

The Berlin Wall



Kennedy visited Berlin to express his solidarity with the West Germans.

“Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in, to prevent them from leaving us.”

“All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words ‘Ich bin ein Berliner.’” (I am a Berliner)



Task: Why does Kennedy mean when he says “As a free man...I am a Berliner”?



Activity: ‘Ich bin ein Berliner’ but I am also a Communist!

- **Directions--Task#1:** Read Kennedy’s famous ‘Ich bin ein Berliner’ speech. Answer these questions:
 - 1) How does Kennedy portray the USSR and communists? Select examples to support your answer.
 - 2) According to Kennedy, what does the wall represent?
 - 3) Towards the end of the speech, what does Kennedy call for?
- **Task#2:** Your next task will be challenging because you will need to place yourself in someone else’s shoes! In 200 words, write a speech in response to Kennedy’s speech, from the perspective of Khrushchev! Argue why the wall must remain and boast about the benefits of Communist rule. Finally, attack Western democracy and the capitalistic system. Use metaphors and other figures of speech to bring your speech to life!



John F. Kennedy
"Ich bin ein Berliner"

In June of 1963, President John F. Kennedy embarked on a visit to five Western European nations for the purpose of spreading good will and building unity among America's allies.

His first stop was Germany, a nation that less than 20 years before had been engaged in a quest for world conquest under the dictatorship of Hitler. Following Germany's defeat in the Second World War, the country had been divided in half, with East Germany under Soviet control and West Germany becoming a democratic nation.

East-West Germany soon became the focus of growing political tensions between the two new superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. Berlin, former capital of Hitler's Reich, became the political hot spot in this new 'cold' war. Although the city was located in East Germany, Berlin itself was divided, with East Berlin under Soviet control and West Berlin under American, English and French jurisdiction.

In 1948, the Soviets conducted a temporary blockade of West Berlin's railroads, highways and waterways. For the next eleven months, the U.S. and Britain conducted a massive airlift, supplying nearly two million tons of food, coal and industrial supplies to the besieged people.

In 1961, East German authorities began construction of a 12 foot high wall which would eventually stretch for 100 miles around the perimeter of West Berlin, preventing anyone from crossing to the West and to freedom. (Nearly 200 persons would be killed trying to pass over or dig under the wall.)

President Kennedy arrived in Berlin on June 26, 1963, following appearances in Bonn, Cologne and Frankfurt, where he had given speeches to huge, wildly cheering crowds. In Berlin, an immense crowd gathered in the Rudolph Wilde Platz near the Berlin Wall to listen to the President who delivered this memorable speech above all the noise, concluding with the now famous ending.

I am proud to come to this city as the guest of your distinguished Mayor, who has symbolized throughout the world the fighting spirit of West Berlin. And I am proud to visit the Federal Republic with your distinguished Chancellor who for so many years has committed Germany to democracy and freedom and progress, and to come here in the company of my fellow American, General Clay, who has been in this city during its great moments of crisis and will come again if ever needed.

Two thousand years ago the proudest boast was "civis Romanus sum." Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is "Ich bin ein Berliner."

I appreciate my interpreter translating my German!

There are many people in the world who really don't understand, or say they don't, what is the great issue between the free world and the Communist world. Let them come to Berlin. There are some who say that communism is the wave of the future. Let them come to Berlin. And there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere we can work with the Communists. Let them come to Berlin. And there are even a few who say that it is true that communism is an evil system, but it permits us to make economic progress. Lass' sie nach Berlin kommen. Let them come to Berlin.

Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in, to prevent them from leaving us. I want to say, on behalf of my countrymen, who live many miles away on the other side of the Atlantic, who are far distant from you, that they take the greatest pride that they have been able to share with you, even from a distance, the story of the last 18 years. I know of no town, no city, that has been besieged for 18 years that still lives with the vitality and the force, and the hope and the determination of the city of West Berlin. While the wall is the most obvious and vivid demonstration of the failures of the Communist system, for all the world to see, we take no satisfaction in it, for it is, as your Mayor has said, an offense not only against history but an offense against humanity, separating families, dividing husbands and wives and brothers and sisters, and dividing a people who wish to be joined together.

What is true of this city is true of Germany--real, lasting peace in Europe can never be assured as long as one German out of four is denied the elementary right of free men, and that is to make a free choice. In 18 years of peace and good faith, this generation of Germans has earned the right to be free, including the right to unite their families and their nation in lasting peace, with good will to all people. You live in a defended island of freedom, but your life is part of the main. So let me ask you as I close, to lift your eyes beyond the dangers of today, to the hopes of tomorrow, beyond the freedom merely of this city of Berlin, or your country of Germany, to the advance of freedom everywhere, beyond the wall to the day of peace with justice, beyond yourselves and ourselves to all mankind.

Freedom is indivisible, and when one man is enslaved, all are not free. When all are free, then we can look forward to that day when this city will be joined as one and this country and this great Continent of Europe in a peaceful and hopeful globe. When that day finally comes, as it will, the people of West Berlin can take sober satisfaction in the fact that they were in the front lines for almost two decades.

All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words "Ich bin ein Berliner."

President John F. Kennedy - June 26, 1963