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Religious Implications of the Berlin Wall

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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in Religion, Sociology, and Policy Studies with Honors

April 2009

Honors Capstone Project in Religion

APPROVED

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Abstract

In this paper, I take a close look at the present condition of the Jewish Community in Berlin. Being a community that, within the last century, has faced the devastation of the Holocaust and the subjugation of the Berlin Wall and accompanying Soviet regime, the Jewish community in Berlin represented, to me, one with an amazing challenge and opportunity to rebuild itself. The aim of this paper was to separate the Jewish community from other communities in Berlin, separate the presence of the Berlin Wall from other historical events, and then consider the possibility that the Wall itself has an inherent religious meaning and that the Jewish community was effected independently and uniquely by that meaning.

In order to fully grasp the condition of the Jewish community in Berlin today, as well as to understand the Wall's role in Berlin society, traveling to the city of Berlin was a necessary component of this study. The observations, insights and information that trip allowed fuel the theories and the arguments made throughout this paper. Ultimately it has become clear that, while the Wall may not itself be inherently religious, it did in fact have implications for Berlin citizens that affected their religious experience. Furthermore, while the Wall's effects may not have been exclusively to Jewish Berliners, being a Jew in Berlin at the time of the Wall's presence and fall did in fact lead to isolation from the rest of Berlin society. Additionally, and most noteworthy, is the shared work that both Jewish and non-Jewish Berliners have done since the Wall's fall to commemorate their history and acknowledge all that Berliners, as a shared community, have overcome.

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Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the help and generosity of several groups and individuals, and to them I am incredibly grateful. First and foremost, my project advisor, Professor Philip Arnold, has been a phenomenal resource and real ally in the process of completing this project. Without Professor Arnold's guidance, this project would not tell the story that it does, and I, as the author, might still be struggling to see the bigger implications today. My Honors Reader, Professor Zachary Braiterman, also played a key role in this process. As a scholar who has completed significant work within the broad category of Judaism, his perspective on this research his perspective, guidance and support were all helpful.

The Renee Crown Honors Program as a whole has been continually helpful and supportive of this project. Deputy Director Eric Holzwarth has been an incredible source of information and guidance since our first Capstone meeting over a year ago, at which time he helped me, and has continued to help me, narrow the focus of my project into a topic that interests me, challenges me, but remains feasible. Eric also helped me through the process of applying for a Crown Award, and Steve Wright and Marilyn Bergett were very helpful in providing the resources I needed for my trip to Berlin. The generosity of the Honors Program took this project from an idea to a reality. After having the chance to meet and thank Renee Crown in person, I am still astounded by her generosity and her interest in a project I thought might only interest me.

I would also like to thank the staff of the several museums and community centers in Berlin, Germany, who opened their doors to me and gave me the tools needed to complete this project: The Allied Museum, Jewish Community Center in Berlin, Story of Berlin Museum, the Neue Synagogue, and Jewish Memorial. Additional assistance and insight was also provided from Beth Hatefutsoth - the Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv, as well as several Syracuse Univeristy Professors including Karina Von Tippelskirch, Gerd K. Schneider, Frederick Daniel Marquardt, and Gerlinde Ulm Sanford.

Advice to Future Honors Students

First and foremost, there will be many distractions. You will become tired. You will, at least once, wish you never started this project. I tell you this because I believe that knowing that going into this helped me stick with the project. Everybody has those days, those weeks, for me even those months where we pretend these projects will finish themselves. For that reason, do not be afraid to take time off from the project. Give yourself and your interest in the topic time to regenerate. There is nothing wrong with taking time off, so long as you can eventually get back to the computer and finish the project you began. By the end, you will not only be proud of the work you are contributing to your field of study, you will be proud of yourself for seeing the project through.

Beyond that, never be afraid to seek out a resource that you think may make your project better. The generosity and the support of the Honors Faculty is astounding, and somehow they seem to develop as much of an interest in and passion for your project as you have developed yourself. The same goes for most of the faculty here at Syracuse University. The network of connections that your professors can offer is seemingly endless, and I have never encountered a potential source of information that did not seem eager to help point me in the right direction.

Also, start your project early. Spring semester of senior year is a very exciting time, and when the warm weather and sunshine hit, the last place you will want to be is in the library reading or in your room writing. Follow the Honors deadlines, or create your own, but try and stick to whatever plan you create. Don't be afraid

to ask for extensions, but it really is in your best interest to be completing the finishing touches before the final weeks of the semester, and of your college career.

Lastly, and most importantly, good luck. The project is a big undertaking, but I mean it when I say, if I can finish, you can finish.

<u>Introduction</u>

This paper focuses on the development of religious life in Berlin, Germany over the past century. Of particular interest are the changes to and growth of the Jewish community after the Holocaust, during the twenty-eight years that the Berlin Wall ran through the city, and in the twenty years following the fall of the Wall. The reason this community is being studied in the geographical vacuum that is exclusively the city of Berlin is because Berliners, as a community, have experienced as recently as two decades ago a revolution of sorts with the fall of the Wall, and as recently as sixty-five years ago the devastation of the second World War.

I began this project with the assumption that, because of how revolutionary the Berlin Wall was, and because it followed the Holocaust which was inherently related to religious life in Berlin, the Wall itself must carry significant religious meaning. According to its Latin roots (re ligare), religion holds a sort of rebinding or connecting purpose within communities. For this reason, it was expected that the Wall would serve as both a physical and a spiritual obstacle to that purpose. This paper explores the validity of that assumption, as well as what the Wall meant, whether inherently religious or not, for the Jewish Berliners at the time the Wall stood and since the Wall's fall.

One of the fundamental questions driving both my research and this paper is what the Wall means for the Jewish community in Berlin. To answer this question, it became clear that as neither a German nor a Jew, I needed to broaden my perspective of and insight into the community I hoped to study. Recognizing

the limitations of my perspective, and being a student of what sociologists call standpoint theory, I looked for a way to take a closer look at what Berlin's Jewish community was like. Standpoint theory, first developed by feminist theorists and then applied widely throughout social research, acknowledges that the groups with which an individual associates shapes their views and as such encourages researchers to reach beyond their personal standpoint to get a broader picture of the subject of their research. For that reason, visiting Berlin and several of the cornerstones of its current Jewish community was a necessity. Furthermore, the trip changed my perspective and likewise my standpoint to allow for a more developed understanding of Berlin's Jewish community. My personal reactions to and perceptions of the Jewish community as it exists today are the basis for many of the trends and theories discussed throughout this paper.

