

Zwei Mauern: A rhetorical analysis of U.S. and Soviet internal and external communication surrounding the construction of the Berlin Wall

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“The suspicion that individuals in Germany are in a frightening way interchangeable cannot be discarded at the border. An awareness of individual plasticity in this country doesn’t stop at the Wall; and sooner or later, one approaches it in the first person: What would I have become, how would I think, how would I look, *if?*”

Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*

Who do we call the enemy?

The enemy is poverty

And the Wall keeps out the enemy

And we build the Wall to keep us free

That’s why we build the Wall

We build the Wall to keep us free.

Anaïs Mitchell, “Why We Build the Wall,” *Hadestown*

“The world is not divided between East and West. You are American, I am Iranian, we don’t know each other, but we talk together and we understand each other perfectly. The difference between you and your government is much bigger than the difference between you and me. And the difference between me and my government is much bigger than the difference between me and you. And our governments are very much the same.”

Marjane Satrapi (2005), bestselling author of *Persepolis*

Zusammenfassung.

Throughout this undergraduate senior honors thesis, I analyze the rhetorical case study of the construction of the Berlin Wall. Using primary archival material from the Kennedy administration in the United States and the Khrushchev/Ulbricht regimes in the Soviet Union and German Democratic Republic, respectively, I trace the dichotomy of private and public rhetoric produced by administrations and government officials about the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. This discourse demonstrates a similarity between the private, classified rhetoric of the United States and the Soviet Union about the Berlin Wall and the Berlin situation of the Cold War. Using the metric of *different and opposite*, I establish that the United States and Soviet Union possessed opposing ideologies, economic practices, and governmental systems during the Cold War, and their respective occupation in West and East Germany served as an extension of these different and opposite ideas. However, I argue that the rhetoric of the United States and the Soviet Union—sourced from declassified primary source material and secondary source accounts—is more similar than dissimilar, and that the physical Berlin Wall itself represents the *different and opposite* rhetorical positioning stereotypically attributed to the rhetorical attitudes of the two opposing superpowers at the helm of the Cold War. The thesis reviews the physical structure of the Berlin Wall, classified internal communication of the United States and Soviet Union, public-facing addresses by Lyndon Johnson, Nikita Khrushchev, Walter Ulbricht, and Willy Brandt, and the contemporary memorialization of the Berlin Wall in the city of Berlin. In doing so, I complicate the narrative of the traditional *different and opposite* West/East dichotomy of the Berlin Wall and the Cold War.

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Inhaltsverzeichnis.

<i>Zusammenfassung</i>	2
<i>Danksagungen</i>	3
<i>Inhaltsverzeichnis.</i>	4
<i>Einleitung</i>	5
<i>Historischer Zusammenhang.</i>	10
<i>Ausschlussklausel</i>	13
<i>Methodik.</i>	14
<i>Teil I. Struktur der Mauer.</i>	16
<i>Teil II. West.</i>	25
II.i WEST, GEHEIM	27
II.ii. WEST, ÖFFENTLICH	40
II.iii. BRANDT und BERLIN: DIE AUSNAHME	49
<i>Teil III. Ost.</i>	53
III.i. EAST, GEHEIM.....	56
III.ii. EAST, ÖFFENTLICH.....	64
<i>Abschluss</i>	74
<i>Zitierte Werke</i>	79

Einleitung.

“I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me...”

—*then-candidate, now-President Donald Trump in his announcement for the candidacy of President of the United States of America on June 16, 2015, speaking on his plans to fortify the U.S./Mexico border*

The rhetorical construction of a wall between two peoples has served as an age-old adage of division. Walls serve as monuments to the achievements of humans in communities and coalitions, or as defensive bulwarks to protect one civilization from a perceived barbaric other.

