



Transcript

At the Berlin Wall

Pres. John F. Kennedy

June 26, 1963

Two thousand years ago... [Kennedy is interrupted by applause.] 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!” [Crowd roars.]

There are many people in the world who really don't understand—or say they don't—what is the greatest issue between the free world and Communist world. Let them come to Berlin! [Applause.]

There are some who say that “communism is the wave of the future.” Let them come to Berlin! [Applause.] And there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere, “we can work with the Communists.” Let them come to Berlin! [Applause and cheers.]

And there are even a few who say “yes, that it's true, that communism is an evil system, but it permits us to make economic progress.” Lass' sie nach Berlin en kommen! Let them come to Berlin! [Great applause and roaring cheers.]

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! [Crowd roars, and Kennedy pauses because of difficulty speaking over the din of the crowd.]

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 eighteen years.

I know of no town, no city, that has been besieged for eighteen 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, all the world can see, and we take no satisfaction in it. For it is an offense not only

against humanity, separating families, dividing husbands and wives and brothers and sisters and dividing a people who wished to be joined together! [Cheers and applause.]

What is true of this city is true to 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. [Cheers.]

Freedom has many difficulties,
and democracy is not perfect
But we have never had to put a wall
up to keep our people in!

In eighteen 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 goodwill to all people. [Cheers and sustained applause.]

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 and all 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, no man is free. When all are free, then we 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!" [Sustained applause, chanting and cheers.]