ["I am a Berliner."]

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-DIVIDED-CITY-Victory-in-Europe-End-of-WWII

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/A-DIVIDED-CITY-Victory-in-Europe-End-of-WWII

Questions 2 Ponder

Is Political Rhetoric Helpful or Harmful?

When political leaders make memorable statements, such as Churchill's comment about an "Iron Curtain" which had "descended across the Continent," they are expressing their own points of view.

When others agree with those points of view, the "sound bites" resonate and become rallying points. When others disagree, the "sound bite" fuels polarization.

Do you think political rhetoric is helpful or harmful? Explain your answer.

Media Stream

Russians Left the US Sector of Berlin
Photo online, courtesy Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) of Germany.
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Fleeing People - Leaving East Germany for the West
Photo online, courtesy Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) of Germany.
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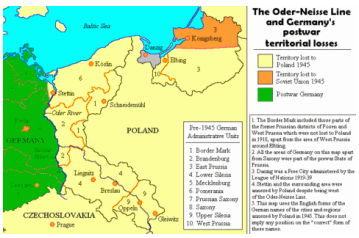

Map Depicting Changes in Germany's Boundaries
Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.
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Berlin Wall - Satellite View

Image online, courtesy NASA/GSFC/MITI/ERSDAC/JAROS, and U.S./Japan ASTER Science Team.

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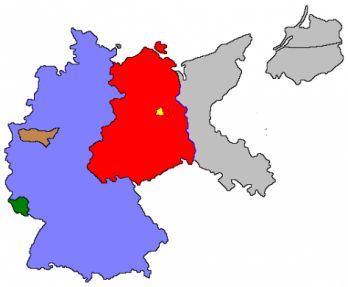

Map Depicting Territory for Poland

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons website.

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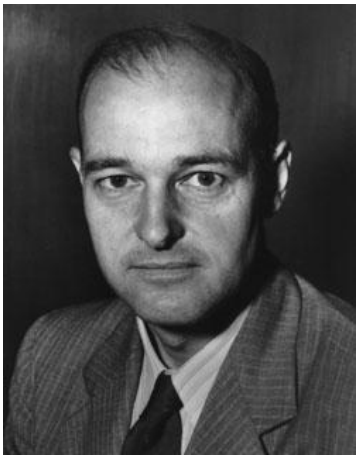

George Keenan

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Map Depicting Fulton, Missouri

Map depicting location of Fulton, Missouri - online, courtesy Epodunk.

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East German Troops Close the Border

Photo from the German Federal Archive, Image 183-85458-0002. (Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-85458-0002). Online, courtesy German Federal Archive.

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Conrad Schumann Escapes East Berlin

Photo of Hans Conrad Schumann escaping East Berlin by Peter Leibing (1941-2008). Copyright, Peter Leibing, all rights reserved.

Leibing's copyright is now held by his widow, Ruth Leibing. This low-resolution image is fair use, for educational purposes, and is online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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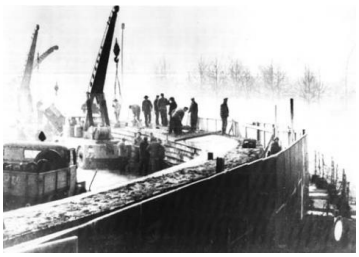

Constructing the Wall

Photo online, courtesy Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) of Germany.
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Erecting the Berlin Wall

Photo online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.
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The Brandenburg Gate

Photo online, courtesy Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) of Germany.
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Wall at the Brandenburg Gate

Photo online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.
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Berlin - A Divided City

Photo online, courtesy Bundesarchiv (Federal Archives) of Germany.
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Berlin Becomes Two Cities Divided by a Wall

Photo online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.
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Kennedy Viewing the Closed Brandenburg Gate

Image online, courtesy the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.
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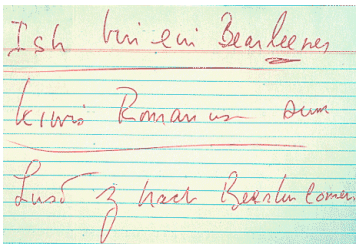

Kennedy's Notes - "Ich bin ein Berliner"

Image online, courtesy Kennedy Library and the U.S. National Archives.

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Map Depicting Areas of Poland Annexed by Russia

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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President Kennedy Overlooking the Wall

Photo online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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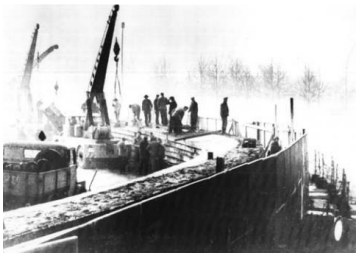

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