

Berlin Wall Symposium to Celebrate 25th Anniversary of Historic Fall Nov. 3-9



OCTOBER 24, 2014 | [ROBERT HULL](#)

In April, University of Virginia officials **unveiled four panels from the former Berlin Wall**, on loan from a private collector and **installed** at a site adjacent to Alderman Library and the Small Special Collections Library.

During the first week of November, the University will connect those physical artifacts with history through a Grounds-wide series of events marking the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Cold War symbol.

“The Berlin Wall Symposium: The Fall of a Symbol, The Will of a People” will offer a dynamic, multidisciplinary exploration of the fall’s importance through lectures, talks, presentations and live performances. It will bring together academics, scholars and artists from the University community and beyond to highlight the cultural, political and historical implications around one of the watershed moments of the 20th century.

The Berlin Wall installation at U.Va. is on loan from Robert and MeiLi Hefner, who own the panels, dubbed “The Kings of Freedom” for the graffiti artwork preserved on one side.

“The Berlin Wall stood for 28 years as a symbol of Communist repression and of the Cold War in general,” said **Allen Lynch**, a politics professor and former director of U.Va.’s **Center for Russian & East European Studies**. “On the evening of Nov. 9, 1989, upon the announcement of an easing of travel restrictions from East to West, tens of thousands of East Berliners marched to the wall. Border guards without orders allowed the crowds to pass into West Berlin unhindered.

“That night, in front of international television, Berliners began to dismantle the wall physically. Thus, a wall that divided families, friends, an entire nation and, symbolically, an entire world, came down, propelled by the very people the wall was designed to contain.”

In 1990, Robert Hefner, sensing the long-term magnitude of human change and historical enormity of the wall’s fall, negotiated for a section of the wall and secured the four complete

panels, which contain two spray-painted Pop Art murals by the graffiti artist Dennis Kaun.

Painted on the West German side are two kings: a brightly colored, joyful king, representing freedom; and a largely colorless, blindfolded king, oblivious to the needs and wishes of the people. The East German side remains unadorned. Hefner believes these two sides – the colorful, lively West German side and the dull, gray East German side – artistically represent the character of freedom and enslavement.

Jody Kielbasa, U.Va.'s vice provost for the arts and director of the Virginia Film Festival, organized the symposium.

“It has been an extraordinary honor to collaborate across Grounds to assemble a remarkable group of scholars, artists and experts to reflect on this critically important moment in history,” he said. “Through their scholarship, their first-person experiences, cultural expertise and creative artistry, these individuals will examine the fascinating array of forces that toppled what stood for decades as the ultimate symbol of the Cold War.”

Numerous events across U.Va. disciplines will take place during the week to celebrate this historical event. The series will culminate in a ceremony at the “Kings of Freedom” Berlin Wall exhibit at 5:30 p.m. on Nov. 9, followed by a reception in the Newcomb Hall Ballroom. The event is open to the public.

Two art projects are of special note.

Artist Sam Welty, known for his murals on Charlottesville’s Free Speech Monument – the chalkboard at the east end of the Downtown Mall – will take to the mall’s bricks to recreate Kaun’s iconic “Kings of Freedom” image.

Across town on the construction fences surrounding the Rotunda, award-winning photographer and artist Gar Hoover shares “The Art of the Wall,” a solo show of 24 photographic prints, each six feet high. These images depict the political murals and accompanying graffiti from the east side of the longest surviving stretch of the Berlin Wall, which became known as the largest outdoor gallery in the world. (More about this project can be found [here](#).)

Some of the symposium’s other lectures and presentations include:

- **Grace Hale**, professor of history and director of U.Va.’s American studies program, will lecture on the legendary rock ‘n’ roll performances at the Berlin Wall given during the late ‘80s, preceding the wall’s fall, by artists including Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen (Nov. 3, 5:30 p.m., Harrison-Small auditorium);
- **Karen Van Lengen**, Kenan Professor of Architecture and former dean of the Architecture School, who was in Berlin at a friend’s apartment one week after the fall of the wall, will share a trove of rarely-seen film footage, her memories and a collection of rare artifacts to tell her story of living in a land soaked in new freedom (Nov. 4, 5 p.m., Campbell Hall, room 153);

- The U.Va. Center for Politics and the **Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy** will present a panel of scholars – including Sergei Khrushchev, senior fellow at Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Studies and the son of former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev – to discuss the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall and its impact on the policies and politics of Europe, Russia and the United States (Nov. 5, 6 p.m., Harrison-Small auditorium)

The symposium also will feature the premiere of an original historical drama, “W/E: a Theatrical Piece of The Wall,” presented by the U.Va. Drama Department at the Helms Theatre. The production, created by associate professor **Colleen Kelly** and playwright **Doug Grissom**, features vignettes developed and performed by members of the M.F.A. acting program. The piece, which incorporates narrative drama along with music and movement by **Marianne Kubik**, associate professor of movement, examines this world-changing moment from a variety of angles.

In addition, the **Virginia Film Festival**, running concurrently with the symposium from Nov. 6-9, will present a series of five films as part of the symposium, including the popular Cold War comedy, “**Dr. Strangelove** or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb,” directed by Stanley Kubrick.

“**41 on 41**,” features 41 storytellers who weave a multidimensional profile of President George H.W. Bush, the 41st president of the United States who was in office at the time of the wall’s demise. There will be a discussion following the documentary with the film’s executive producer, Mary Kate Cary; Marlin Fitzwater, press secretary for President George H. W. Bush; and Barbara Perry, co-chair of the Miller Center Oral History Program.

“**Red Army**” turns a unique lens on the social and cultural transformation of the Soviet Union leading up to the fall of Communism, mirroring the rise and fall of the fabled Red Army hockey team. A discussion will follow with the film’s director, Gabe Polsky.

Also screening are “**Walesa: Man of Hope**,” Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda’s biopic tracing the rise of Nobel Prize-winner Lech Walesa’s Solidarity Movement in the 1970s and the peaceful revolution he inspired, with an introduction by **Dariusz Tolczyk**, associate professor in U.Va.’s **Department of Slavic Languages and Literature**; and German director Wim Wenders’ “Wings of Desire,” a visually entrancing film that earned Best Director at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival.

The symposium is supported by the offices of the **President, Executive Vice President and Provost, Vice Provost for the Arts** and **The Hefner Collection**. Other participants include the **School of Architecture**; the **Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy**; the **American studies program, Center for German Studies, Corcoran Department of History, dance program, Department of Drama, Department for Germanic Languages & Literatures** and the **Woodrow Wilson Department of Politics**, all in the **College of Arts & Sciences**; the **Center for Politics**; the **Harrison Institute and Small Special Collections Library**; the **Miller**

Center; the **Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression**; and the **Virginia Film Festival**.

Details and information about the Berlin Wall Symposium can be found [here](#).

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The University's installation of "The Kings of Freedom" panels from the Berlin Wall was unveiled in April.

(Photo: Sanjay Suchak)



Cover of the brochure for "The Berlin Wall Symposium: The Fall of a Symbol, The Will of a People."

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Last Modified: Monday, 08 June, 2015, 5:17PM

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