Also invaluable to this study was the input provided by German citizens, particularly those working at historical and cultural museums in the city. Because of the recency of the Wall's impact, as well as the devastation of the Holocaust, a significant amount of material, primary sources, and artifacts have been preserved in museums throughout the city, and attending and viewing the content in these museums also developed this study significantly. The concept of intersectionality guided this paper and helped me not to forget that the community which I studied was never simply a Jewish community, but rather had many facets to its identify. Just as every individual has many roles and identities that increase his or her complexity, so do communities. For this study, it was the combination of being

both German and Jewish that made this community particularly unique and complex in its character and action over the last century.

Lastly, what can be considered a "religious implication" as is referenced in the title of this paper? For the purposes of this paper, the notion of what is "religious" and what is "religion" will be defined socially. That is, a religion suggests, regardless of denomination, a combined set of ideals, faith, and practices. A religious community is a group of people sharing a set of ideals, faith and practices; i.e. a religion. A religious implication is any noticeable, perceived or anticipated effect that the Wall has or will have on a particular community, in this case, the Jewish community in Berlin.

To understand what the Jewish Community was during the time the Wall stood, and what it is today, I argue we must also understand what it was in the preceding years. As a student of sociology, I could arguably avoid setting a contextual setting in which to consider the following research based on the principles and methods of sociologist Michel Foucault. Foucault, among many others, asserts that to truly gain valuable insight into any social phenomenon, in this case religious life in Berlin since the late 1980s, one must disassociate that phenomenon from surrounding events and conditions and consider it unto itself.[1] Along these lines, and as Foucault would advocate, I must abandon my assumptions that World War II and the Holocaust effected religious life in Berlin even years after they had ended. However, it is the firm belief of this researcher, as will be argued throughout this paper, that it was precisely the political, social,

[1] (Foucault, 1970)

and religious climate in and around Berlin preceding the fall of the Wall that determined the city's Jewish culture and religion at present. As such, let us begin by briefly considering the events and factors contributing to the erection and the destruction of the Berlin Wall. For those intimately familiar with World War II history and the years that followed, advanced apologies for the history lesson.

Chapter One: Historical Context

Of most relevance to this project is the impact WWII had on Jewish citizens and communities living in Berlin at the time of the war. Certainly the implications of the War were felt in communities across the globe, but for the purpose of this paper, we will consider how the War effected the two intersecting identities discussed above: German citizenship and Jewish culture and religion. By understanding the repercussions of the War on these two subgroups, we can better understand how the Berlin Jewish community, specifically, was shaped and changed by the War. To summarize the effects and tragedies of the Holocaust would do little justice to the tremendous amount of pain it caused, and yet, it is a summary that will follow.

Following the Nazi takeover in Germany, Jews were among several races and groups of people persecuted by Hitler and his followers. Throughout the duration of the war six million Jews lost their lives at the hands of the Nazis. Most offensive and disgusting was the brutal and tortuous methods used to attempt to rob these individuals of their families, their businesses, their health, their dignity and ultimately their lives. Hallmarks of the Jewish community were lost or destroyed. On November 9, 1938, nine of Berlin's twelve synagogues were set on fire.[2] Just three days later, Jews were forbidden to visit social spaces like theaters, swimming baths, and entertainment facilities, among other locations. By mid-September of 1941, Jews were required to wear the Star of David visibly on their clothing.

[2] Allied Museum, Berlin

The cumulative effect of this large-scale, calculated and staged destruction of the Jewish population was not only to drastically reduce the raw number of Jews living in Germany, and specifically in Berlin, by the end of the war; additionally, this devastating, degrading, and offensive attack also brought a loss of Jewish identity, spirit, and community across the nation as well as much of Europe. Despite resolution of the war conflict itself, nothing could be done to restore the Jewish population to its pre-Holocaust numbers and character.

Following the culmination of WWII, the Potsdam Agreement determined that Germany would be settled into four parcels to be divided amongst the Allied Powers. The northwestern sector fell under control of the former Soviet Union, the southwestern sector went to the United States, the northeast to Britain and the southeast to France. Berlin, as the capital city, was also divvied up amongst the Allied Powers despite falling with the Soviet's northwestern block. These divisions not only split apart communities, they were known for even separating family members from each other. One of the cumulative effects of this division was to qualify what it meant to be German at the time. While it was the original aim amongst the Allied Powers to govern Germany cohesively, the Cold War increased tensions between the Soviet Union and the remaining powers, ultimately leading to the Soviets dividing from the Allied Powers and creating the German Democratic Republic (GDR) within its northwestern block. In response, the remaining allied powers joined together to create the Federal Republic of Germany that encompassed the remaining three blocks. To state it mildly, the geographical divisions as well as the divisive politics sent the message: Not all

regions of Germany, or all Germans for that matter, were created equally. As the capitalist, democratic West Germany thrived, struggling individuals living in the authoritarian, economically controlled East Germany wanted to move to the West.

This wave of migration was widespread amongst large groups of German citizens, German Jews in particular. Like other Germans, German Jews did not want to live under Soviet control. Additionally, and largely unique to the Jews, was the desire to leave Germany, and with it the bloody memory of the Holocaust, altogether. As a result, Jewish communities that did exist in Germany at the time were seen only as "temporary communities". Among those migrating included a number of Jews from Eastern Europe. Most of them only passed through Germany and continued out of the country. However, in the midst of all this migration, some Jews from Eastern Europe stopped in Germany. Those immigrants, together with surviving Jews who had lived in Germany prior to Nazi period, started to hold religious services, and constructed social, cultural and educational institutions. [3]

As mentioned above, Berlin was unique to other cities throughout Germany in that, despite falling exclusively in one Allied Zone (for Berlin it was the Soviet Union's Zone), it was split into four sectors, making it like a smaller version of the entire country in that it was occupied by four different nations and divided into two governments. What, then, was to become of Berlin, which found itself surrounded by the Soviet's GDR while also encompassing individual territories governed by America, France and Britain? Berlin, in a way,

[3] (Jewish Community, 2002)

experienced the same migration that all of Germany did, just on a smaller scale. Those living in East Berlin began traveling to the west to escape Soviet control. However, shortly after the war ended, the Soviets began tightening border control, making passage from East to West Berlin increasingly difficult. Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin stopped all traffic to and from Berlin starting June 24, 1948.[4] Ultimately, the border security culminated with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, becoming what GDR armed forces General Karl-Heinz Hoffmann called the "best border security system in the world."[5] The Wall persisted for nearly forty years, baring witness to thousands of escapes and, tragically, hundreds of deaths following unsuccessful escape attempts. Throughout the decades the Wall endured, West Berlin thrived economically and culturally. For the East, the story was much different, and much darker.

