

**Your On the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

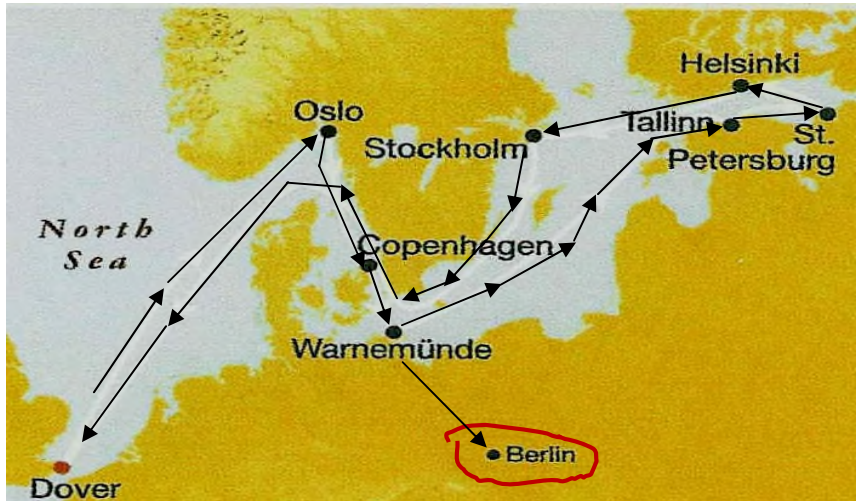
**The Baltic Sea Tour:
Berlin, Germany**

The Baltic Sea Tour

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Chapter 4: Berlin, Germany: Then and Now Report One



August 6, 2008

We continued our Baltic Sea cruise today, with a port stop in Warnemude (Rostock), Germany, a train trip through northern Germany, and a visit to Berlin.

Holly and I had visited both East and West Berlin before the Wall came down. We were eager to see how much East Berlin had changed. We expected it had undergone a transformation, but we were impressed as to how much the former drab city had been made over into a vibrant culture.

To set the stage for this report, I include an excerpt from a previous report (“President Reagan's Museum, Library, and Grave” (2007).

Berlin: Then

Entering East Germany

During one of my lecture tours in Europe in 1986[, Holly and I took a train from Frankfurt to visit friends who were stationed in West Berlin. As you may recall, during the Cold War, Berlin was surrounded by East Germany, a satellite of the USSR. The United States, Britain, and French occupied parts of West Germany, as well as sections of West Berlin. The Soviets occupied the remaining part of Berlin, called East Berlin.

As our train entered East Germany, it made a stop at the border. Just before the stop, an announcement informed us we might be searched by East German security personnel. We were advised not to take pictures. We were also advised to keep our cameras out of sight and to remain in our seats. We were cautioned not to talk to one another during this stop. Nor should we engage in repartee with the East German soldiers.

- I said to Holly, "Should we keep our heads down, eyes to the floor? You know, if you look at them, maybe they'll go crazy and attack."

- "Don't joke. It's not funny."
- "I've read about the East German border guards. I'm only half-joking."

The train was stopped for a few moments. During this time, the doors opened and East German soldiers came in. They were armed, silent, and frowned a lot.

We showed our passports to the guards. They looked them over and handed them back---without speaking a word. No hello. No thank you. No, "Welcome to our Cozy Communist Borough, a land of milk and honey. OK, not much milk, and almost no honey. And stop smiling."

Nothing. It was almost as if we did not exist, but yet we somewhat did exist. Very strange, and later in this report, I'll explain why we got the silent treatment.

Unlike scenes from the movies, no one left the train. Of course not. We passengers were traveling through a Communist country. No one in their right mind would try to smuggle themselves *into* East Germany, Russia, or any place under Soviet rule. But our return train trip *out* of East Germany was a different matter, and the train was stopped for longer times. Most likely, the guards were looking for concealed émigrés.

The ride through the East Berlin corridor was as depressing a train ride as any I've taken. The railroad line was surrounded on both sides by high fences. Every few thousand feet, guard towers had been erected, just to make sure no one jumped off the train and attempted to flee into captivity along the Communist borders.

Or perhaps some brave soul might try to jump *onto* the train, cruising along at 50 MPH, in order to make it into that fine place where we were headed: West Berlin.

During our visit to West Berlin, we also spent an evening in the East Berlin sector. The two cities, separated only by the Iron Curtain Wall, seemed as if they were on different planets. Similar to the two sides of the wall itself.

Going through Checkpoint Charlie, one of several entrance/exit points between the two sectors, was a surreal experience. Figure 1 shows the American side of the place, and reflects its structure when we passed through it.



Figure 1. Checkpoint Charlie (The hut behind the two soldiers delineates the border between East and West Berlin).

Our friend and tour guide (Ron) was an Army Colonel. As he drove us toward Checkpoint Charlie, he gave us this advice (I paraphrase the conversations and actions):

- Reporter, *Ron, why are you wearing your uniform?*
- Ron, *Part of the protocol. And here's how we must behave going through Checkpoint Charlie. Look straight ahead. Don't say anything. Don't get out of the car. Don't roll your window down. Don't do anything!*
- Ron pulled up to the security gate, where East German guards stood. I expected Ron to roll down his window and utter a protocol-like greeting. Nope. He kept his window up. He placed a piece of paper (a one-time pass) against the window. A guard examined the paper through the window. He made some notes on a clipboard. He said not a word, nor did he look at Ron. And Ron stared straight ahead.
- I cheated. I moved my head ever so slightly so I could watch the paper-against-the-window protocol execution. The gate was opened, and Ron drove us through a depressing city of drab, gray buildings.
- Reporter, *What was that all about?!*
- Ron, *The two sides don't acknowledge the existence of each other. It's complicated. Cold War politics.*
- *But they had to acknowledge you. They looked at your pass.*
- *But they didn't look at me, and I didn't look at them. And we didn't talk to each other.*
- *Hmm, we had a similar experience on the train at a security checkpoint. Pretty weird. So, the Russians and Americans don't accept each other's presence, but they do somewhat, because both are physically present?*
- *It's complicated, but yes, sort of.*

With that Kafkaesque encounter behind us, we made our way to a four-star restaurant. Yep, even in Communist life, and contrary to their dogma, the upper-echelon Reds feasted on fine red steak and fine red wine.

