

# Ich Bin Ein Berliner



**Date** ★ June 26, 1963

**Place** ★ West Berlin, West Germany (surrounded by East Germany)

**Type of Source** ★ Speech

**Author** ★ President John F. Kennedy

**Context** ★ West Berlin, the areas of the city occupied by the United States, Britain, and France, had been an easy means of escape from Communist East Germany. In August 1961, the Soviet Union and East Germany built a 96-mile wall around the city to prevent escapes, provoking a dangerous crisis that nearly led to a war. By 1963 the crisis was over, but the Berlin Wall remained a symbol of Communist oppression and the division of Europe. President Kennedy visited West Berlin to remind the Germans that the United States would not abandon its commitments to defend them against the Soviets.

**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—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—who has been in this city during its great moments of crisis and will come again if ever needed.

Two thousand years ago—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—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.**

## Mayor

*Willy Brandt, who had been Mayor of West Berlin during the building of the Wall (and had criticized the U.S. for not stopping the construction). Six years later, he was elected Chancellor of West Germany and in 1971 he won the Nobel Peace Prize.*

## Federal Republic

*The Federal Republic of Germany was the official name of West Germany. It is the official name of (united) Germany today as well.*

## Chancellor

*Konrad Adenauer, who was largely responsible for establishing democracy in West Germany after World War II.*

## General Clay

*Lucius Clay, retired, former military governor of American-occupied Germany. He organized the Berlin Airlift in 1948–1949. Clay had also been sent to Berlin in 1961 as a special representative and had ordered U.S. forces to stand their ground in defense of the city.*

## civis Romanus sum

*Latin: I am a Roman citizen.*

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—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 look—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—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."

**Ich bin ein Berliner.**

*German: I am a Berliner. The sentence literally translates as "I am a pastry [called a Berliner]," although its intended meaning was perfectly clear to the Germans.*

**Lass' sie nach Berlin kommen.**

*German: Let them come to Berlin.*

**besieged**

*surrounded by enemy forces*

**vitality**

*liveliness*