

## The Berlin Wall: Then and Now



On the 9th November 1989, 30 years ago now, the Berlin Wall came down - helping to end the decades of Cold War that existed between the West and the Soviet Union. Built by the Communist-controlled East in August 1961, the Berlin Wall was the physical barrier separating the two sides of Germany.

See [HERE](#)

As World War II came to an end in 1945, peace conferences at Yalta and Potsdam determined the fate of Germany's territories. They split the defeated nation into four "allied occupation zones": The eastern part of the country went to the Soviet Union, while the western part went to the United States, Great Britain and (eventually) France. Even though Berlin was located entirely within the Soviet part of the country, it sat about 100 miles from the border between the eastern and western occupation zones, the Yalta and Potsdam agreements split the city into similar sectors. The Soviets took the eastern half, while the other Allies took the western. This four-way occupation of Berlin began in June 1945.

The existence of West Berlin, a conspicuously capitalist city deep within communist East Germany, stuck like a bone in the Soviet throat and the Russians began manoeuvring to drive the United States, Britain and France out of the city for good. In 1948, a Soviet blockade of West Berlin aimed to starve the western Allies out of the city. Instead of retreating, however, the United States and its allies supplied their sectors of the city from the air. This effort, known as the Berlin Airlift, lasted for more than a year and delivered more than 2.3 million tons of food, fuel and other goods to West Berlin. The Soviets called off the blockade in 1949.

After a decade of relative calm, tensions flared again in 1958. For the next three years, due to the prospect of better economic conditions and the lack of political oppression in the West, there was an endless flow of refugees from east to west, many of them young skilled workers such as doctors, teachers and engineers. Summits, conferences and other negotiations to try and stop the flow came and went without resolution and the flood of refugees continued. In June 1961, some 19,000 people left the GDR through Berlin. The following month, 30,000 fled. In the first 11 days of August, 16,000 East Germans crossed the border into West Berlin, and on August 12 some 2,400 followed, the largest number of defectors ever to leave East Germany in a single day. By mid 1961, a sixth of the entire population had left, this was nearly three million people.





On August 13, 1961, the Communist government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) began to build a barbed wire and concrete “Antifascistischer Schutzwall,” or “antifascist bulwark,” between East and West Berlin. The official purpose of this Berlin Wall was to keep Western “fascists” from entering East Germany and undermining the socialist state, but it primarily served the objective of stemming mass defections from East to West. It effectively created two incredibly different cities. West Berlin was brightly lit, modern and bustling. On the other hand, East Berlin was drab, colourless and decaying.

### The Fall of the Wall.



A crowd in front of the Berlin Wall, with the East German border guards standing on the wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate in 1989

During the 28 year period from 1961 to 1989, despite the clear risk of crossing the Wall from East to West, many people attempted and often succeeded in their escape. The border guards had orders to shoot to kill, so anyone who tried to cross the Wall was in danger of being shot. A total of [140 people](#) was killed while trying to cross.

Before the wall was built, Berliners on both sides of the city could move around fairly freely: They crossed the East-West border to work, to shop, to go to the theatre and the movies. Trains and subway lines carried passengers back and forth. After the wall was built, it became impossible to get from East to West Berlin except through one of three checkpoints, at Helmstedt, (Checkpoint Alpha), at Dreilinden, (Checkpoint Bravo) and in the centre of Berlin at Friedrichstrasse (Checkpoint Charlie). Eventually, the GDR built 12 checkpoints along the wall and at each of the checkpoints, East German soldiers screened diplomats and other officials before they were





allowed to enter or leave. Except under special circumstances, travellers from East and West Berlin were rarely allowed across the border.



The construction of the Berlin Wall did stop the flood of refugees from East to West and it did defuse the crisis over Berlin. Though he was not happy about it, President John F. Kennedy conceded that "a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war."

Escape from East Germany was not impossible, however: From 1961 until the wall came down in 1989, more than 5,000 East Germans, including some 600 border guards, managed to cross the border by jumping out of windows adjacent to the wall, climbing over the barbed wire, flying in hot air balloons, crawling through the sewers and driving through unfortified parts of the wall at high speeds.

On November 9, 1989, as the Cold War began to thaw across Eastern Europe, the spokesman for East Berlin's Communist Party announced a change in his city's relations with the West. Starting at midnight that day, he said, citizens of the GDR were free to cross the country's borders. East and West Berliners flocked to the wall, drinking beer and champagne and chanting "Tor auf!" ("Open the gate!").

At midnight, they flooded through the checkpoints.