Driving through the streets of East Berlin would have made Jane Fonda an anti-Communist.¹ The buildings were of Soviet Gray concrete. No signs of commerce. Few signs at all. No neon lights. No gaiety. Hardly any citizens walking about. Few cars. It reminded me of a moon landscape designed by the urban planner Joe Stalin: An oppressive location for a dusk evening in a major city; one devoid of vitality.

The restaurant seemed both out of place and fitting to its locale. Its shabby décor spoke of past elegance, even opulence. We dined for three hours on one of the best tasting and best tended dinners I have ever experienced. I recall the tab was not much more than that of a cafeteria lunch in America.

¹ It is time to cut Ms. Fonda some slack. She has repeatedly expressed regret for her North Vietnamese-sponsored cannon-posing photo and her accompanying remarks. She has explained that she was first, naïve, and second, set-up by evil Red propagandists. I doubt some of it, but it's water under the bridge. Anyway, I've thought that Ms. Fonda---earlier in her career---was not playing with a full deck of cards to begin with. After all, she married Ted Turner. If ever there is a man operating on a half deck, Ted Turner is its prototype. But maybe not. Perhaps Jane Fonda and Ted Turner play life's game with a different deck of cards.

Berlin: Now

Let's return to the present. If you wish a copy of the full report on the Wall and President Reagan's role in helping to dismantle it, send an email to me at Ublack7510@aol.com.

Soon after debarking from the train, we boarded a bus that took us around the city. Other than an iconic piece here-and-there, the wall was gone. I snapped some photos of its remains, as seen in Figure 2. The left photo shows the west side of the wall. As we know, this side was covered with graffiti of such creativity and symbolic implication that even Rudy Gulianni would have left it alone. The middle photo shows the east side of the wall, symbolic of the Soviet and East German regimes' lack of a sense of humor (and color). I've made some annotations on the right figure, described next.

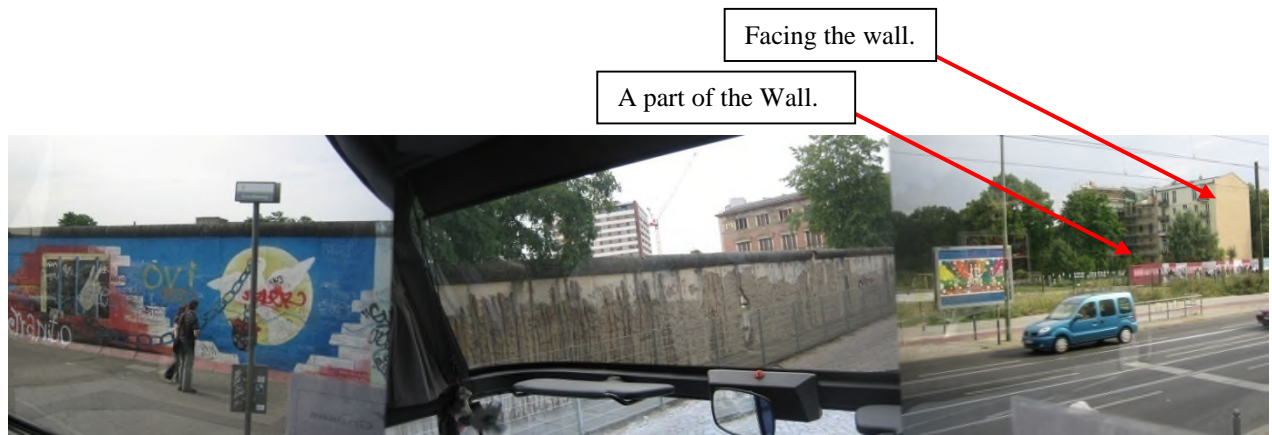


Figure2. Snapshots of the Wall.

As indicated with the lower red arrow, part of the wall can be seen. Sorry it's so small. Photo editing is not one of my talents. The other annotation is why I've included this picture. Notice the side of the building that faces the wall; that faces toward the west, toward freedom. The Communists boarded-up and plastered-over *all* windows and doors of buildings in East Berlin that looked onto West Berlin.

Communism, being what it is, tends to sub-optimize incentives for doing anything well. Stories abound of workers in Russia who subverted the Five Year Plans by, as one example, moving bath tubs from floor-to-floor to satisfy the Red Party inspector's analysis of the progress being made on bath tub installations in a building.

Take a look at Figure 3. The architect fulfilled his orders. He made certain all windows, doors, balconies, and gargoyles looking onto West Berlin were covered. That was his job.

A side glance from the balconies on the side of the building into freedom was not his responsibility. Nothing less, nothing more. Communism in action, or inaction. America defeated the Soviet Union, and for that Promethean feat, we can be proud. Equally telling, the Soviet Union also defeated itself. And if we hold to our values and if we stay the course while recalibrating our international compass, militant Islamic fundamentalism will be defeated.