By the mid to late 1980s, protests against the Wall and its effects reached a height that can only be described by acknowledging that they ultimately culminated in the destruction of the wall and the allowance of free movement between East and West Berlin. For now, let us consider two particular events that take us within days of the Wall's fall.

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[4] Allied Museum, Berlin
[5] Checkpoint Charlie Museum, Berlin

November 4th Demonstration: Alexanderplatz

The New Forum, an alliance of those opposed to the conditions in East Berlin and the GDR, was the group that developed the idea to hold a massive demonstration and protest in the heart of the city of Berlin.[6] The demonstration took place on November 4, 1989, and was an officially registered public assembly event. Possibly the most surprising fact about this demonstration was that, despite the oppression and government restriction, the demonstration occurred in the Soviet-governed Eastern sector of Berlin. Because the organizers made their plans in accordance with GDR constitutional requirements, and notified the authorities prior to the event, there was minimal protest or backlash on behalf of authorities at the demonstration.[7] For East Berliners, this protest was a rare and relatively unheard of opportunity to voice their dissatisfaction with the current political and social climate in the city. Beyond that, the existence of a public demonstration in any situation develops and strengthens the sense of community that fellow protestors share.

Not only did the demonstration indicate a growing sense of community amongst those living in East Berlin, the sense of a unified front and strong community expanded beyond the barriers of the Wall and even beyond national borders. Footage of the protest was broadcasted on television, even in the conservative Eastern Block which was itself the target of the protest. The result of the protest, and likely the fact that it was featured on television, was that multiple other protests in other cities spurred up within the same day. With

[6] (Smolowe, J., Jackson, J., and Kenn Olson-Bonn. 1989)
[7] (Demonstration and Rally)

between half a million to one million people gathering in Alexanderplatz, the scale of the demonstration was certainly impressive. In the photograph below, one can see just how concentrated and enormous the gathering was.

Figure 1

For all German citizens, but particularly for those living in Berlin, the Wall's power to divide the community, in spirit and ultimately in location, was fading by the end of 1989. While citizens of Germany were reforming and strengthening their community and identity, the question remains: how was the Wall as a community disturbance affecting the Jewish community in Berlin, if at all?

A common trend connecting the November 4, 1989 demonstration in Alexanderplatz with other protests throughout Berlin and Germany against the GDR is the involvement of the Protestant Church. Many of the speakers at the November 4th demonstration were associated with the Protestant Church, and a significant number of the organizers who comprised The New Forum were local

leaders in the Church. As explained in more detail below, it was in churches that citizens first felt safe and comfortable enough to protest. The Church's role as facilitator in the protests is certainly evidence that religion, namely Protestantism, was a unifier and a means of connecting people. The implication for Jewish Berliners, however, was that they were excluded from other members of the Berlin community because of there religion. Likely uncomfortable with attending church services and gatherings to join with other protestors, Jewish Berliners were left to wait until the church demonstrations moved to the secular zone of city streets and town squares. This delayed integration into community protests indicates that while the Wall may not have been constructed for religious reasons or have a blatant religious character, reactions and responses to the wall varied by and at times were contingent upon religious affiliation.

Monday Demonstrations

Starting in early September of 1989, citizens of East Berlin began gathering in the Nikolai Church in Leipzig in peaceful protest of the Wall and of the Soviet Regime controlling them. The first demonstration and the ones to follow were called "Monday Demonstrations." In the weeks following the first Monday Demonstration on September 4, 1989, the number of people participating grew to the point that they spilled out of the church into the downtown. As citizens in other cities learned of the peaceful protests, the idea caught on and every Monday, in other cities in East Berlin, people filled the streets to continue the protest. "Nikolai Church in Leipzig and the Frauenkirtche in Dresden . . . these churches provided gathering places for the population which felt uncomfortable with the Eastern regime. People did not consider a forceful revolt; they were Protestants and many still stood in the shadow of Luther who abhorred revolution."[8] As the protests were non-violent and in most cases the church was encouraging them, more and more people joined in and the GDR forces sent out to control the crowds did not respond with violence.

The appreciation for and success associated with the Monday Demonstrations is clear in the use of similar protest strategies in the past few years. At the start of the Iraq War several years ago, German citizens again took to the streets calling their peaceful protests "Monday Demonstrations." The ability of these and the previous Monday Demonstrations to win international attention speaks to the persistence of the citizens and the ability for a sense of

[8] (Schneider, G. Personal Communication, February 28, 2008)

community to persist despite division through government enforcement and physical barriers. However, it is clear that the sense of community that did exist in Berlin started in a non-secular community. It was the Protestant community that brought the protests to the streets, not a Jewish community. With their synagogues burned down, after experiencing the oppression and cruelty that Holocaust brought, the Jewish community in Berlin in the 1980s, if it existed, was not strong enough or motivated enough to take on the large scale protests and demonstrations that led to the Wall's fall. Furthermore, as discussed above, the Jewish community was effectively excluded from the beginning stages of the Wall protest process, as these stages found their roots in Christianity.

Chapter 2: The Wall Itself: an Unintended Canvas

This next chapter moves away from the people that made up the various communities and movements in Berlin in the last century and focuses directly on the Wall itself. As a landmark that still exists in a reduced form in Berlin today, the Wall took on the role of a canvas, of sorts, covered with art and rhetoric that serve as a snapshot of Berlin society since the Wall's existence. One would be hard-pressed to find someone who has not heard of the Berlin Wall, but understanding that wall as a canvas, as well as appreciating the significance of the Wall as a barrier, is nearly impossible without actually standing before the massive structure. Even as I stood before the Wall and walked its length, I was amazed to think that I was only seeing a micro-version of what once engulfed half of a city. The Wall is shown in its original form below, extending all the way around the entirety of West Berlin, isolating it from the Soviet Block surrounding it.[9]

Figure 2

[9] (German Unification)

My goal, upon seeing the artwork lining the Wall, was to understand the significance of the imagery. Was there any religious value or meaning to any of the work? To fully answer this question, I would certainly need to approach each artist and discuss their personal motivations for their work. Because this was not an option, what I instead offer is a personal interpretation of various images along the East Side Gallery portion of the Wall that still stands today. What I found was that, because interpretation of the imagery was my own personal interpretation and therefore inherently subjective, it would be both most helpful and most fair to the images and their artists to classify the images into categories based on their possible religious value. Discussed in the following pages are two types of images: blatant religious symbols and possible religious symbols. A blatantly religious symbol is one that is most often associated with a particular religion or religions. Examples, in addition to those discussed below, may include a crucifix or a menorah. . This does not rule out the possibility that the blatant religious symbol can also carry with it other, non-religious meanings. However, if the first and most often associated meaning is a religious one, then the symbol is classified as blatantly religious. Possible religious symbols are those that in many cases carry a religious connotation, but also have secular meanings and associations. The existence of both types of symbols speaks to, I will argue, the existence of the Wall's inherent religious meaning both because the Wall most likely inspired the images it wears, and because the religious imagery exists for the public to see as they view the Wall.