A twoness has always existed in our rhetorical understanding of walls. For one side of the wall, protection is enabled—a people can be surrounded and protected by a wall. The other side of the wall is its status as a barrier. Another people—or the same people that wall is intended to protect—face significant barriers upon their travel, work, life, relationships, and/or leisure, because of the existence of the wall. These modern barriers, such as the West Bank barrier in Jerusalem, or the U.S./Mexico border wall referenced in this introduction’s epigraph, exemplify this rhetorical twoness: they can best be understood as not just one wall, but two. Each side of each wall represents a different rhetorical perspective: barrier, or protection. Safety, or threat. Exclusion—or fortification.

The Berlin Wall, first constructed on August 13, 1961, split the German capital of Berlin down the middle, dividing three Western-occupied zones from the Eastern Soviet-occupied zone. The Berlin Wall as a literal form of division serves its own rhetorical purpose to further the German narrative of separation (*Trennung*) and its destruction in 1989 serves as a candid physical marker of the process of reunification (*Wiedervereinigung*) between the two republics. However, scholarship revolving around the rhetoric and materiality of the Berlin Wall is limited

to the rhetorical instance of its destruction as the first marker of German reunification. The case study of the “Fall of the Berlin Wall” is rhetorically well-analyzed.¹ What is missing is a rhetorical understanding of the circumstances of the Wall’s construction, both from an American and Soviet perspective.

Carole Blair, contemporary scholar of the rhetoric of physical places and memorial sites, argues that rhetoric can manifest not only in the written and spoken word, but also in a material sense. Texts, according to Blair, can be explicitly physical instead of oral or written, and still constitute “rhetoric.” This rhetoric of materiality, Blair writes:

...seem useful to consider, because they summon attention to their assiduous materiality.

These are structures, for the most part, that remain in our perceptual fields as long as we are nearby. They do not fall into silence like oral speech, nor are they (in most cases) “put away” like the writings that we read and then store in bookshelves out of our way.

Because of their recalcitrant “presentness,” I believe memorials are particularly revealing for an inquiry into rhetoric’s materiality. (Blair 17)

The Berlin Wall, as a contemporary memorial, fits easily into Blair’s analysis in her piece “Contemporary U.S. sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality.” I argue that the Wall as it stood in a non-memorializing state (as in, when it served as a real state border, and especially as it was constructed) also serves as a pertinent example of rhetoric, symbolizing the Cold War, the division and separation between a people, and the two warring economic-political systems of capitalism and communism.

¹ Julia Sonnevend’s *Stories without Borders: The Berlin Wall and the Making of a Global Iconic Event* provides one such thorough rhetorical analysis on the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which I highly recommend.

Some United States-based historians paint a picture of opposites when creating a narrative of the Berlin Wall and its construction, standing, and destruction. East and West are meant to be understood as rhetorical opposites, antitheses of one another. Remembrances of the Cold War prove this rhetorical positioning: a simple Google search reveals Wikipedia describes the Cold War as “a period of global geopolitical rivalry between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR) and their respective allies, the capitalist Western Bloc and communist Eastern Bloc,” immediately creating a dichotomy of *different and opposite* political, ideological, and economic viewpoints (Wikipedia). Encyclopedic literature frames the Cold War as a conflict of twoness and opposites as well, naming it as “the open yet restricted rivalry” between the United States and the Soviet Union (Britannica). As the instrument which birthed the Berlin Wall, the Cold War exemplifies the antithetical rhetorical positioning which the United States and Soviet Union relied on to market the Wall and the War as a battle between opposite economic ideologies and against fascism.

Additionally, some history classes in the United States rely on a curriculum which emphasizes and enhances the metaphoric and literal Iron Curtain dividing “competing powerbrokers,” relying on the rhetoric of different and opposite to frame the historical narrative of the Cold War and the Berlin Wall (Wende Museum). One example of a primary school curriculum adapted around the Berlin Wall as a case study of the Berlin Wall by the Wende Museum and the University of California, Los Angeles argues for the relation of “the construction of the Berlin Wall by the East German regime to the East-West tensions of the Cold War” (Wende Museum). Using these examples from history classes and curriculum, I establish that the education standards of the United States recognize the different and opposite rhetorical positioning of the Cold War, painting two sides—an East and a West—fundamentally opposite

and against one another. As such, history also assigns the blame of the Berlin Wall to the Eastern side of this conflict, as the curriculum above shows in its learning objectives for students highlighting the East German responsibility for the Wall.

