



# Bridges

## Lessons of Vietnam



### “Tear Down This Wall!” (Twenty Years Later)

*By Aby Stoner*

One of the most influential and symbolic events of the late twentieth century occurred twenty years ago with the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. This Wall, built in the morning hours of August 13, 1961, would divide East and West Germany for nearly three decades. Its destruction--which took place as instantaneously as did its construction--was celebrated around the world.

At the end of WWII, Germany and its capital city of Berlin were divided into occupation zones controlled by the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. Although eventual reunification had been planned, the relationship between the once Allied Powers turned Germany into a “West vs. East”--or “Democracy vs. Communism” confrontation for control. In 1949, the sectors of Germany occupied by the U.S., Great Britain, and France were unified into West Germany while the Soviet sector became East Germany. The same unification process created a divided East and West Berlin as well. Because Berlin was surrounded by the Soviet occupied sector, West Berlin became an island of democracy in the middle of a communist East German sea.

Within short order, living conditions within West Germany markedly improved as those in East Germany correspondingly deteriorated, prompting a mass emigration from East Berlin into West Berlin (and on to West Germany). As the loss by 1961 of 2.5 million its citizens through emigration did not speak well for the communist system, East Germany, with Soviet approval, decided to end it. As easy access to West Berlin was encouraging emigration, East Germany decided to build a wall, making its citizens prisoners in their own country.

In the early morning hours of August 13, 1961, construction of the Berlin Wall began. Four versions of the 100 mile wall were built to prevent those in the East from escaping. Upon awakening that morning, East Berliners were shocked to see the “prison” walls that had gone up overnight. That shock became international. The side of the Wall on which Berliners went to sleep the night of August 12 determined their freedoms--or lack thereof--for the next 28 years.



*Artwork by Lizz Alfano*

The fall of the Berlin Wall occurred nearly as quickly as it rose. On June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan, during a speech delivered at the Brandenburg Gate, challenged the Soviet Union’s leader, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, by saying, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” The stage had been set for its downfall. On November 9, 1989, announcements were made by East German government officials stating permanent reunification between the two Germanys was possible. Again, there was international shock. Were the borders really to be opened? As East Germans tentatively approached their prison walls, they found the guards manning them allowed them to cross. The city was very quickly inundated with residents from both sides of the Wall. Celebrations erupted as people hugged, cried, kissed, sang, and cheered. The two Germanys were reunited on October 3, 1990.

As the Wall collapsed, smashed into millions of small pieces by Berliners who once again were a united people, it also marked the collapse of the Soviet Union. This physical barrier, which had constrained the residents of East Berlin for decades, ultimately proved incapable of containing the spirit of democracy.



### LOV Brings History to Life!

*By Reid Baumann*

As soon as I opened the web page ([mhs.wcpss.net/academics/poling/index.htm](http://mhs.wcpss.net/academics/poling/index.htm)), I found myself greeted by the smiling faces of Mrs. Poling’s students. It was obvious to me the students in the *Lessons of Vietnam* class were not only taking part in something quite amazing, but they were having fun at the same time! There are *Bridges* Newsletters dating back to 2000 on this website, as well as a lot of information about the Millbrook High School *LOV* curriculum. This provides a further testimonial as to the amazing impact this class has had on people’s lives both inside and out of Wake County.

I was perusing the 2002 *Bridges* Holiday Edition, and my eye was drawn to the article, *A Veteran’s Reflection on Veteran’s Day*. This article was written by a Veteran Link named Tom Dingbaum. It was an article that was filled with emotion, particularly regarding his discussion of his first and only visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It was when he remembered the lives of those who had perished, those

who had been his closest and dearest friends, he broke down and cried. I, too, felt moved by the words he spoke and by the recollection of his long stay at Walter Reed Hospital. I personally felt his confusion and frustration over his fellow soldiers not being respected for their sacrifices back home. It was what he found in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial that touched me most of all. He believed it was a fitting remembrance of those who died during the war. He felt the Memorial itself healed inner emotional wounds. This Memorial also has helped to resolve differences in America and the way the public feels about the war. Hearing words like this from a veteran really helped me gain a better understanding about the impact this conflict had upon the men who served.

By sharing their experiences, veterans enable me, generations after the Vietnam War, to walk for a moment in their shoes. What better way to learn history than from those who have lived it?





# President Obama's *State of the Union* Address: Where Do You Stand?

By Emily Bower

After much anticipation and speculation on what was to be said, America tuned in to hear President Obama deliver his first *State of the Union Address* on January 27. *LOV/RIR* students weighed in with their thoughts and opinions on the proposals and plans that were put on the table and also how well the President conveyed his agenda.

The topic of economic clean-up arose multiple times throughout President Obama's speech. Whether through a new employment bill or by seeking new markets, it is clear the President is taking a broad approach in trying to deal with the current economic crisis. Senior Lizz Alfano agreed with President Obama's decision to tax the banks which previously had been bailed out by the American public, suggesting, "It's money that needs to go towards better use. It could decrease the deficit or go back to the people." Sara Perez shared a similar opinion: "He is trying to hire more people, and two million people have jobs that otherwise would not." However, some students held differing opinions. Tessa Walters likes the sound of the ideas the President has proposed, yet wonders how practical they will be to implement. And some of the students disagree completely. "He dances around the tough topics, and he seems to think he has already solved it," said Beth Schumacher, wrapping up the widely varying opinions the class held on his economic policies.