First I considered the blatant religious symbols apparent along the East Side Gallery. At the time I visited the Wall, I still expected the connection between the Wall and religion in Berlin to be profound, and so it was surprising to find only two blatantly religious symbols. The first of these symbols is most pertinent to this study of Judaism, as it is a flag marked with the Star of David. As shown below in Figures 3 and 4, the star separates the colors of two flags. Flanking the right end of the flag is a passage explaining the image. Translated from German, the passage reads: “The flag is based on the humanistic spirit of peace and unity of all peoples. It is a confrontation with the heritage of all German generations after the Second World War.” That passage, combined with the text overlaying the flag “Who stop the war?” combine to send a message that is simultaneously indignant as well as hopeful and optimistic.

Figure 3

Figure 4

In Figure 5, if the graffiti can be ignored, one can see that just behind the darker paint is a brighter, more colorful image that is itself the second blatant religious symbol found on the surface or the Wall. In this image, there is a cross at the center, with bright rays of color emanating from the center at various angles. The beautiful, light colors surround the cross, in this case the religious symbol, in a positive light. While this icon does not have any accompanying text as the previous did, the image achieves a positive message, possibly of hope or beauty, similar to the message of the flag and star of David.

Figure 5

Ultimately, though few in number, there are blatant religious symbols along the Wall, both of which depict the religions with which they are associated in a positive and hopeful light. This encouraging portrayal of religion through art along the Wall is certainly reflective, if only on a small scale, of the extent to which religion was associated with either the building or destructing of the wall. Unfortunately, because the dates on which the artwork was created are unknown, one cannot say whether this religious imagery and association developed earlier in the Wall's existence, or possibly even after the Wall had fallen.

Unintended or Possible Religious Symbols

While more commonly associated with peace, the image of doves carries with it certain religious undertones. It was a dove that, after the forty days of the flood, was sent out to confirm that land was again safe for those confined to the Ark (Genesis 8:11). For this reason, and the fact that the dove is repeatedly mentioned throughout the Bible, that some consider the dove to symbolize “deliverance and God's forgiveness.”[10] With that in mind, the fact that the dove as an image or icon made its way onto the Wall more than once suggests a positive and hopeful attitude amongst the artists, again coinciding with the message sent by the blatant religious symbols. In Figure 6 shown below, two doves are paired facing each other.

Figure 6

On another parcel of the Wall, a dove is portrayed with a bit more meaning and interaction. In Figure 7, the dove is seen as the bringer of salvation in a way. The dove is yielding the wrecking ball that breaks down the Wall.

[10] (Animal Symbolism, 2009)

Whether this implies that it is a message from God that the wall should come down, or whether it is a more secular message of peace that should do the same, is open to interpretation. But it is clear that if religion was involved in motivating or conveying this image, it was involved in a positive, empowering way.

Figure 7

Though not specifically a dove, birds are used again on the Wall as another possibly religious icon. This particular image, shown in Figure 8, provides a strong argument for religious significance. The text within the image specifically reference Heaven. The imagery of people turning into birds flying higher and higher also implies that there is an ultimate goal, or at least and ultimate event that will bring people beyond the earthly world and allow them to ascend to heaven.

Figure 8

Figure 9

Unfortunately, not all the symbols along the Wall, whether blatantly, possibly, or not at all religious, suggested the recurring message of hope or

optimism. As shown in Figure 9 above, there is a much darker side to the art lining the Wall than has been portrayed and studied in this chapter so far. Whether carrying a flag or a type of sickle-like weapon, the dark figure in the image above gives no indication that viewers should feel positive or hopeful upon seeing it. The face is not visible and there is no textual message accompanying the image to explain its meaning. The dark colors and shadows strongly suggest death, and at first look some may consider the figure to represent the Grim Reaper or Angel of Death, two figures strongly associated with many religions including Judaism. This image works against those previously discussed, suggesting that if religion is involved in the image's message and therefore in the existence of the Wall, it should be perceived as causing despair and ultimately death.

After seeing the remaining portion of the Wall, as well as walking along the ground where parts of the Wall used to but no longer stand, I was left wondering why some of the Wall was still left standing. The implications of the Wall's preservation turned out to be part of a much larger initiative in Berlin focused on memory preservation of German history. In the following chapters, I will discuss the means and motivations for preserving both the standing portions and the demolished portions of the Wall.

Chapter 3: The Wall's Role in German Society Today

One of the remaining question the paper seeks to answer about the Wall is what role it plays currently in German society and whether there is anything particularly religious in nature about that role. Just as standpoint theory suggests, the Wall does in fact mean markedly different things for different groups of people. This chapter explores the Wall's role in commercial society and amongst non-German societies, then seeks to explain how both those roles impact Berliners, and whether those roles particularly effect Jewish Berliners.

As an American student, as an American in general, the concepts of commoditization and commercialization are certainly not foreign ones. However, the last trend ever expected personally was that businesses in Berlin would capitalize on the history and feelings associated with the Wall itself. As much as the construction and demolition of the Wall contribute to the rich and colorful history of Berlin, various aspects of the Wall are also contributing to the city's economy.

Upon leaving several of the Museums located in the heart of Berlin, (ex. Story of Berlin Museum), patrons are bombarded with products for sale like in any other museum gift shop. What is unique to these Berlin museums is that they sell pieces of the demolished Wall to their patrons. The range of products claiming to include parts of the Wall include large blacks of painted concrete priced at over one hundred euro, to small plastic key chains holding a pebble inside for only a few euro. These "souvenirs" as they were called generated several questions regarding the commercialization of what is also considered a

symbol within German society and specifically within the Jewish community and culture in Berlin.

What does it mean to have a large block from the Berlin Wall displayed in a living room? Does that take away from the meaning that the Wall has for that community and for the previous generation, or does it serve as a constant reminder of the barrier? It is likely that for each family or individual who purchases a piece of the Wall, the Wall means something different, but let us consider the broader implications of selling what is, for all intents and purposes, a cultural icon.