Make no mistake, the militant Islam credo poses a threat as sick as that of Hitler's madness. But its extreme radicalism, its barbarity toward innocents, will lead to its being alienated from the Muslim mainstream. Yet, there will always be a few dangerous zealots to carry the torch of misguided Islam. We must always stay vigilant against them.

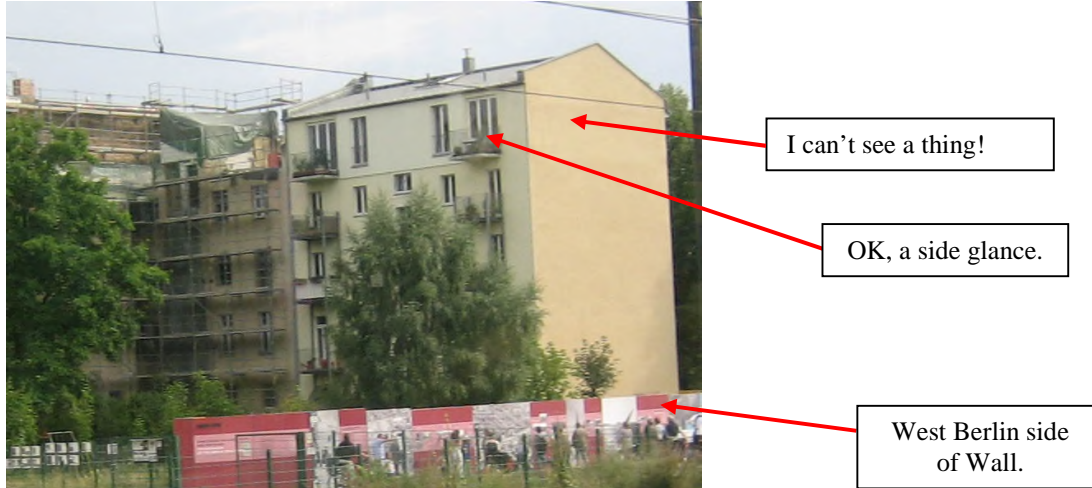


Figure 3. The real façade.

Stay vigilant. Stay armed. Stay engaged. Stay true to values.

We continue our visit to Berlin in the second segment of this report.

Berlin: Then and Now Report Two

August 6, 2008

We continued our visit in Berlin with a walk around the old Checkpoint Charlie and parts of the former Communist East Berlin. As noted in report one, the former drab city had been transformed. It is now an integral part of Western Europe and the European Union (EU).

We spent much of this day touring the area where the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate are located. We were eager to walk over to the other side of the Brandenburg Gate, as our previous (Cold War) visit kept us away from the Communist section in this part of the city. On this occasion, I took the photos in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Both sides of the Brandenburg Gate.

As recorded in an earlier report, President Reagan stood in front of this gate and issued his famous challenge to the Soviets. His position in relation to the gate is shown in Figure 5.² At the risk of repetition, it is too fine a story not to repeat it in this report (See “President Reagan's Museum, Library, and Grave” (2007) on my blog for a more detailed explanation):

Gorbachev and Reagan had argued about the “Wall,” with Gorbachev declaring the United States had its own border problems. Gorbachev cited quotas and security guards at the Mexican border. Ron put this discussion to rest with a short comment, “There's a big difference between wanting in and wanting out.”³

² Louisa Thomas, *Newsweek*, August 4, 2008, 31.

³ *Newsweek*, December 21, 1987, in Richard Reeves, *President Reagan, The Triumph of Imagination*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 435.

In 1987, the President traveled to Berlin to help the city celebrate its 750th anniversary. Ronald Reagan wanted to give a speech that would compare with President Kennedy's 1963 "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech. And he wanted to make a statement about getting rid of the Wall.



Some of his aides, notably his chief of staff Howard Baker, disagreed. They thought it would do no good, and would only exacerbate matters. The speechwriter, Peter Robinson, who had spent a lot of time writing then rewriting the line, has this to say about the conversation between Reagan and his staff:⁴

- "Now, I'm the President, aren't I"
- "Yes, sir!"
- "So I get to decide?"
- "Yes, sir!"
- "Well then, the line stays in."

For the speech, the President stood on a platform near the Wall and the Brandenburg Gate. He went through a rather desultory address, then said,

Figure 5. Reagan lays down the gauntlet.

We hear much from Moscow about a new policy of reform and openness. Are these the beginnings of profound changes in the Soviet Union state? Or, are they token gestures?...There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace. 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!

The speech made page 3 in America's newspapers the next morning. The moment itself passed, but its effect was everlasting. Before long, the sentence caught on. In a few days, it was seen all over the world on television.

Ronald Reagan's challenge remains a part of Cold War lore. Eastern Europe is one of the few parts of the world today in which America has a positive image. The main reason for this support was our anti-Soviet stance during the Cold War. We were patient but vigilant. We waited our enemy out. The enemy eventually self-destructed. So too, will militant, religious terrorism.

Rethinking Most Everything

Starvation

It is often difficult to fathom how Germany transformed itself so soon after World War II. In 1940-41 the average adult intake of calories had been 2,455 a day. By 1943, it fallen to 2,078 per day. By 1945, it was 1,412 per day. But this figure is an average. Just after the war, in the

⁴ Ibid., 400-401.