What history does not attest as having two *different and opposite* sides is the Berlin Wall itself. The rhetorical twoness of walls ensures that indeed, the Berlin Wall had a second side, which can even mirror the rhetorical positioning of the Cold War itself: an Eastern front and a Western front. But the mere nomenclature of the Berlin Wall itself suggests just one wall, meant to be remembered by photos of a sleek, smooth cement wall littered with graffiti.

I argue that the Berlin Wall was not just one Wall, as its nomenclature and representation in mass culture suggests, but instead takes shape as a rhetorical device of its own. The singular “Wall” is indeed two walls: a literal and rhetorical. Further, I argue that the rhetoric surrounding the Berlin Wall in the earliest days of its construction—denouncing, necessitating, decrying, or requiring it—is more similar than dissimilar. Contrary to historical representation of the “West” and the “East” occupying two different and opposite rhetorical positions, they instead utilize the same strategies and parrot many of the same internal talking points. Instead, *the Wall itself* is what occupies the “different and opposite” rhetorical positioning; the Berlin Wall is not one, but two Walls, physically, mentally, and geopolitically. I will examine the binaries and dichotomies of repeated twoness surrounding the Berlin Wall: interior and exterior; private and public; Communist and Capitalist; East and West.

In my thesis, I will illustrate these binaries by examining American and Soviet political rhetoric produced on and in the months near August 13, 1961. Utilizing federal archives of declassified internal communications of the governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, I will analyze the similarities and differences in both the political communication itself

and its rhetorical strategies and features. I will then compare this internal communication to the external, publicly rehearsed rhetoric of American and Soviet politicians surrounding the construction of the Berlin Wall. These rhetorical examinations will display my findings that the Berlin Wall itself, not the “West” and “East” rhetorical positionings of the powers in the region, is, in and of itself, a twoness.

My analysis of the Berlin Wall, both as a physical example of the material form of rhetoric, and as a summation of the language and communication of two governments representing two “sides” of a much larger conflict, helps to fill the gap of storytelling and understanding surrounding Berlin’s role in the Cold War. The construction of the Berlin Wall reveals important dichotomies and foregrounds the rhetoric of the Wall for the twenty-eight years it stood, and the centuries it will continue to stand in remembrance.

My findings indicate that the mass representation of the Berlin Wall by the media and by popular historian understanding is wrong to paint the Berlin Wall solely as a conflict of opposites. Instead of finding a gross discrepancy between the political language of either the Western or Eastern powers at play, I instead find more similarities than differences. The two sides are not dissimilar: Both forms of government publicly denounced the Berlin Wall (or the need for the development of the Berlin Wall), while privately celebrating its construction. The Wall was developed as its own cultural item and instance of rhetoric necessitating and making the division tangible by both Western and Eastern powers. Neither government had an interest in protecting the people of Berlin—only with protecting their claim to power. Thus, we must reexamine how we view rhetorical arguments about the Cold War and the Berlin Wall as a point of division, not because they aren’t true, but because they neglect to tell the whole story: The Wall was built by both sides.

Historischer Zusammenhang.

ONE WEEK AFTER ADOLF HITLER'S SUICIDE underneath war-stricken Berlin, Karl Dönitz—Hitler's named successor to the Third Reich—signed a document of unconditional surrender, collapsing the Nazi regime. With an authoritarian dictatorship reigning in Germany from Hitler's election to the chancellery in 1933 through his death in April 1945, German civic institutions and instruments of government had been purged, expunged, or otherwise destroyed. Put simply, under the Third Reich, the German state ceased to exist. But Allied powers agreed that a German *nation* and *people* remained, though their government did, and could, not.