More than 2 million people from East Berlin visited West Berlin that weekend to participate in a celebration that was, one journalist wrote, “the greatest street party in the history of the world.” People used hammers and picks to knock away chunks of the wall, they became known as “mauerspechte,” or “wall woodpeckers” while cranes and bulldozers pulled down section after section. Soon the wall was gone and Berlin was united for the first time since 1945. “Only today,” one Berliner spray-painted on a piece of the wall, “is the war really over.”



The reunification of East and West Germany was made official on October 3, 1990, almost one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

To this day, the Berlin Wall remains one of the most powerful and enduring symbols of the Cold War.

Nowadays, 50,000 people are moving to Berlin every year. Since the wall fell in 1989, the population of East Berlin has grown by 500,000 to 4 million.

On Saturday, 9 November 2019, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the wall, a ceremony was held at the Berlin Wall Memorial, outside NATO headquarters in Brussels when representatives from across the Alliance gathered around the Berlin Wall Memorial to mark the anniversary. The memorial, made up of two blocks from the wall, acts as a "solemn reminder" of that terrible past.





Speaking at the ceremony, Germany's Ambassador to NATO, Hans-Dieter Lucas, said: "The human desire for freedom turned the division of Europe and the Cold War into things of the past. "On this special anniversary, we also remember all the victims of this war and the political system it stood for.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1961, a quarrel between an East German border guard and an American official on his way to the opera in East Berlin very nearly led to what one observer called "a nuclear-age equivalent of the Wild West Showdown at the O.K. Corral." That day, American and Soviet tanks faced off at Checkpoint Charlie for 16 hours. Photographs of the confrontation are some of the most familiar and memorable images of the Cold War.





Men have 2 motivations: hunger and hanky panky and women can't tell them apart.  
If you see a gleam in his eyes, make him a sandwich.

## An Open Letter to Greta Thunberg.



You are not a moral leader. But I will tell you what you are.



Greta Thunberg:

You have declared yourself a leader and said that your generation will start a revolution. You have comported yourself as a credentialed adult and climate change activist who has fearlessly addressed politicians and world leaders. You have dropped out of school and declared that there isn't any reason to attend, or any reason for you to study since there will be no future for you to inherit. You have, rather than attend your classes, been leading Friday Climate Strikes for all students in your generation across the globe. Your attendance at oil pipelines has been striking. There, you unequivocally declare that all oil needs to remain in the ground where it belongs.

I shall, therefore, against the backdrop of your activism, address you as an adult rather than as a child.

In September of 2019 you crossed the Atlantic in a "zero carbon" racing yacht that had no toilet and electric light on board. You made an impassioned plea at the United Nations in which you claimed that, "we have stolen your dreams and our childhood with our empty words." You claimed that adults and world leaders come to young people for answers and explained in anger: "How





dare you!" You claimed that we are failing you and that young people are beginning to understand our betrayal. You further declared that if we continue to fail your generation: "We will never forgive you."

You have stated that you want us to panic, and to act as if our homes are on fire. You insist that rich countries must reduce to zero emissions immediately. In your speeches you attack economic growth and have stated that our current climate crisis is caused by "buying and building things." You call for climate justice and equity, without addressing the worst polluter on the planet - China; the country that is economically annexing much of Africa and Latin America. You dare not lecture Iran about its uranium projects -- because that's not part of the UN's agenda, is it?

You proclaim that we need to live within the planetary boundaries, to focus on equity and "take a few steps back" for the sake of all living species. You resent the hierarchical distinctions between human and animals and entertain no qualitative distinction between a monkey, a malaria-infested mosquito and a snarling hyena. You mouth slogans such as: "We have set in motion an irreversible chain reaction beyond control," and you advocate for universal veganism on the Ellen DeGeneres show. You do not buy new clothes and you don't want the rest of us to either. You want us all to stop flying in jet planes without giving us an alternative as to how we would re-transform our financial and trading systems, to say nothing of our personal enjoyment of the world, without regression to a primeval era. Few can afford to cross the Atlantic in a \$6M zero carbon yacht financed by rich people who made their wealth by the very means you condemn as loathsome.





There are a few things that we, the rational adults of the world who are not bowing to you like guilt-ridden obsequious Babbitts need to say to you, Greta.