American zone of occupation (a hard hit area), it stood at 860 calories a day. The Germans joked, “Better enjoy the war---the peace will be terrible.”⁵

Berlin was a ravaged and dangerous place. Looting occurred frequently, if nothing but for a morsel of bread. Franz Kafka said, “Fear for one’s daily bread destroys one’s character.” Anon would put it this way, “Fear for one’s daily bread brings out one’s character.” But then anon is more of an optimist than Kafka. Eric Sevareid put it well, “No man (is) more than about nine meals from crime or suicide.”⁶

In addition to the dangers of starvation, WWII had these additional effects on Europe:

Ethnic Cleansings

Both wittingly and unwittingly, Hitler’s Nazis and Stalin’s Communists performed mass ethnic cleansings. Not just in their murders, but in their forced migrations of hundreds of thousands of people. As a few examples:

- “Well over a million people were deported east from Soviet-occupied Poland and the Western Ukraine and the Baltic lands.”⁷ Who took their place? In many places, Russians moved in. A situation that remains a source of resentment and conflict today. (Amplified in later reports in this series.)
- The Nazis expelled 750,000 Poles from Western Poland. The vacancies were taken over by ethnic Germans.
- Between 1939-1943, Hitler and Stalin uprooted some 30 million people.
- An officer with the British Army observed: *Human flotsam and jetsam*. By that he meant: women who had lost husbands and children; men who had lost their wives; men and women who had lost their homes and children; families who had lost vast farms and estates; distilleries, factories, flour-mills, mansions. There were also little children who were alone, carrying a small bundle, with a pathetic label attached to them. They had somehow become detached from their mothers, or their mothers had died and had been buried by other displaced persons somewhere along the wayside.

What to do with the Jews?

During these tragedies, and as an aftermath of the war, Europeans spoke about the Jewish question, as in “Where do we put all the Jews?” A logical and morally correct answer would have been, “Back where they were in the first place. Notably, their homes and shops that are now occupied by ethnic Germans.”

⁵ Judt Tony, *Post War: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 21.

⁶ Kafka quote, in Gustav Janouch, “Conversations with Kafka,” *Encounter*, August 1971, and Savareid quote in “A New Kind of Leadership,” Washington, DC, April 26, 1974, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 376.

⁷ Judt, *Post War*, 22 – 23, for facts in this section.

But no, the solution was for the Jews to move to the Middle East, where they displaced the resident Arabs. Between 1948-1951, 332,000 European Jews left for Israel and many more followed. But they did not just move. They were granted their own nation, carved out of existing political entities and religious cultures. One wrong was addressed by yet another wrong.

The subject of this section of the report is one that writers approach with caution. Under the best of intentions, writers are often labeled as Jewish bigots or some other negative moniker if any aspersion whatsoever is made about Israel. I make no claim about Jews other than I like and admire their culture and religion. The truth is, if I had not already been immersed in the holy waters of Southern Baptism (with a lock on the Pearly Gates), I would consider following the Jewish faith.

A cogent aspect of the current state of affairs in the Middle East (Israel, Palestine, Gaza) is that many of the Middle East problems owe their origins to the late 1940's U.N. and U.S. decision to create Israel. In no way do I write this part of the report to downplay the Holocaust. I ask you to read on and see if you know some of the facts behind our current problems.

First, the decision to create the state of Israel ignored the demographics of that region: 95 percent Arabs and 5 percent Jews! I ask even the most ardent Zionist to justify the morality of altering a milieu---almost instantaneously---to the detriment of 95 percent of the population.

These sorts of changes in earth's demographic landscape usually take at least decades or even centuries to come about. In so doing, they tend to even-out the mayhem associated with such changes. Not so for this situation. In the context of humans' millennia, it was tragically abrupt.

Nor was it a question of friendly neighbors taking up with each other. Jews and Arabs were not buddies.

Second, on February 12, 1945, the King of Saudi Arabia (Abdul Aziz) boarded the *USS Murphy* to head for a February 14 meeting with President Roosevelt at Great Bitter Lake. Robert Lacy will help us with this story:⁸

President Roosevelt...wanted the Sa'udi King's help with the problem of Palestine. Roosevelt believed the British were mishandling the question, and Jewish lobbies in the USA were elevating the need for a Jewish homeland into a major political issue.

The Jews of central Europe had suffered most terribly at Hitler's hands, the president told Abdul Aziz---eviction, torture, mass murder. Roosevelt felt a personal responsibility to help these poor people now---indeed he had committed himself to finding a solution to their problems. Did the King of Arabia have any suggestions to make?

The King did, "Give them and their descendents," said Adbul Aziz, "the choicest land and homes of the Germans who oppressed them."

⁸ For anyone who wishes to gain insights (pro and con) into the Arabs, their cultures, and religion, you can do no better than to read Robert Lacy, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa'ud* (New York: Avon Books, 1981) 271-275. The material in this section of this essay is sourced from Lacy's classic.

This was not what the president had had in mind. The Jewish survivors of the holocaust, he explained, had an understandable dread for remaining in Germany where they might suffer again, and they also had a “sentimental desire” to settle in Palestine. (Reporter’s note: So did the folks who were already settled there, except they just wanted to remain settled.)

Abdul Aziz ignored the last point, for surely, he said, Britain and America were planning to defeat Nazi power in a total fashion. He could not see what the Jews had to fear if the Allies were fighting a serious war....

(Abdul Aziz) said, “Make the enemy and oppressor pay. That is how we Arabs wage war.”

It was not the Arabs of Palestine who had massacred the Jews. It was the Germans, and as “a simple Bedouin,” the Sa’udi King could not understand why the president seemed so eager to save Germany from the consequences of its crimes.

Roosevelt promised the Sa’udi king that he “would do nothing to assist the Jews against the Arabs and would make no move hostile to the Arab people,” and he encouraged a plan which Ibn Sa’ud had been nursing, to send a mission to the West to explain the Arab viewpoint on Palestine.”