Representatives from the United States of America, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and France signed the Berlin Declaration in June 1945, a legal document assuring the four countries would assume supreme authority over Germany. During the Potsdam Conference in July, three of the countries (the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom) further decided the administration of Germany and effectively neutered the government and military. Allied aims were to “demilitarize, denazify, democratize, decentralize, dismantle, and decartel” the previous Nazi regime, and establish a new, democratic nation (Bevans 1210–12).

The German nation was redrawn, then divided; Germany became four occupation zones, which would, with the outbreak of the Cold War eighteen months later, effectively split the nation in half along sociopolitical and economic lines: East, under control of the Soviet Union, and West, under control of the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. These massive powers agreed to also divide the capital, Berlin, splitting the city along the banks of the Spree River.

The overall goal of reintroducing democracy to the German people, remaining as one nation simply occupied by four powers, failed within two years. In 1947, the British and American sectors merged, following a period of elections in 1946 across all four occupied zones, in which it became



Figure 1. A map of Divided Berlin, produced in 1963 by the western Presse- und Informationsamt des Landes Berlin/PIA (@BritishLibrary on X).

apparent through the construction of the Socialist Unity Party and the subsequent demise of the Social Democrats in the East that the Soviet Union would not permit free, multiparty elections (“History of Germany”). To revive the German economy, the American and British sectors extended the American financial aid guaranteed in the Marshall Plan to their sectors, and coined a new currency used in all three Western zones. The Soviets, angry that the economic recovery in the West was not extended to the East, established a complete blockade on West Berlin for eleven months, planning to revitalize their own economy by forcing the Western zones within Berlin to engage in trade with the Soviets. Western powers responded with an airlift program and supplied West Berliners with supplies until the blockade was lifted in May 1949. The French joined the American and British merged zones in April 1949, and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG; *Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) officially ratified a basic form of its constitution in May 1949.

The establishment of the West German federal government, limited though it was, spurred the Soviet Union to similarly hold an election and establish a federal form of government, housed in the Eastern sector of Berlin. The German Democratic Republic (GDR; *Deutsche Demokratische Republik*) ratified a constitution of its own in October 1949. Both republics constitutionally promised a federal parliamentary democracy, with free, fair, multiparty elections.

The emerging difference between the two German republics was first reflected in their economies; with support from the West, the FRG economy experienced the *Wirtschaftswunder*. In the GDR, although the standard of production remained high, no miracle funding poured in from America to stabilize the economy—and the East Germans had to support other states consolidated in the Eastern Bloc and Warsaw Pact. Soviet powers struggled to make the East Germans as profitable as the West Germans in a republic half as large and with one-third as many citizens (“History of Germany”).

Facing increasingly unequal economic and political conditions, three million people fled the GDR, a massive drain on the already-struggling economy. Thousands more were displeased with their living conditions. In Berlin, East Germans could look out their window and see their neighbors in new postwar housing developments produced by a stable economy. Berlin, the last touchpoint between East and West Germany, enjoyed its status as the last living barrier between capitalism and communism. The construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 ended any notions of the Cold War’s peaceful and ambassadorial resolve.

Ausschlussklausel.

As a white USAmerican researcher born decades after the *Mauerfall*, I was not alive while the Berlin Wall stood. German is my second language; I am designated as a non-native fluent speaker (C1). I don't identify myself as ethnically German. My placement in this research is purely from a foreign perspective.

All translations not otherwise credited are my original translations, with assistance and from Dr. Daniel H. Magilow, University of Tennessee.

In January 2024, I studied abroad in Berlin. All the photos of the Wall not otherwise credited are mine; I also collected photos, labels, and didactics from leading DDR and Wall museums. While in Berlin, I visited:

- The DDR Museum, located on the Spree off Karl-Liebknecht Str. in former East Berlin
- The Zeitgeschichtliches Museum in Leipzig, Germany
- The East Side Gallery, located on the Spree off Warschauer Str. in former East Berlin
- The Topography of Terror, located at the site of the former Gestapo headquarters



Figure 2. The author in front of the famous Bruderkuss mural at the East Side Gallery, January 2024.