For the people producing and selling these pieces, the Wall seems to have been reduced from a symbol of oppression, division and disruption to just another means of generating a profit. The cultural and social value is displaced by an economic value, which as a result has the likely implication of marginalizing and even offending those who consider the Wall to be more than a product, and certainly impossible of pricing. This first possibly reason for selling the Wall hinges on the idea that a growing number of people first grew ambivalent to the Wall, and then saw its economic value and capitalized on it. There is, however, another likely alternative.

It may be, contrary to the first assertion, that the ambivalence to the cultural and social meaning of the Wall was a result of, or a goal of, the treatment of the Wall as a product. For so long the Wall exerted tremendous power over the people of West, but more so, of East Berlin. Even when the political and geographical power of the Wall was reduced and eliminated, its power and

influence endured as a cultural and historical symbol. It is certainly possible that the selling and purchasing of the Wall by Germans was done purposefully to demonstrate to other Germans and to the World that the Wall will not hold power and influence any longer, but will be treated as it is: an inanimate object that can be reduced to a marketable product.

Following either of these justifications for the selling of the Wall, still remains another question: Why are people buying this product? The possible explanations are similar to those above. Either the purchasers no longer associate the Wall with its strong historical and cultural imputations and see it more as a collectors' item, or they feel empowered themselves through purchasing the relic and do it purposefully to reduce the meaning or power of the Wall's meaning. Alternatively to those two explanations is a third in which the meaning of the Wall both culturally and historically is still very real, and purchasing the Wall is a way of commemorating the Wall's story and its meaning for previous and future generations.

Ultimately, there will likely still be a group of Germans, Jewish Germans in particular, who still strongly associated the Wall with suffering and subjugation, and the marketing of such a product for purchase will likely breed resentment and possibly even further emotional suffering. In considering a comparable alternative to the commoditization and commercialization of the Berlin Wall, the remnants of the Twin Towers after September 11, 2001 came to mind. How would America react to the commercialization of that cultural and historical icon. Would people buy the rubble? Undoubtedly some would. While

a quick search did not yield any results for such a product, it would not be surprising that in American capitalist society, such a product would indeed sell. However, with this more local example, it may be easier to see just how offensive the marketing of such a product may be to citizens, particularly those who suffered the most from the disruption and the tragedy that the towers and the rubble represents. Many capitalist societies pride themselves on their ability to make a product and a profit out of anything, but with the transformation of cultural and historical icons into products necessarily brings with it the degradation of those meaningful icons, and insensitivity to those affected by what those icons originally represented.

To continue to consider the use of World Trade Center rubble in American society in comparison to the BerlinWall in Germany, we may also consider use of rubble not as marketable product, but as symbol none-the-less. One piece of rubble, shaped like a cross, was found and preserved at St. Peter's Church at Ground Zero. Like the Wall, the memories associated with the rubble are sure to include negative thoughts and sentiments, and yet the preservation of this piece of steel rubble from the trade centers is said to mean "more to many people than any piece of steel ever," by Richard Sheirer, former head of the city Office of Emergency Management. Sheirer also adds that the rubble transcends religion, and a reverend who blessed the cross called it an image of "consolation and inspiration."[11] This cross, found and preserved after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, is an example of the use of religious, cultural, and historic

[11] (Dobnik, V. 2006)

artifacts for the purpose of preserving a memory and commemorating a powerful and important time in a given society. In the next chapter, we will discuss the ways in which, like the Trade Center rubble, the Wall has been memorialized in German society.

The impact of and reactions to the Wall exist in a ripple effect, of sorts. Certainly in Berlin, the resting place of the Wall, the effects as well as the reactions are strongest. However, visiting the Wall and seeing the number of tourists it attracts indicates that while the effects may not be as strong as for Berliners themselves, people outside the immediate Berlin community are also impacted by the existence of the Wall. Within the time it took to walk along the Wall, maybe forty-five minutes, at least one dozen people approached the Wall and attempted to leave their own mark amongst the artwork that endured. The main demographic of vandals seems to be younger individuals. Additionally, after observing and listening to the groups talk amongst themselves, it seems most likely that they are not Berliners, or even Germans. Instead they appear to be tourists attempting to leave their mark on the face of history. As is obvious within each of the pictures shown above, beautiful and meaningful artwork is being destroyed and defaced by the graffiti being added. The first impression of this vandalism was that it exemplified disrespect and ignorance for the suffering and the oppression that the wall represents.

However, with more thought, an alternative to this characterization of disrespect and ignorance developed. What if, alternatively, these individuals, these so-called vandals, understand all too well the demoralizing and subjugating

nature of the Wall. In that case, it is possible that spray paint as a tool for vandalism is also a tool for challenging, purposefully disrespecting and speaking out against the authorities and the climate that enabled such a landmark, the Wall, to be built. Again, this seems unlikely considering the demographics of the vandals: too young to have really experience the Wall when it existed as an intended restraint, and likely not German and therefore not directly impacted by the Wall themselves. However, protest can take shape in many ways, meaning that painting a name or a symbol on the Wall, even if over top of someone else's art, can express many different attitudes.

Chapter 4: Memory Preservation

The use of the Wall since its fall by German society speaks to a habit common to many communities: the concept of preserving national and community history. Similar to the commoditization of the Wall, several other cultural artifacts have been, in a sense, preserved through commoditization. The pages below discuss the preservation of or commemoration of several sites that, through their preservation, serve as hallmarks of either a German identity, a Jewish identity, or an intersecting German and Jewish identity.

Checkpoint Charlie, during the years when the Wall and the regulations associated with the border where in full effect, stood as a symbol of hope as well as frustration for German Jews. The Checkpoint Charlie of Berlin today is a far cry from the landmark that once existed. Not even in its original location, the current "Checkpoint Charlie" calls itself a Museum but doubles as a store selling souvenirs much like those found at the gift shops mentioned above. To see the full collection of photographs and relics recovered from the original Checkpoint, patrons have to pay an additional fee. What could stand as a public site open without charge to those interested in the city's history has been privatized and commoditized, limiting who can gain access to such an important cultural and historical icon.

A similar transformation of a historical site to a money-making attraction is the Neue Synagogue in Berlin. Once a place of worship for members of the Jewish Community, the Synagogue's primary function is no longer serving the Jewish community but instead serving the paying customers who are largely

comprised of tourists. There are warnings about flash photography, red velvet ropes, even a gift shop immediately to the left after entering the Synagogue. What could and arguable should be the center and the hallmark of the Jewish Community of Berlin is instead a museum, for all intents and purposes.