We return to Lacy shortly. One week after this meeting, Roosevelt was dead. President Truman was sworn in, and the accord at Great Bitter Lake was discarded by Truman. In the autumn of 1945, less than six months after the death of FDR, the U.S. Chiefs of Mission in Sa’udi Arabia and other countries concerned about the Palestine problem were summoned to Washington by Truman. The President wanted to hear about the fear and concern in the Arab world regarding his comments on the Zionist movement. After listening to them---and being the consummate politician (I omit the word statesman)---he responded:⁹

“I’m sorry, gentlemen,” said the president, summing up his position with the utmost candor, “but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”

Thus, with the political roll of the dice, the Jews came up with seven. The Palestinians got snake-eyes. At least for the next few decades. In 2009, it is difficult to see how the Jews really won this battle. As matters now stand, Israel has evolved into an apartheid state---giving privileges to people based on religion and penalizing others. (In a touch of irony, it has joined its Arab neighbors in this regard.) It has had to evolve to apartheid to defend itself. But it has defended itself against the consequences of a 1948 act that led to yet more ethnic cleansing (of the Palestinians).

We shall never know what the future of the Holy Land might have been if the Jews had been granted their rightful revenge on the Germans; if they had been given back their homes and possessions; if they had been amply compensated for Hitler’s crimes; if they had remained in Europe and became part of the EU community. We shall never know if the Holy Land would

⁹ Lacy, 275.

have remained relatively peaceful. We shall never know if the world would be a less dangerous place if Israel had not been created in the way it was.

But this we do know. Presently, the state of Israel is in a state of siege. We know it has ossified into apartheid, merely to survive. We know the Israelis are in a deep state of denial. If they continue their present policy, they will ossify into an even more apartheid nation. If they allow the "Palestinians" to be part of their nation, they will become a minority. Yet, politics is one topic of conversation forbidden among the landed gentry at Tel Aviv parties.¹⁰

In the past, I was emotionally in Israel's corner. The Holocaust was such a monumental tragedy that any caring human had to have sympathy and empathy for the Jews. I disagreed with Truman's decision; with the UN act; with Balfour's resolutions leading to Israel. But I did not question the sincerity and passion of the Zionists. I disagreed with their philosophy, but I respected their beliefs.

Today? I believe Israel lost its moral and political compass with its refusal to adhere to the U.N. resolutions about its borders and the settlements.

Now that I have likely alienated many of my Jewish friends and former business partners, permit this one last thought on the subject: "Since the fourth century after Christ, there have been three anti-Jewish policies: conversion, expulsion, and annihilation. The second appeared as an alternative to the first, and the third emerged as an alternative to the second"¹¹

Israel cannot survive under the present conditions. It will either be destroyed by weapons of mass destruction or its growing Arabic population will disenfranchise the Jews through assimilation. The only hope is a two-state solution.

Why Stay Here?¹²

To close out this part of the report, between the years of 1945-49, a consistent majority of Germans said Nazism was a good idea. They just thought it was badly applied. "In November 1946, 37 percent of Germans questioned in a survey in the American zone believed, 'the extermination of the Jews and the Poles and other non-Aryans was necessary for the security of the Germans.' "

In 1952, 37 percent (the Germans are noted for their consistency) said it was better not to have Jews on its territory. Of course not. Keeping all those Jews in Germany meant the ethnic Germans would have to move out of a lot of houses. That same year, 25 percent of West Germans said they had a good opinion of Hitler.

The old saying, "Where one stands depends on where one sits," is appropriate to the German/Israel/Palestinian issue. If I were a German sitting in Jew's home, I would want the Jews in Israel. If I were a Jew sitting in an internment camp, I would want the Jews in Israel. If I were a

¹⁰ Comments made by Bob Simon of CBS to Charlie Rose of PBS during a PBS program aired in January, 2009.

¹¹ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the Jews*, 1, 1961, in Leonard Roy Frank, *Quotationary* (New York: Random House, 2001), 366.

¹² Judt, 58.

Palestinian sitting in a Palestinian home, I would want the Jews anywhere but Israel. Such is human nature. Such are the roots of conflicts.

A Social Revolution

Since recorded time, the Europeans have been at each other's throats. Between 1814 and 1940, France was invaded and occupied by Germany five times. Even passive Sweden, when it had sufficient tools in its aggression toolbox, invaded parts of Eastern Europe. King Gustav (more later when we visit Stockholm) fought with Poland, the Hapsburgs, the Catholic League, Bavaria, even Peter the Great of Russia.

At the risk of oversimplification, I think WWII changed all that. Just after the war, several brutal internecine wars took place between ethnic groups in Europe. Coupled with the Nazi and Communists surreal actions, Europe's fabric was destroyed. It would never be the same. The Europeans did not start from scratch, but they went through a serious period of self-evaluation and self-criticism. People began to understand that it was out of the question to return to the ways of pre-1939.

On these happy notes, we conclude this segment. In our next report on Berlin, we take a boat tour and chat again with our knowledgeable tour guide.

Berlin: Then and Now Report Three

August 6, 2008

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. We continue our tour of Berlin, interspersed with observations about Europe and America.

