



The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape

Brian Ladd

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In this compelling work, Brian Ladd examines the ongoing conflicts radiating from the remarkable fusion of architecture, history, and national identity in Berlin. Ladd surveys the urban landscape, excavating its ruins, contemplating its buildings and memorials, and carefully deconstructing the public debates and political controversies emerging from its past.

"Written in a clear and elegant style, *The Ghosts of Berlin* is not just another colorless architectural history of the German capital. . . . Mr. Ladd's book is a superb guide to this process of urban self-definition, both past and present."—Katharina Thote, *Wall Street Journal*

"If a book can have the power to change a public debate, then *The Ghosts of Berlin* is such a book. Among the many new books about Berlin that I have read, Brian Ladd's is certainly the most impressive. . . . Ladd's approach also owes its success to the fact that he is a good storyteller. His history of Berlin's architectural successes and failures reads entertainingly like a detective novel."—Peter Schneider, *New Republic*

"[Ladd's] well-written and well-illustrated book amounts to a brief history of the city as well as a guide to its landscape."—Anthony Grafton, *New York Review of Books*

The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape Details

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Elli says

The tone this book was written in was engaging, and got me very interested in the subject. The author establishes the uniqueness of Berlin as a city, and sets up the "mystery" element very well for a non-fiction academic book.

I felt that this was a fluid read, and definitely one of the better course reads I have had in the Intl. Relations major.

Matt says

This book offers pretty much everything you want in a walking tour of a city (history and architecture, anecdotes and themes), apart from the thousand photographs you wish were in here. But mainly it's an analysis of issues of memory and politics and the German psyche in general, and how it affects (and is reflected in) the landscape of the city. Understandably, there basically isn't a brick in town that doesn't associate with it some measure of guilt and mourning. I bought this book because I'm off to visit the city and I wanted to learn a bit more about whatever it had to say. What I got was plenty. And I wonder if I'd have to go to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem to find more burdened scenery.

Ladd is really smart, and a good writer. Now I'm a little ticked off since I have acquired a list of about 500 places I need to visit.

lisa says

I just returned from my first visit to Berlin, and this book allowed me to truly appreciate the architecture in this beautiful city. The author walks you through the history of Berlin by examining its buildings and monuments, and explains how these structures are a manifestation of the "identity crisis" the city suffers as its inhabitants struggle to come to terms with its violent past. Highly recommended for lovers of history, architecture, and/or travel!

Kirk says

I am enjoying this book so much, I love the architecture of Berlin, what is here and what is missing. This book is from around 1995. It is an amazing period when they are removing the wall and looking at the area that has been for thirty years no mans land, but is now the center of the new capital of reunified Germany. Amongst these ruins are palaces, churches, synagogues, parliamentary headquarters, interrogations cells,

secret service buildings, antifascist squats, prison camps, large stretches on concrete wall, model soviet, and western roads, buried blown up paved over bunkers, and Mietzkassern. In many instances the same structures had been used by monarchists, the weimar republic, the nazis, the GDR. This book is an exploration of the simultaneous creation and uncovering of a national identity, through the process of deciding what pieces of German history to remember, which to forget, and which to erase. Reading this books has peeled back the layers and allowed me to see through the walls of my second city. A profound enjoyment to read.

Salvador Ortega says

Would have been four stars were it not for the poor quality of the photos. Picked the book up while visiting Berlin- bookstore tourism. Really wished I had read it prior to the trip.

Alison says

A really interesting public history of Berlin. Berlin has such a unique history as the center of so many globally significant events, both positive and negative, that how they have preserved and written their identity is a fascinating case study of public history. Well written and engaging, a good read for anyone interested in public history.

Sue says

What kind of Berlin can there be after the Holocaust and the Wall? The answer is more than complicated. The city's visitors feel like archeologists, digging for the layers under every building, every street name. Because the book focuses on the physical city, I'm guessing that it would feel too abstract for someone who had never visited. But for me it was a revelation, supplying details about the sights I have seen and leading me to new ones.

For example, there is the large office building on Wilhelmstrasse which would attract no attention on its own. But it was built by the Third Reich as a "document in stone displaying the reawakened military will and the reestablished military readiness of the new Germany." Ouch. The home of Hermann Göring's Ministry of Aviation, it is the sort of place with too much baggage to find continued usefulness. Except that it was not bombed, and this intact building fell into the Eastern sector. It was just too usable, so the GDR "converted" it to its purposes by mounting a mural (crafted by Meissen, which fell into the East!) along one wall to show the happy Socialist society. In 1953, a workers' uprising took place there (quelled, of course). So in 1993, the new Germany placed a commemorative plaque of that uprising.

And that's what you see: A Nazi war building, decorated with an East German mural and a post-Wall commemoration. But it does not really attract attention on its own. You need a little help getting there, and this book helps a lot. The book documents that Berlin and Germany have done a good job of coming to terms with history.