Even traveling the length of the Wall that is still standing, the East Side Gallery, there are vendors trying to capitalize on people's interest in such an important piece of history. On the East side of the Wall, towards the end of the gallery, a "beach bar" was built, sand and all, to attract the Wall's visitors. A plot of land where only twenty years prior people risked their lives in escape attempts now is covered in sand, littered with lounge chairs, and complete with a DJ, bar, and dance floor. Such insensitivity to the meaning the Wall holds is literally astounding. However, the presence of this bar, the transformation of Checkpoint Charlie and the Neue Synagogue, and the selling of the Wall all suggest that in a city where religion meant so much, for good and bad, what now binds the citizens is not a religious faith, but rather the spirit of capitalism.

The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was a project slow to come about. The idea of creating a high profile memorial was first suggested by publicist Lea Rosh in 1988. Still, it was not until almost seven years later that a design competition was held for artists' submissions. However, the competition yielded no results, indicating either poor planning or lack of interest. Either way, it was clear that a memorial related to Jewish culture and history was not an incredibly popular idea. A few years later, Federal Chancellor Kohl votes for a design submitted by Eisenmam and Serra in a second design competition.

However, even after this vote is cast, the decision to go ahead with the design and the monument is delayed by federal elections. [12]

For the federal elections to have this effect on the construction of the monument suggests several things. First, and somewhat positively, the focus in Germany appeared to be on the future, as opposed to the past, by the end of the twentieth century. Second, memorializing the tragedy that the Jewish culture and population faced as a result of the Holocaust was certainly not a top priority among government officials. And finally, the small number of Jews living in Germany at the time were not working together or fighting to expedite the process of building this memorial.

Finally, fifteen years after the first call for this memorial, construction began. Within 2 years, the memorial was opened and a public inauguration was held. One of the noteworthy aspects of the construction of the memorial was the preservation tactics used on the surface of the memorial stones. Each was treated with a process that would protect the concrete, and make it easy to graffiti from the surface. Perhaps this is a lesson and a strategy taken into account after seeing the extensive amount of graffiti popping up along the Berlin Wall each day.

Earlier in this paper I mentioned the preservation of the Wall as a form of memory preservation. Having already discussed what Germany has done with the portions of the Wall that have been demolished, let us now consider what it means to have allowed some of the Wall to remain standing. There is in fact an organization, known as the Artists Initiative East Side Gallery, which is devoted

[12] Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin

to preserving the remaining 1.3 kilometers of the Wall. The East Side Gallery initiative maintains that the preservation of the Wall, and the artwork along it, represents freedom.[13] The various goals of the initiative include restoration and memory preservation. Through the process on restoring the artwork, preserving the Wall, and possibly even adding additional structures to the Wall's route, the Initiative describes their work as "an act against forgetting."[14] What is meant to be remembered is what Berlin was at the time the Wall held its power, and what Berlin can be now that the Wall has fallen.

The push to remember and to send a message of freedom is common characteristics when it comes to the preservation of the Wall and the Trade Center rubble as discussed above. Following the terrorist attacks, the slogan "We remember" spread rapidly in American society, used as proof that the attacks certainly meant something, but that society would decide how to give that memory power and meaning. The same reverend discussed above that blessed the cross from the Trade Center rubble noted while the rubble may mean something different for each person, preservation of the memory is a common societal goal:

> "Some interpret it as a cross. Others see it as an artifact that has historical and architectural importance, a reminder that is also a sign of closure."[15]

The same can be said about the Wall. While belonging to a particular community in Berlin, the Jewish Community for example, may add new or additional meaning to the Wall's memory, the shared ideal that brings nearly all of the

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[13] (Artists Initiative, 2002)
[14] (Vision, 1999).
[15] (Dobnik, V. 2006)

community together is an overarching desire to preserve the Wall and the historical meaning that accompanies it.

The concept of freedom and the idea that the Wall generates images of freedom is certainly relevant to both Berliners as a community, as well as the Jewish community. For Berliners, the Wall was once an obstacle to freedom, but now is a reminder that one should always fight for his or her freedom, and should never take it for granted. While the Wall was not uniquely oppressing to Jewish Berliners, the continued oppression Jewish Berliners faced following the Holocaust under the Soviet regime made the idea of freedom even more desirable. If, as the initiative suggests, the Wall is both a symbol and reminder of freedom, then preserving that symbol and the historical memory associated with it is an important task for all Berliners, Jewish or not.

Chapter 5: Berlin's Jewish Community Today

One of the more startling aspects of this study was the revelation that fears and concern of persecution still affects the behavior of and measures taken by practicing Jews in Berlin. Here we will consider one particular Jewish Community Center, located within Berlin, that exemplifies the precautions still taken by Jews in Berlin nearly twenty years following the fall of the Wall and over sixty years after the end of the Holocaust.

The Szloma Albam House is a Jewish Community Center located in the high-end neighborhood of Charlottenburg in Berlin. A new addition to the neighborhood, the Center opened its doors officially in September of 2007. The House is run by the Chabad Lubavitch organization.[16] While on the one hand the Center delivers a strong message that the Jewish community in Berlin is literally and figuratively rebuilding itself, the building's appearance alone also works to undermine the strength and success of that rebuilding. First, though, let us consider the positive message and impact of this center.

Logistically, the center will serve many different functions including conference, tourist and media center, seminary, youth lounge, kosher restaurant, library, shop, mikvah, and of course synagogue. In addition to having varied uses, the goal of the center is to attract varied guests, including non-Jews. The Center is headed by its executive director, Rabbi Yehuda Teichtal. Teichtal sees the Szloma Albam House as the key to helping Jewish immigrants join German society. Additionally, he hopes that the center will symbolize survival amongst

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[16] (Pfeffer, 2007)

the Jewish people and work towards making Berlin a "central hub of Jewish life". These goals fall right in line with the architectural goal of Sergei Tchoban, who hoped the sleek, contemporary design would demonstrate a focus on the future.[17]

Unfortunately, all the positive steps described above are accompanied by the drawbacks presented by the Center's physical appearance. The Center is priced at an estimated six million euro, which equated to over eight million in US dollars at the time.[18] A significant portion of that cost is likely due to the nineteen tons of gold that was purchased from Jerusalem and shipped to Berlin in order to make a replica of the Western Wall in Jerusalem for the Center. Despite the efforts to use this gold to create a symbol recognizable to Jews and others around the world, the view of the beautiful monument is hindered by several other physical obstacles, the most startling of which are the armed guards and the high fences surrounding the Center.