We took a short tour around the area of Brandenburg Gate. The gate itself is described in Report Two. During this time and our walk back to the bus, I mentioned to our tour guide that I had been in this area before the Wall came down and that I had walked around the area where Barak Obama had given his speech the week before (The Victory Column, about a mile from the Brandenburg Gate). I mentioned I was writing reports and would like to ask her some questions. The dialogue below represents our conversation:

- The guide was named Majida. She responded, “He’s popular here, but I doubt you will elect him. He’s black and has a Muslim name.”
- “He’s an outside bet for sure. Say, where are you from? Excuse the profiling, but you don’t look Germanic.”
- “Ha. I was born in West Berlin. After the war, my parents came to West Germany from Iran. Little did we know what would happen to our country.” She said her father was a business man and foresaw opportunities in post-war West Germany. She said they were lucky as her relatives, who remained in Iran in the late 1970s, lost most everything. (Such is the fate of the privileged class after a revolution.)
- “So, other than your take on America as being bigoted, any other views?”
- “It’s not just America. Even here, or any other part of Europe, you will not live to see a black person come to power. But certainly not in America.”
- “That’s an interesting view. OK, what do Germans think of Americans?”
- “An easy question to answer. Your country kept my country free from Stalin. My parents saw President Kennedy speak. I watched President Reagan’s speech at the Brandenburg Gate.”
- “Really?!”
- Yes. Besides, we knew what was going on in East Berlin. Anyway to your question, I think Germans like Americans very much.”

I continue to be amazed at the historical insight of tour guides. But why should I be? They make their living knowing about the past. On a tour of the Mediterranean a couple years ago, I could have mistaken our tour guide for a Rhodes Scholar of ancient Mediterranean history.

After leaving the area around Brandenburg Gate, we stopped at several monuments and castles---required appointments for a tour in Europe. Holly wanted to visit the Old Tower of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. During this time, I walked around the area and came across a curio shop.

T-shirts Anonymous (TA)

Uh oh. Since my reporting to you about my addiction to T-shirts and my having completed the Ten-Step Process to free myself from this sickness, I have yet to purchase a T-shirt. The program

was successful because I discovered T-shirts Anonymous (TA). Hallelujah! In case you want help, here is some background information on TA (plagiarized from my report “T-Shirts Anonymous (TA)” (2006):¹³

T.A.’s roots date to a 1935 meeting in Akron, Ohio, of two men who had serious T-shirt wearing and purchasing problems. Both men had been members of a fellowship group that emphasized spiritual values and discouraged not only buying T-shirts, but wearing them as well. Through this group, both men achieved T-shirt sobriety. They learned that excessive purchases of T-shirts was a disease, and with this new perspective, they were able to stop wearing T-shirts. The two men began working with other T-shirt sickees at Akron’s City Hospital, referring to themselves as T-shirt Alpha and T-shirt Bravo, thus establishing the T.A. tradition of anonymity. Their approach—that T-shirt addicts must recognize their plight as a sickness—helped dozens of Akron T-shirt addicts to stop wearing T-shirts.

The shop had hundreds of T-Shirts! The Wall. Palaces. Castles. Monuments. Beer steins. Skin heads. All for a few dollars. But no, TA was working. Granted, I broke into a sweat as I made my way through the aisles. I knew very well the adage, “Once a T-shirt addict, always a T-shirt addict. “ We recovering T-shirt addicts recite this mantra frequently, as 99.99 percent of America’s stores tempt us with T-shirts.

I cannot credit just my resolve. This curio shop had a display that advertised, “Own a piece of The Wall!” Not just a wall, or the wall, but The Wall. My attention was diverted from a T-shirt of The Wall to a piece of The Wall itself.

Majida had warned us about Wall rip-off artists, “If you want to buy a piece of the Wall, go ahead, but it might not be genuine.” She also cautioned against pick-pockets. Doing a bit of profiling herself, she offered, “Watch for pick-pockets...especially gypsy-like people.” I saw no gypsy-like people while in Berlin, but then, I’m not sure if I’ve ever seen a gypsy.

Anyway, I can understand the situation. For example, I would be reluctant to buy a piece of The Wall from a street vendor. It’s the same situation as a street vendor selling a supposedly genuine Gucci bag. One can’t be too careful. But an established curio shop? The specimen had to be authentic. Curio shops are noted for the authenticity of their curios. Else, why call them curios in the first place?

See my problem? I wanted to believe I could possess a piece of The Wall. I wanted to believe the small nugget in my hand (see Figure 6) was the real thing. I was in the same boat as those pathetic, naïve souls in the Bernard Madoff’s come-ons: If it looks too good to be true, then it is most likely not true.”

But why not? The supposed artifact was very small, not much more than a tiny stone. It was a miniscule part of the whole. True, but consider that little remains of the Wall. A small piece here, a small piece there. Before long, it’s gone, and street vendors and curio shops will be doing what they do best: Selling replicas of the real thing.

¹³ “Alcoholics Anonymous,” *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*...with very heavy alterations.