Methodik.

My methodology for this thesis employs mainly archival research. I sourced primary sources focused on the United States scope from declassified federal archives and publicly available documents from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, the National Security Archive, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of the Historian, and the National Archives. Many of my primary source documents from the Soviet scope came from Berlin museums and online resources, the most helpful being *Chronik der Mauer*. I also studied public speeches from prominent political actors in both the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as politicians in West and East Germany and West and East Berlin. Archival newspaper articles and headlines were analyzed. I utilized secondary sources, including Frederick Kempe's wonderful report of Berlin in 1961, to find biographical information about prominent political actors and timelines of the Berlin Wall.

I am strictly limiting my discussion to the rhetoric produced by the United States, Soviet Union, and West/East Germany, excluding the remaining two massive military powers occupying Germany at the time, the United Kingdom and France. My undergraduate thesis does not have the space available to examine the French and British involvement. For more information on the French and British in the "Berlin problem," please see Creswell and Trachtenberg (2003) and R. Smith (2021), respectively. I hope that a focused examination of the United States and the Soviet Union creates a visible sense of "twoness," though I recognize that my positionality as a United States researcher certainly contributes to my framing and research.

I will additionally only focus on the *construction* of the Berlin Wall, the first round of which occurred in 1961, starting in August. Though the Berlin Wall was reconstructed at least four times into the 1970s, I focus on the first construction of the Wall only. Most of my

rhetorical documents are sourced from 1961, with select few exceptions in the early 1960s. I highly recommend Julia Sonnevend's book, *Stories without Borders: The Berlin Wall and the Making of a Global Iconic Event*, for a thorough rhetorical analysis on the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. I have made extensive reference to Sonnevend's work throughout this thesis, and I drew my inspiration for arguing that the Berlin Wall is indeed two walls from her writing.

Teil I. Struktur der Mauer.

“Two huge West German tourist buses just drove by. Yes, we’ve become Berlin’s number-one tourist attraction. Oh how gladly we’d just be ignored! How gladly we’d turn back the wheels of time and leave things the way they were!”

—Regine Hildebrant, resident of Bernauer Straße 44 on the East side of the Wall, writing in her diary in October 1961 (Kempe 394)

AS CONSTRUCTION ON THE WALL BEGAN, its primitive forms were simple enough to jump over. On August 13, 1961, well-guarded by East German *Grenzpolizei*, bricklaying began to supplant the barbed wire acknowledging the border on the inner boundaries of the city. The exterior boundary of West Berlin, bordering the countryside of the DDR, remained closed in by barbed wire—that had been completed when East Germany became sealed off in 1952. The interior, splitting East Berlin from West Berlin, became a much more secure crossing point whose defenses would be significantly updated to create four distinct generations of the Wall in the twenty-eight years the Wall stood (Sonnevend 41). But the term *wall* is a misnomer. In no place was the border between East and West Berlin as simple as a wall.

The prelude of the Berlin Wall, the one famously constructed “overnight” at 1:00 AM on August 13, 1961, started as a chain of human officers restricting travel out of East Berlin as the more laborious task of the constructed barrier underwent completion (Kempe 326). Police forces, including the special establishment of the *Volkspolizei* (“Vopos,” the People’s Army), called the *Grenzpolizei*—established with the specific aim of guarding the interior border—were deployed in precise numbers at each of the eighty-one crossing points (Kempe 326, 327). Officers would stand guard at the checkpoints to ensure no reckless attempts at escape could be made.

fortified concrete barrier, topped with concrete sewage pipes to deter climbers (Sonnevend 38).