Healthcare was a touchy topic. The majority of our class had expressed disagreement with the controversial proposal. Gillian Cronin and Elizabeth Klein shared similar views. "I don't believe in redistributing wealth or quantity versus quality in our healthcare system. More people would have care, but it would be of poorer quality," stated Gillian. Elizabeth believes that "all Americans should be able to have the freedom to choose their health care plans."

On the opposite end of that argument stands Eddie Somers: "People need a more affordable healthcare program. All patients need care." Danny Mizerk expressed a similar viewpoint, indicating agreement, but making it clear he believes it "will be difficult because of our hurting economy."

Even more students seem stuck in the middle of a terrible tug-of-war between a policy which has provided for them their entire lives and a new policy proposing care for every citizen. Alysa Citero does not understand how the President is going to reform healthcare. She stated that she "wants to believe it's possible," but just does not have faith. And Ryan Fordice concluded that he "needs more information

to better understand," before he makes his decision on whether or not he supports the healthcare proposal.

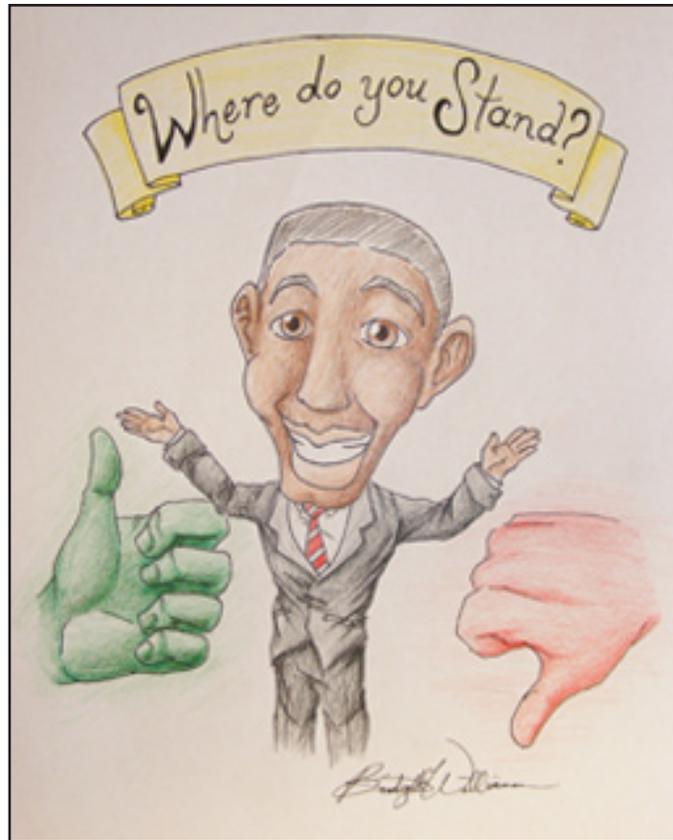
Education struck a major chord with the students in the class. As seniors this year, we are anxiously awaiting decisions from colleges, all the while wondering how we will manage to cover the rising costs of education. Some students questioned the policies the President put forth, while others favored the ten thousand dollar grants and debt forgiveness discussed. Savannah Core feels while loan forgiveness sounds like a good idea, President Obama "did not explain it well enough." Tyler Floyd sits on the fence with his statement, "If he's able to make it happen, his education plan sounds great." And Natalie Morgan finds that she agrees with the President's efforts saying that "education is a crucial part of a strong country and it should be easier to pay for."

The fight over clean energy was an issue raised during the President's *State of the Union* speech. Elizabeth Plummer and Justin Abbott support the idea of America leading the way in a switch to clean energy. "I agree that we need clean and safe alternatives for energy. The United States should be the nation to lead the clean energy economy," said Elizabeth. Justin echoed her when he stated that he agrees with the President: "The United States should be energy efficient, so that we can lead the global economy."

The subject of foreign policy was seemingly absent from the President's speech. One of the biggest topics in this category, the Iranian nuclear threat, was given only a few lines. Even more surprising, there was nothing said about that country's sponsorship of terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. Little detail was given regarding the current status of U.S. military efforts in these two countries.

Overall, our class had varying opinions and views on the issues discussed. Hunter Davis felt President Obama delivered the speech well, but thought "it was filled with glittering generalities." Colby Cook said, "The President needs to focus more on what he *can* do, rather than what he has already done." And some members of our *LOV/RIR* class primarily had their families in mind. Karisan Lane commented, "President Obama has a lot of good ideas about the economy, healthcare, and education, but I am very worried about the cost of everything and how it will affect middle class families."

Whether you agree, disagree, or still want to know more, hopefully you were able to identify with some of the ideas and opinions that were expressed in our class. Where do *you* stand?



Artwork by Bridgette Williamson