Possibly as a result of the visual obstacles, the appearance of the monument, as well as its meaning, are reduced. An orthodox rabbi from New York, Rabbi Chaim Rozwaski, who has also served at Berlin's Pestalozzistrasse Synagogue, said the replica has "no more meaning than a picture."[19] Even the meaning it may hold as a picture is reduced by its surroundings. Consider Figures 19-13 below:

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[17] (AP, 2007)
[18] (AP, 2007)
[19] (AP, 2007)

Figure 10

Figure 11 *Figure 12*

Figure 13

For a Center claiming it hopes to attract many visitors, including tourists and non-Jews, the outside décor offers a sharp contrast to the inviting message the Center claims. As is clear in Figure 12, visitors must pass by two armed guards in order to enter the Center. Still, even after passing the armed guards, the visitors must also make their way through the high fence that surrounds the entire building. Furthermore, the previously mentioned gold monument is not visible from any angle provided in any of the above figures. What does seem clear is that the center is rather private, somewhat cold, and altogether uninviting, especially for a first time visitor.

Such security measures beg the question, "Why?" German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier addressed this question specifically in relation to the Szloma Albam House. At the opening of the Center two years ago, Steinmeier cautioned that "vigilance against anti-Semitism remains necessary."[20] It seems that vigilance can take the form of protection and security. Steinmeier

[20] (Pfeffer, 2007)

added that coupled with this vigilance is a “reason for gratitude” that such a Center can open after the horrible crimes of the Holocaust that all German remember.

While the Szloma Albam House gave an image of the Jewish Community of Berlin as a guarded, possibly even hostile one, the Jewish Community of Berlin Center gave a much more welcoming and positive impression from both the inside and out. Opened in 1959, the Community Center stands on the ground that formerly held a synagogue from 1912. However, the synagogue fell victim to arson and destruction during the “Program of 9th November 1938” and the ruins were blown up in the 1950s.[21] While the Community Center is certainly warmer than the Szloma Albam house, going inside still felt more like entering a government building than entering a community center.

To enter the premises, one must pass through the tall, iron gate that encloses the facility shown below. Unlike the Szloma Albam house, during the day the gate remained open. Once inside, guests must pass through security including metal detectors and a guard inspecting belongings carried in. Once inside, even in the mid-afternoon, the Center was quiet and I only saw five people, including the security guard, in an hour’s time.

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[21] (Jewish Community, 2002)

Figure 14

On the premise is the Jewish "Volkshochschule" (JVHS), an institution focusing on adult education, which offers lectures, presentations, workshops, language courses and cultural activities. The library of the Jewish Community is also located at the Community Center. On the right side of the courtyard a memorial wall has been erected with the names of all the concentration camps and ghettos built during the Holocaust. While the memory behind the memorial wall is certainly upsetting and sullen, the wall itself is very beautiful and it acknowledges, unlike some other transformations discussed earlier, the meaning that the past century has had for Jews in Germany. Similarly, a marble monument, shown below, stands outside the front of the center.

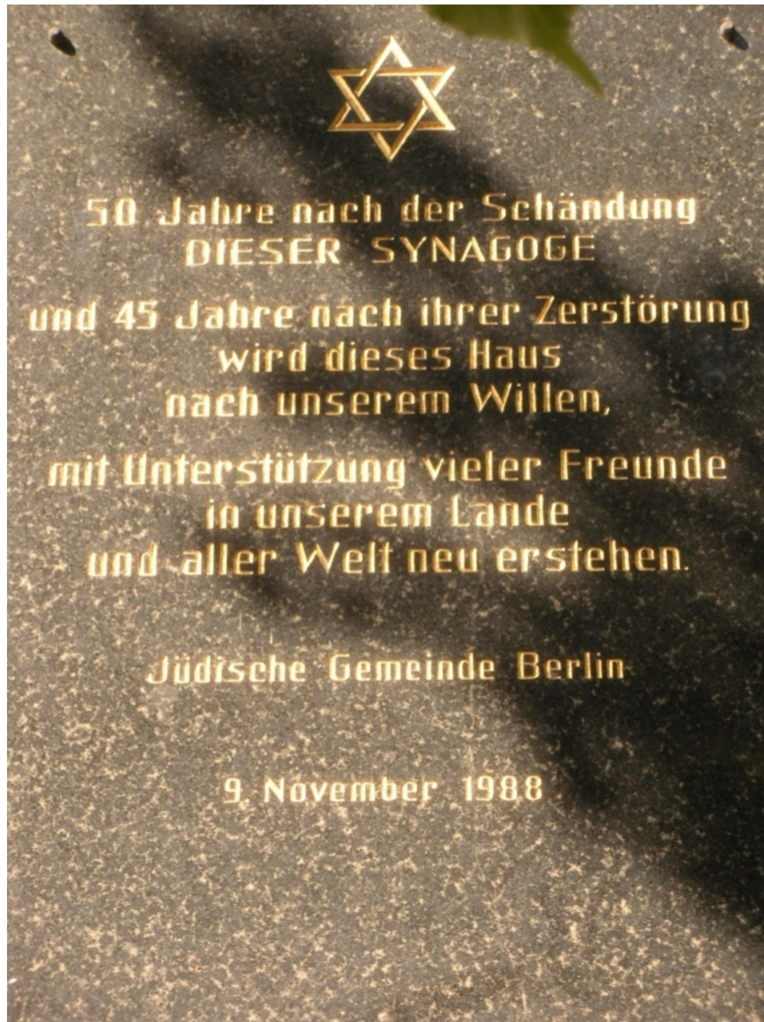

Figure 15

The monument reads: “Fifty years after the desecration of the synagogue and 45 years after its destruction is this house, for our sake, with support for many friends in our country and around the world, newly named the Jewish Community in Berlin.” While not swarming with people when I visited, the community center does give the impression through this monument, and the commemorative photos and historical information contained inside, that there is a future for the Jewish religious community in Berlin, and that community is one that will overcome the terror of the Holocaust and the fragmentation of the Wall.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Today, Berlin is advertised as having the broadest variety of religious denominations in the country. [22] Jewish life and the community encompassing it is certainly stronger and more vibrant than it was immediately proceeding the Holocaust and preceding the construction of the Berlin Wall. Considering the degree of devastation and degradation the Jewish community suffered in the past century, the possibility for and existence of resurgence is, at least to some, a surprise. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier describes that it was an unexpected miracle that a renaissance of Jewish life in Germany came about.[23]

Since the fall of the Wall in 1989, the transformation and growth of Jewish life in Berlin is astounding. Jews were encouraged to immigrate from the former Soviet Union to Germany following the fall and as a result, the Jewish population has more than tripled. In fact, thanks to immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union, Germany has been considered the fastest growing Jewish community in the world with 110,000 registered members. [24] Berlin, once again the capital, has the largest number of Jewish residents and active synagogues in the country.[25] Additionally, community centers like the Szloma Albam house are signs of the growth and vitality of Berlin's 12,000-member Jewish community.[26] However, there is still significant room to grow for the Jewish community in