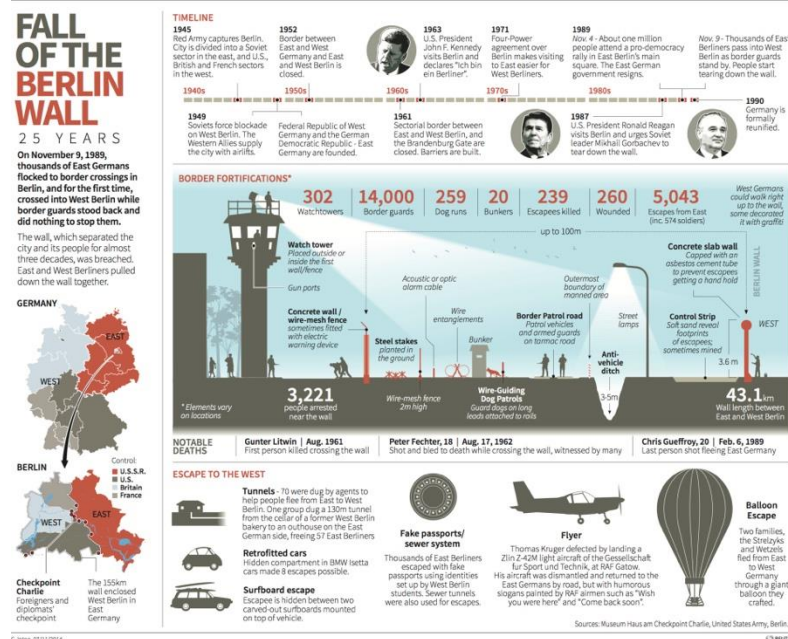


Figure 4. Describing the timeline and interior fortifications of the Wall, as well as some escape methods (Inton 2014, for Reuters).

“not one but two walls” (Sonnevend 41), both topped with rounded, slick concrete designed to make climbing incredibly difficult. The Wall was heavily patrolled and guarded, with border towers watching over large sections at a time. The interior section of the Wall, called the “Death Strip,” consisted of a “myriad of obstacles” (Sonnevend 41): a pit of sand, designed to easily show guards the footsteps of escapees; several lower fences of barbed wire and spikes, to prevent escapees from climbing the exterior walls and jumping into the “death strip;” a ditch to prevent vehicular escape; lights to illuminate the entire area; and electric fences (“Aufbau der Grenzanlagen”).² Grenzpolizei were under orders from Erich Honecker, Politbüro Security

² “Betonplattenwand mit oder ohne Rohr; Metallgitterzaun; Kontrollstreifen (KS); Beleuchtungsanlage; Kfz-Graben; Linie der vorderen Begrenzung des Grenzpostens; Kolonnenweg; Führungsdraht der Hundelaufleine; Signalgerät; Beobachtungsturm; Kontaktzaun.”

In 1975, the final, fourth generation of the Berlin Wall, internally called *Genzmauer 75* (“Border Wall 75”), was built, constituting of unbroken lengths of sleek, white concrete nearly impossible both to climb and to drive through. The interior border was between five and ten meters wide, encased between

Secretary, to “arrest or exterminate” (*Schießbefehl*) fleeing migrants to deter their exodus—or “defecation” in the East (*Republikflucht*) (Sonnevend 42).

Even after the fourth generation of the Wall was constructed in 1975, improvements still had to continually appear in the defense system. Though the Wall continued to gain structural and defensive improvements and became “increasingly technically perfect,” it also became “increasingly politically fragile” (“Grenzmauer 75”).³ Peter Schneider, West Berliner and author of the bestselling novel *The Wall Jumper*, claimed “every improvement in the border system had spurred the creative drive to find a new loophole,” comparing crossing the Wall to attempting to climb K2, the second-highest mountain in the world (Schneider 59).

The Berlin Wall was not just a physical structure in the middle of populated Berlin, but a demarcated line dividing “rail embankments, marshland, fields, and waterways” (Sonnevend 42). Physical barriers did not exist at these crossings. Still, “the” Berlin Wall divided the city through these arbitrary and invisible lines. The Berlin Wall extended underground and high above the ground, too; underground subways (the *U-Bahn*) and aboveground railroad systems (the *S-Bahn*) were divided along the same geopolitical borders at the beginning of the Soviet zone. *Geisterstationen* (“ghost stations”) emerged when rail lines belonging to the Western zone passed through Eastern stations. The Wall here consisted of barbed wire strung across sawhorses, guarded by *Transportpolizei* (“Trapos”), and livewire tracks which deterred refugees in flight. Trains passed through but did not stop.