The book is now more than 10 years old, but it still works as a guide to Berlin as a work in progress. Now a city full of young people who remember little or none of this, Berlin rewards the persistent visitor as a vibrant and livable place, built upon a troubled past.

Laura says

Fantastic look at the history of Berlin via architecture and landscape. The book really shines when it discusses the human drama surrounding these monuments and buildings, the little personal stories that highlight everything. The use of design contests was surprisingly frequent, as was the total disregard for the winning design. By far my favorite story was about the Linné Triangle and the only mass flight from West Berlin to East Berlin.

Also excellent was the way the author explained the controversies related to the decisions by successive governments on what to keep, what to tear down, what to replace and how - and believe me, everything was a controversy. And rightly so. A monument to communism looks like a monument to oppression in the eyes of a West Berliner, but a decision to remove a monument to communism says to East Berliners that their personal history is of no value.

I've used this book a few times to take N to interesting places and then read the related snippets aloud, and it's been a successful form of low-key walking tour.

Chris says

Despite the rating, this is a must read if you plan to visit Berlin. While the information is excellent, unfortunately the writing is not.

In spite of the circular writing, I found the rich history of the city of Berlin to be incredibly fascinating and truly helps you understand the culture of Berlin and Germany as a whole with respect to the events of the 20th century.

The author provides plenty of anecdotal information that can be easily compiled as a guidebook for those interested in digging deeper into the history of this amazing, dynamic city.

Michael Pennington says

This troubled city.

Ricardo says

Aunque ya tiene casi veinte años, este libro es una de las mejores herramientas que he leído para poder entender un poco más la fascinante relación que se establece en Berlín entre paisaje urbano e historia, que es casi como decir la confrontación entre el deseo de olvidar que pretenden algunos contra el deseo de recordar que impulsa a otros. Desde una perspectiva histórica, política, arquitectónica y social, el autor explora los restos materiales e inmateriales de la ciudad prusiana, la de Weimar, la que soñaron los nazis, el período

soviético y el de la reunificación. Ladd nos introduce concienzudamente a todos los debates abiertos en cada una de estas épocas (o retomados por cada nueva generación, con lo que en buena medida permanecen inconclusos) y el resultado es un fascinante viaje cultural motorizado por monumentos, sitios, tipos habitacionales o memoriales de guerra de esta metrópolis, una de las más emblemáticas de la modernidad. El autor conoce profundamente la ciudad y su historia, y más allá de su indudable interés para todos los urbanitas, el libro es un excelente material para aquellos que conocen o desean conocer un poco más sobre Berlín, el problema de la identidad alemana y las discusiones en torno a la memoria nacional. Varias fotografías blanco y negro acompañan el texto y cada capítulo está precedido por una serie de citas muy significativas. Ya está entre mis indispensables. Lástima que una de las últimas tormentas porteñas me lo dejó como un acordeón.

Victoria says

In urban landscapes, sites often have multiple histories. How do we determine which histories are to be remembered and which are to be forgotten? Moreover, how do these choices impact the citizens who engage with urban sites on a daily basis? Brian Ladd's book is a fruitful meditation on these questions. Ladd recounts the histories of several of Berlin's high-profile public sites from the medieval period through reunification. While each site has a unique trajectory and ultimate fate, what shines through in each case is Ladd's thesis that public sites serve as loci upon which discourse over what it means to be an urban citizen and, moreover, a national citizen, are centered.

My only major complaint about the book is that it is now dated. Written in 1997, not long after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the book seems chiefly concerned with how citizens of Berlin and Germany will negotiate their identities in the wake of Communism. He is ultimately skeptical that Germany will ever be able to come to terms with its past. I would be curious to see how Ladd would treat certain sites built after his book was published (like Potsdamer Platz), particularly in light of Germany's dominance of the EU. Nonetheless, I would recommend this book to anyone interested in German history, memory, or urban planning, particularly if they are interested in seeing how those fields can be used in conjunction with one another. I would also recommend the book to those wanting to see how a narrative can be constructed from creative non-archival sources, such as street signs and tourist site guestbooks. Finally, I would even recommend Ladd's book as simple pleasure reading; his mode of storytelling is so compelling that the book is a pleasure to read.

Earl Adams says

A fascinating look at the evolving Berlin landscape. While *The Ghosts of Berlin* is nearly 20 years old, it's still largely relevant. Berlin-lovers, residents and visitors will find some thought provoking nuggets here.

Melanie says

This book was a really interesting complement to what I already know about Germany and German culture. Just today, there was a news article on a controversy about tearing down an apartment building. Even more than 10 years after it was published, this book is still very relevant. I only wish it would be translated into German, as I have some friends who would be interested, but don't read English on a high level.

Kayleigh says

This was an almost perfect book for me to read on a trip to Berlin. I spend all my time in foreign cities walking around looking at buildings and wondering what their stories are, and this is a perfect set of some answers for a particular strange city. It was engaging, informative, and made my whole trip more meaningful. My only wish is that it could be written again in the current decade.