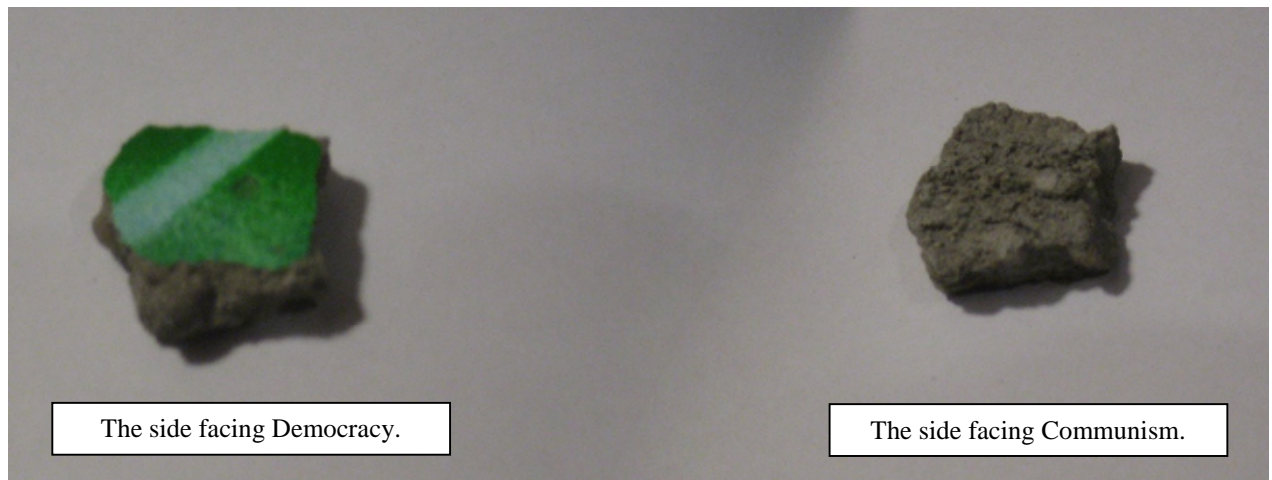


Figure 6. A piece of the Wall. Ahem. My piece of the Wall.

No matter, as anon says, “Reality is in the eyes of the sucker.” So I bought a piece of the rock, eh the Wall. It is sitting (as far as rocks are known to sit) on my desk as I write this report.

Notice the gay and colorful personality of the Good Guy Side of The Wall. Notice the drab and unimaginative countenance of the Bad Guy Side. I make light, but the contrast is a telling symbol of the failures of Communism. What is that symbol? Look at the picture again. Try to visualize the two images as metaphors of a society; as icons of a culture; as emblems of a way of life. Which would you choose? We’ll examine Communism more when we reach Russia (in a couple days).

The New Checkpoint Charlie

Majida took us to the place where Holly and I entered East Berlin years ago: Checkpoint Charlie. Ah, the beauties of curiosity and capitalism! Checkpoint Charlie was now the most popular tourist attraction in Berlin. Figure 7 shows some scenes around this historic site.

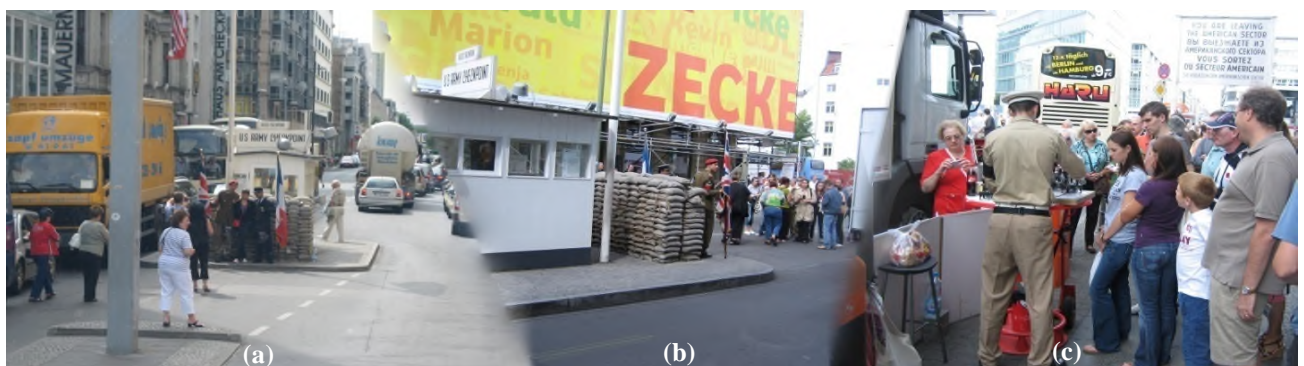


Figure 7. The present Checkpoint Charlie.

Figure 7 (a) shows the front of the Checkpoint Charlie security shack. The people in front of the hut are uniformed actors pretending to be authentic allied soldiers.

Figure 7 (b) shows a side/back view of the hut. The sandbags are burlap bags pretending to be authentic sandbags. No such sandbags were placed in front of the hut (based on your Reporter reviewing scores of photos). I made a joke to Majida about my observation. She laughed and

responded the sandbags were placed there to protect the building from crazy Berlin drivers. Figure 7 (c) shows a man issuing passports.

Fat chance of Berlin cars doing much damage. The building would be impervious to Berliners' vehicles. I snapped some pictures of typical modes of transportation around Checkpoint Charlie, shown in Figure 8.



**Figure 8. Where's the Volkswagon?
Where's the SUV?**

That's it for now. Our last report on Berlin will cover the canals of Berlin, the recollections of Maijida's parents about the Berlin airlift, and the practice in Germany (as well as most of Western Europe) for a planned, yet capitalistic economy.

Berlin: Then and Now Report Four

August 6, 2008

Continuing our visit of Berlin, our tour guide escorted us to more palaces and old estates, some shown in Figure 9. As we were walking around these places, I made it a point to talk with Majida again. (As before, the conversations are taken from my notes.)



Figure 9. More Berlin sights.

The Berlin Airlift

- “Majida, what do you remember about the airlift?”
- “Nothing. I wasn’t born yet. But I’ve read-up on the subject because of my job, and my parents told me about it.”
- “What did they think?”
- “They were afraid the allies would grow tired and give up....Turn us over to the Russians.”
- “Yeah, that’s what Stalin thought. What do you think?”
- “I think the Berlin Airlift is another reason why Germans like Americans.”