The Berlin Wall phased through multiple generations of appearance and of ever-updating security and surveillance. Its apparatuses include its interior physical features: sand pits, barbed

³ “Die Mauer wurde in den Jahren seit 1975 technisch immer perfekter und gleichzeitig politisch immer brüchiger.”

wire, watchtowers armed with guards with orders to kill border crossers, two encompassing walls. Also included are its exterior appearances and features: spray paint, graffiti, and street art encasing one side of a sleek concrete wall, border patrols and keep-away signs dotting the other.

The “Berlin Wall” as the global world knows it today emerged from a complicated and ever-changing border control regime. Though the Berlin Wall never consisted of a simple wall, the narrative and name of “the” Berlin Wall sprung because of propaganda from both Western and Eastern parties. Julia Sonnevend, a communication scholar at the University of Michigan, argues that understanding the Berlin Wall as a single, simple wall “focuses only on how the Berlin Wall changed over the years as seen from the Western side” and “pays little attention to the physical obstacles on the Eastern side of the border” (Sonnevend 42). In essence, “the Berlin Wall” was really *two* walls: its Western appearance, furthered by propaganda coloring the Wall as the essential image of communism; and its Eastern appearance as a systemic and structural necessity.

The Berlin Wall’s concrete exterior and extensive, systemic installation throughout Berlin appeared so stalwart that Erich Honecker proclaimed in 1989 that the Berlin Wall would continue to stand for the next one hundred years, so technically innovated and perfect this iteration of the border security system had become (“Grenzmauer 75”).⁴ Mere months later, the Wall had fallen. Carole Blair’s “paradox of materiality,” in which “durable materials may actually render a text more vulnerable” to any number of destructive threats, such as “natural weathering, vandalism, lack of maintenance, and even bulldozing,” clearly comes into play with

⁴ “Noch im Januar 1989 verkündete Staats- und Parteichef Erich Honecker, die Mauer würde noch in hundert Jahren stehen.”

the physicality of the Berlin Wall (Blair 37). Its rhetorical destruction in 1989 at the hands of the Soviet Union, and its physical destruction at the hands of Berlin itself, come as a direct consequence to its *technically perfect* construction.

But the Wall's apparatuses extend beyond merely the physical, including photographs of its expanse in local, national, and international news, its presence in legislation, and its occupation within the public conscience of both East and West Berlin. These mental and rhetorical apparatuses prove its degree of durability much more securely than its concrete existence over the twenty-eight years of the Wall's divisive reign over Berlin. As Schneider wrote in *The Wall Jumper*: "It will take us longer to tear down the Wall in our heads than any wrecking company will need for the Wall we can see" (119). The rhetorical division that the Berlin Wall sprung as a result of, and embodied, would serve a far more effective and durable apparatus for its citizens and the external world than the physical features of the Wall itself.

Another rhetorical difference appears in the nomenclature of the Wall. In the West, the Berlin Wall was called just that—*Berliner Mauer*. Colloquially, Germans also called the Wall the *Schandmauer*, building on the German root of *Schande*—shame. Governing mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt, coined the term in retaliation to Eastern language (Sonnevend 47). Additionally, West Berlin press compared the Berlin Wall to *Konzentrationslager*, concentration camps, in use by the Nazis (Sonnevend 47). In the East, the Soviet Union named the wall the *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (anti-fascist protection bulwark). Their branding draws in the ideology of anti-fascism as well as the German root of *Schutz*—a protection or safeguard. Interestingly, Eastern rhetoric also revolved around negative comparisons of the other power in Berlin to the Nazi party. Drawing on the ideas of antifascism as a cornerstone for the development of the DDR, the Eastern branding of the wall as a protection against fascist rhetoric

and ideology drew a careful line between previous rhetoric and pro-Eastern propaganda establishing the West as the breeding ground of Nazification (Sonnevend 45). Additionally, the Wall was called a bulwark (*Wall*) and not a wall (*Mauer*) to avoid the negative connotation of revoking access to the West. Internally, however, the Eastern powers were well aware of the encasing and restrictive nature of the Wall. In its preliminary stages of ideation, the Wall was to become “an iron ring around Berlin” (“Letter,” trans. by Harrison).

