

# RONALD REAGAN'S SPEECH AT THE BERLIN WALL

*June 12, 1987*

Twenty-four years ago, President John F. Kennedy visited Berlin, speaking to the people of this city and the world at the City Hall. Well, since then two other presidents have come, each in his turn, to Berlin. And today I, myself, make my second visit to your city.

5 We come to Berlin, we American presidents, because it's our duty to speak, in this place, of freedom. But I must confess, we're drawn here by other things as well: by the feeling of history in this city, more than 500 years older than our own nation; by the beauty of the Grunewald and the Tiergarten; most of all, by your courage and determination. Perhaps the composer Paul Lincke understood something about American presidents. You see, like so many presidents before me, I come here today because wherever I go, whatever I do: Ich  
10 hab noch einen Koffer in Berlin. [I still have a suitcase in Berlin.]

Our gathering today is being broadcast throughout Western Europe and North America. I understand that it is being seen and heard as well in the East. To those listening throughout Eastern Europe, a special word: Although I cannot be with you, I address my remarks to you just as surely as to those standing here before me. For I join you, as I join your fellow  
15 countrymen in the West, in this firm, this unalterable belief: Es gibt nur ein Berlin. [There is only one Berlin.]

Behind me stands a wall that encircles the free sectors of this city, part of a vast system of barriers that divides the entire continent of Europe. From the Baltic, south, those barriers cut across Germany in a gash of barbed wire, concrete, dog runs, and guard towers. Farther  
20 south, there may be no visible, no obvious wall. But there remain armed guards and checkpoints all the same--still a restriction on the right to travel, still an instrument to impose upon ordinary men and women the will of a totalitarian state. Yet it is here in Berlin where the wall emerges most clearly; here, cutting across your city, where the news photo and the television screen have imprinted this brutal division of a continent upon the mind of  
25 the world. Standing before the Brandenburg Gate, every man is a German, separated from his fellow men. Every man is a Berliner, forced to look upon a scar.

President von Weizsacker has said, "The German question is open as long as the Brandenburg Gate is closed." Today I say: As long as the gate is closed, as long as this scar of a wall is permitted to stand, it is not the German question alone that remains open, but the  
30 question of freedom for all mankind. Yet I do not come here to lament. For I find in Berlin a message of hope, even in the shadow of this wall, a message of triumph.

In this season of spring in 1945, the people of Berlin emerged from their air-raid shelters to find devastation. Thousands of miles away, the people of the United States reached out to help. And in 1947 Secretary of State--as you've been told--George Marshall announced the  
35 creation of what would become known as the Marshall Plan. Speaking precisely 40 years ago this month, he said: "Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos."

In the Reichstag a few moments ago, I saw a display commemorating this 40th anniversary of the Marshall Plan. I was struck by the sign on a burnt-out, gutted structure that was being  
40 rebuilt. I understand that Berliners of my own generation can remember seeing signs like it dotted throughout the western sectors of the city. The sign read simply: "The Marshall Plan

is helping here to strengthen the free world." A strong, free world in the West, that dream became real. Japan rose from ruin to become an economic giant. Italy, France, Belgium-- virtually every nation in Western Europe saw political and economic rebirth; the European Community was founded.

- 5 In West Germany and here in Berlin, there took place an economic miracle, the  
Wirtschaftswunder. Adenauer, Erhard, Reuter, and other leaders understood the practical  
importance of liberty--that just as truth can flourish only when the journalist is given  
freedom of speech, so prosperity can come about only when the farmer and businessman  
enjoy economic freedom. The German leaders reduced tariffs, expanded free trade, lowered  
10 taxes. From 1950 to 1960 alone, the standard of living in West Germany and Berlin doubled.

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- 15 In the 1950s, Khrushchev predicted: "We will bury you." But in the West today, we see a  
free world that has achieved a level of prosperity and well-being unprecedented in all  
human history. In the Communist world, we see failure, technological backwardness,  
declining standards of health, even want of the most basic kind--too little food. Even today,  
the Soviet Union still cannot feed itself. After these four decades, then, there stands before  
the entire world one great and inescapable conclusion: Freedom leads to prosperity.  
Freedom replaces the ancient hatreds among the nations with comity and peace. Freedom is  
the victor.

- 20 And now the Soviets themselves may, in a limited way, be coming to understand the  
importance of freedom. We hear much from Moscow about a new policy of reform and  
openness. Some political prisoners have been released. Certain foreign news broadcasts are  
no longer being jammed. Some economic enterprises have been permitted to operate with  
greater freedom from state control.

- 25 Are these the beginnings of profound changes in the Soviet state? Or are they token  
gestures, intended to raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system  
without changing it? We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and  
security go together, that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of  
world peace. There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would  
30 advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace.

General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union  
and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open  
this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!

- 35 I understand the fear of war and the pain of division that afflict this continent-- and I pledge  
to you my country's efforts to help overcome these burdens. To be sure, we in the West  
must resist Soviet expansion. So we must maintain defenses of unassailable strength. Yet we  
seek peace; so we must strive to reduce arms on both sides.

- I invite Mr. Gorbachev: Let us work to bring the Eastern and Western parts of the city closer  
together, so that all the inhabitants of all Berlin can enjoy the benefits that come with life in  
40 one of the great cities of the world.

To open Berlin still further to all Europe, East and West, let us expand the vital air access to this city, finding ways of making commercial air service to Berlin more convenient, more comfortable, and more economical. We look to the day when West Berlin can become one of the chief aviation hubs in all central Europe.

- 5 As I looked out a moment ago from the Reichstag, that embodiment of German unity, I noticed words crudely spray-painted upon the wall, perhaps by a young Berliner: "This wall will fall. Beliefs become reality." Yes, across Europe, this wall will fall. For it cannot withstand faith; it cannot withstand truth. The wall cannot withstand freedom.

- 10 And I would like, before I close, to say one word. I have read, and I have been questioned since I've been here about certain demonstrations against my coming. And I would like to say just one thing, and to those who demonstrate so. I wonder if they have ever asked themselves that if they should have the kind of government they apparently seek, no one would ever be able to do what they're doing again.

Thank you and God bless you all.