First, we did not rob you of your childhood or of your dreams. You are the legatee of a magnificent technological civilization which my generation and the one before it and several others preceding it all the way to the Industrial Revolution and the Renaissance, bequeathed to you. That growth-driven, capitalist technological civilization has created the conditions for you to harangue us over our betrayal. It is a civilization that eradicated diseases such as small pox from the word, and that lifted millions out of abject poverty in a universe you think is dying and decaying. It assured you a life expectancy that exceeded that of your ancestors. Most likely by focusing on economic growth which you demonize, and scientific advancement, that civilization will further enhance a robust quality of life and health for your descendants.

Here is a hard truth to ponder, Greta: if the great producers of this world whom you excoriate were to withdraw their productivity, wealth and talents and their minds from the world today, your generation would simply perish. Why? Because as children you have done nothing as yet, with your lives besides being born. This is what we expect of children until such time as they can be producers by learning from their elders. You are understandably social and ecological ballast. You are not yet cognitively advanced to replicate the structures of survival of which you are the beneficiaries.

Children are important instalments on the future. We have invested in you. It is you and your smug generation which think they have nothing to learn from the older ones who are failing themselves. Whom do you expect to employ the majority of you if you have neither the job credentials or life competency skills to navigate the world? The future unemployable-skipping-school-on-Friday obstreperous children?

The truth, as one anonymous blogger aptly put it, is that your generation is unable to work up to forty hours per week without being chronically depressed and anxious. Its members cannot even decide if they want to be a boy or a girl, or both, or neither, or a "they." They cannot eat meat without crying. I might add that your generation needs "trigger warnings" and "safe spaces" as pre-conditions for learning in school. Its members have a pathological need to be coddled and protected from the challenging realities of life. Your generation is the biggest demander and consumer of carbon spewing technological gadgets and devices. An hour without any of them and too many of you succumb to paralysing lethargy. Your generation is the least curious and most insular set of individuals one has ever encountered. Your hubris extends so far that you think you have nothing to learn from your elders.



Yes, we have betrayed you: by capitulating the world of leadership to bored, attention-deficit children who spout bromides, platitudes and slogans that a rudderless and morally relativistic culture accepts because a significant number of its denizens have become intellectually bankrupt and morally lazy.

The logical endpoint of your ecological vision would see us living in primeval conditions eking out an existence in jungle swamps in which we would regard poisonous snakes and man-eating





tigers as our moral equals. We would have to adapt ourselves to nature rather than adapt nature to meet our needs, like all members of civilized civilizations do. Your vision would see us foraging for mushrooms and plants without knowing which were inimical to our digestive systems. Under your system we would swelter from heat, die from rampant plagues and starvation because there will be no air-conditioning units, no sophisticated plumbing and irrigations and sewer systems, no anti-bacterial soap made from animal matter, no pesticides and chemicals to sanitize our food and drinking supplies: just one primordial swamp of human putrefaction.

If civilization is left in the hands of your ecofascist supporters we will be living in grass huts, drinking animal feces infested water, and shrinking in fear from polar bears instead of killing them for food when they attack us.

Greta, living in complete harmony with nature is the death of creativity. Understand this. All great civilizations were forged in the crucibles of proper exploitation of the earth. Those who lived on land with oil and did nothing with it never had a right to it in the first place. Non-usage of God's resources is the cardinal sin because it results in the un-development of our human capabilities and makes us indistinguishable from beasts.



Your generation needs to be taught the morality of wealth creation, rather than only parasitically benefiting from it. The only revolution you will lead is one into nihilism and civilization regression. You need to learn about the moral case for fossil fuel. You owe it to yourself to understand how the harnessing of the vast store of concentrated energy in fossil fuels allowed mankind, for the first time in human history, to escape intractable constraints and energy limits that had left all but the very privileged in total poverty and depravity. Before the Industrial Revolution all societies were dependent on a very limited flow of solar energy captured in living plants for subsistence needs such as food, fuel and shelter.

But we, the creative enterprisers, will not go back to the Dark Ages. Your philosophy can be summed up as follows:

What was good for my anthropoid ancestors is good for me. Do not rock the boat, or even build one as that will require cutting down a tree. Do not disrupt nature. Do not dare to see the earth as rightfully belonging to us. We don't have the right to use our brains in a manner that can transform our needs into a material form. Let's conveniently forget that production is the application of reason to the problems of survival. Let's all diminish the grandeur of man and his luminous potential. Crush the Thomas Edisons of this world.

The apocalyptic world vision you hold has been a strip landing for those who have hated progress throughout history. Your apocalyptic predictions have been made for millennia and, we're still here. We will still be here long after you've grown up and we have forgiven you for skipping classes, thereby lowering the intelligence quotient of an entire generation.

Go away!



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