[22] (Lerner &Daur, 2008)
[23] (Pfeffer, 2007)
[24] (AP, 2007)
[25] (Lerner &Daur, 2008)
[26] (AP, 2007)

Berlin and in Germany, as nearly six-hundred thousand people made up the Jewish community in Germany before the Holocaust. [27]

Berlin, with 12,000 Jews and eight synagogues, has the largest Jewish community in Germany. [28] However, the community in Berlin is more that just a mass of bodies. Unlike the Jewish community that existed during the years the Wall was standing, the current Jewish community in Berlin has some influence. In that past twenty years, the Jewish community in Berlin has gone from standing on the sidelines of protests against the Wall and the Soviets to taking a stand for what is important and pooling their resources. In the case of the Szloma Albam House, it was the enormous fundraising ability of the Jewish Community that enable the center to be constructed. When the community was able to raise ninety percent of the funds necessary to build the center on their own, there was a sense, at least among the leaders of the center like Rabbi Yahuda Teichtal, that "people are putting their trust in the Jewish future of Germany."[29]

While this paper aimed to focus largely on Jewish life and community in Berlin since the creation of the Berlin, Wall, one caveat became clear since the beginning stages of research. The most prominent trends I have found in the course of this study is that no individual living in Berlin exists are solely a German citizen, solely a Berliner, or solely a Jew. Rather, each individual is comprised of various unique, competing and complementary identities that likewise allow them to exist in various communities. While the Jewish

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[27] (AP, 2007)
[28] (AP, 2007)
[29] (Pfeffer, 2007)

Community is present and growing in Berlin today, it is part of a larger community of Berliners all sharing a similar goal: to move on from the tumultuous past while still preserving the memory of what they have overcome, and those who made it possible. Whether through commercialization or monument construction, protest or silence, Berliners and Jewish Berliners have been determining the role the Wall plays in their society for over half a century. For Berlin society, the Wall is a chapter in the rocky history book the last century has been. For Jewish Berliners, the Wall was one in a series of oppressors that at one time fragmented them from each other as well as other Berliners, but now serves as a reminder and a testament to how far a religious community, even one was fragmented and demoralized as the twentieth century Jews in Germany, can come in an effort to rebuild and rebind.

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Capstone Project Summary

This study of religious life in Berlin, Germany seeks to identify and explain the changes to one aspect of a community's culture since the creation and destruction of the Berlin Wall. The project focuses specifically on Jewish life in Berlin, and how the Jewish community in this historical city developed during the foreign occupation following WWII, and whether or not the construction of a Wall dividing the city changed religious life for that community. While this project acknowledges the largely individualistic nature of religion, for this study religion is looked at sociologically. That is, religion is considered one form of a group's identity that connects the individuals within that group. The Jewish community is identified as one with unifying characteristics including shared faith, norms, and rituals. At the start of this project it was expected that the Berlin Wall, while obviously a physical barrier, also serves as a spiritual barrier and a religious barrier, interfering with and at times defeating the connecting and unifying characteristics of religion.

The goal of this project was to understand the process that a religious community undertakes in order to rebuild itself. For this study, I specifically selected a community that was nearly destroyed and fully demoralized following the Holocaust, and then even further divided, both physically and spiritually, by the construction of the Berlin Wall. The first phase was to understand what endured of the Jewish Community in Berlin following the Holocaust. Second, this project looks at the role religion played while the Wall stood, particularly toward the end of the 1980s immediately preceding the Wall's fall. Lastly, this

study examines what remains of the Jewish Community in Berlin today, and why that community has developed the way it has over the last twenty years.

In order to serve justice to both this project and to religious life in Berlin, visiting the city and many of its cultural and religious landmarks, particularly within the Jewish Community, was necessary. Time spent in Berlin focused on visiting sites like Jewish Community Centers, cultural and historical museums, and of particular importance, the Berlin Wall itself. A substantial portion of this project was interpreting the art that lines the remaining portion of the Wall known as the East Side Gallery. In addition to the figures provided at the museums and the input from museum staff, communication with one of Syracuse University's own German Professors provided insight into religious movements in and around Berlin and the Jewish Community's role in those efforts. Conclusions and assertions about the development of Jewish life in Berlin are founded on the interpretation of the city's treatment of historical locations and artifacts, facts and figures detailing religious participation, and the condition of Jewish Community centers within the city.

Throughout the course of this study, it became clear that the Berlin Wall did not, in fact, have the inherent religious meaning I expected it would. Instead, the Wall's meaning has transitioned from a symbol of oppression to instead an artifact that various parts of German society are using differently. For some, the Wall is a product to be sold, for others it is a canvas for self expression, and for even more it is an enduring symbol of freedom. While the Wall is expected to mean something different for every individual, particularly those living in Berlin,

this study revealed that, in terms of how Berliners today respond to the Wall, religious background has little effect.

With that said, during the time the Wall was standing, it did effect different religious denominations differently. For the Jewish community in Berlin that was already fragmented and nearly destroyed by the Holocaust, the Wall continued their isolation from the rest of society. As protests and demonstrations against the Wall originated in Christian communities, Jewish Berliners lacked a forum for expressing their dissent and were thereby quieted by the majority and the powerful once again. Amongst all religious communities, the Wall interfered with and at times fully prevented the communities from rebuilding and growing because they were literally divided by the physical barrier.

While I expected to be able to isolate and study the Jewish community in Berlin as an independent entity, this project made it very clear that a community is composed of significantly more than their religious association. While at times being Jewish in Berlin distinguished one person from another non-Jew, it is more often the case that it was a combined identity of Jewish and German that shaped an individual's experiences. As a community as a whole, Berliners have recovered from the imposition of the Berlin Wall over the last couple of decades by preserving historical artifacts and sites as a way of constructing and shaping the memories associated with a given point in history. Despite struggling numbers and presence since the Holocaust, the Jewish community has participated in this memory preservation process with the creation of monuments and construction of community centers aimed at remembering the community that

preceded them while strengthening and developing the Jewish community for the future.

This project has revealed that while religion may be treated or relied on as a connector amongst individuals, it can instead serve to divide individuals and isolate them from a broader community. Additionally, in the unique circumstances within Berlin following the Holocaust and the Berlin Wall, it was the existence of a national identify, more significantly that a religious identity, that fueled responses to the Wall as well as the rebuilding of communities following the Wall's fall.