For the couch potatoes and MTV fans reading this report who think the Berlin Airlift is a spinoff from the Jefferson Airplane, permit a brief diversion.

After WWII, Germany was not going the way Stalin had wanted. He wished for a united, but neutral and weak Germany with the notion that the Soviet Union would eventually take over “stewardship” of the country. The Communist’s piece of Germany was not neutral, although it was weak. Meanwhile, the allies decided they would pursue a strategy of establishing a separate, non-neutral West German state, but a state organized in such a way that it would no longer be a threat to Europe. On June 1, 1948, the West announced the plans, along with a new currency, the Deutsche Mark.

The Soviets were not happy. On June 23, they begin actions to blockade Berlin. They closed rail lines, and three weeks later, the water canals. They also restricted road connections into the city.

West Berlin was under siege for eleven months. I was too young to appreciate the magnitude and danger of the situation and did not comprehend the magnificence of the airlift until many years later. For a while, I wondered why the Communists were so prissy about keeping people inside East Germany. Later, I learned the exodus from East Germany was of such magnitude that the Communist authorities were afraid of losing their work force.

As Ronald Reagan said, America had to build walls to keep workers out. The Communists built walls to keep workers in. Sweet irony.

During the airlift, the allies shipped some 2.3 million tons of food on 277,500 air flights into West Berlin. Stalin had hoped his blockade would lead the allies to abandon the city or abandon plans for a separate state. In both assumptions he was wrong. As it turns out, Stalin was wrong on almost all of his major strategic initiatives.

In facing sociopaths, compromise is rarely an option. The Berlin Airlift is a keen example of America's resolve and our country's refusal to compromise with a sick and dangerous man.

The Waterways of Berlin

During our first visit to Berlin, we did not have the opportunity to explore Berlin's water canals. If you're in the area, don't pass up a boat ride on the Spree and joining canals. Your best bet is to tour the Brandenburg Gate area, perhaps walk to the Victory Column, and then take a taxi to a nearby boat stop. Figure 10 shows some views we enjoyed while watering and watering-down on the Berlin canals.



Figure 10. Berlin by boat.

Post War Europe and Post Meltdown America

I mentioned in an earlier report in this series that WWII changed the physical, national, and demographic landscapes of Europe. It also altered the mental landscapes of most Europeans. As I write this report in January of 2009, I am struck by some of the similarities of views that were prevalent in Europe in 1945 and the views of many critics (Red and Blue) who are writing about 2009 America. Again, in no way do I equate the magnitude of WWII with America's current problems. But I close out this report on Berlin with a quick look at these thoughts.

In post WWII Europe, the foundations of the modern welfare state were being laid. Again, Tony Judt puts it well.¹⁴

¹⁴ Judt, 361.

The state it was widely believed would always do a better job than the unrestricted market; not just in dispensing justice and securing the realm, or distributing goods and services, but in designing and applying strategies for social cohesion, moral sustenance, and cultural vitality. The notion that such matters might better be left to enlightened self-interest and the workings of the free market in commodities and ideas was regarded in mainstream European political and academic circles as a quaint relic of pre-Keynesian times; at best a failure to learn the lessons of the Depression, at worst an invitation to conflict and a veiled appeal to the basest human instincts.

Take a look at Judt's first sentence. He uses the word "always." Neither the state nor the market "always" does a better job. Each is equally subject to sloth and malfeasance. *The difference lies in the market's correct posture of making money, and the state's correct posture in making sure the market makes its money within ethical and moral boundaries.*

In this regard, the magnitude of the current financial meltdown demonstrates that America's economic machinery has failed. But the failure is not the fault of the philosophy just cited. The failure is in the capitalists who undertook unethical or illegal transactions, and the regulators who did not perform their duties of oversight and supervision.

To recover from these fantastic actions of incompetence and misconduct, America has moved toward the European model of welfare capitalism. Will the pendulum swing back? I am not in the crystal ball business, but most things in life swing from one extreme to another and eventually settle somewhere in the middle.

Another Wrap

It was time to move on to the next stop on our Baltic cruise, and for this writer to stop writing about Germany and Berlin. Stay with me. I am almost done.

During my sending these reports on Berlin to readers, I have received a number of emails that have taken me to task for (a) my bias against the founding of Israel, and (b) my one-dimensional presentation (Truman's decision) of how and why Israel came about. They are fair criticisms. Granting their due, I chose to present the subject in the manner I did because I do not believe the American public gets a balanced view of the subject. My write up was purposely unbalanced to help tilt an unbalanced see-saw.

As I was preparing to write this final segment on Berlin, I watched the movie, *The Diary of Anne Frank*. The film brought back memories of the book and of several visits I made to Anne's refuge in Amsterdam (now a museum) when I was lecturing in Europe.

As I watched the film again, I reconsidered what I had said about Israel in this report. In spite of my beliefs about the way Israel was created, my sympathies and empathies for the Jewish people remain steadfast. The movie affected my mood. It gave me pause. Before writing these last segments, I reread the first segments of my essay. I wanted to be sure: Did I present these controversial views in a manner consistent with my beliefs? The rereading did not change my stance.

But for others, who do not view the German/Israel/Palestine situation as I do, I am likely seen as misguided. This situation exemplifies a common human condition: An argument about what is right or wrong never occurs...until a second person enters into the discussion.

We close this curtain on Germany with these final thoughts:

Anon tells us:

To deny one's past,
is to deny one's future.

The Jews tell us:

To forget one's past,
is to endanger one's future.

The Germans tell us:

To dwell on one's past,
is to forsake one's future.

Such is the nature of humans and why problems never go away.