To most of the Western world, the Berlin Wall was, though, simply a tall, concrete barrier; many of our historical photos of the Wall and our understanding therefore of the rhetoric of its physical messaging come from the West, where the only part of the Wall visible from street level was its massive concrete exterior. Instead of representing military might and control over citizen’s movements, the Wall came to represent communism itself, and the forecasted dangers of such an economic system, so wholly unpopular, in the West’s opinion, that they were forced to construct a Wall to keep their citizens engaged within that economic system. At first, the material Wall threatened West Berliners and their freedom of movement. But as the construction continued to pass, however, and no eminent signs of war threatened the daily lives of West Berliners, the Wall began to lose its physical effect and morph into a purely symbolic piece of rhetoric representing the evils of communism – or really, any enemy of the West. But its materiality, though not entirely lost on the Western eye, was much less relevant. I think about the Wall appearing, from the West, to be almost glass-like. The barrier exists, and is visible to the naked eye, but is also easily circumvented, ignored—and fragile. Peter Schneider wrote:

Once the initial panic died, the massive structure faded increasingly to a metaphor in the West German consciousness. What on the far side meant an end to freedom of movement, on the near side came to symbolize a detested social order. The view East

shrank to a view of the border complex and finally to a group-therapy absorption with the self: for Germans in the West, the Wall became a mirror that told them, day by day, who was the fairest one of all. Whether there was life beyond the death strip soon mattered only to pigeons and cats. (12)

To East Germans, the rampart spoke an entirely different language. It was the language of the guard towers and bloodthirsty hounds and guards who had orders to shoot to kill anyone found near the Wall. The Wall stood as a menacing physical reminder of what modern researchers from the museum site *Chronik der Mauer* consider to be the cause of death for “at least 140 people...” who attempted to flee East Germany, “[and] furthermore at least 251 travelers before, during, or after pressure at the crossing”⁵ (“Todesopfer”).

With the benefit of hindsight, history considers the Berlin Wall to be this singular entity, this one wall. The responsibility for the Wall lies with the Soviets, because they laid the first bricks. The outrage against the Wall was a Western one, because the Westerns were on the other side of the Cold War. The Wall was the barbed wire that Konrad Schumann leapt over; it was the brick-and-mortar assemblage in black-and-white photographs; it was the sleek, white expanse of concrete quickly tagged and graffitied.

Telling the story of the Berlin Wall as though it was one wall is a dangerous misconstruction of history and of reality. The Berlin Wall was a name applied to a comprehensive border control system; it was both the Wall as it was perceived, rhetorically and

⁵ “Mindestens 140 Menschen wurden zwischen 1961 und 1989 an der Berliner Mauer getötet oder kamen in unmittelbarem Zusammenhang mit dem DDR-Grenzregime ums Leben. Darüber hinaus verstarben mindestens 251 Reisende aus Ost und West vor, während, oder nach Kontrollen an Berliner Grenzübergängen.”

symbolically, and the Wall as it really existed. This twoness is mirrored by the two concrete walls encasing the “Death Strip” which constituted the portion of the Wall dividing the inner city. On the outside, the Berlin Wall appears as one cohesive structure. But its inner workings reveal its complex double nature.

Physically, the border encased West Berliners to their city, an island within the sea of East Germany. But mentally, psychologically, and geopolitically, the Berlin Wall trapped East Berlin in the maw of the Cold War.

Teil II. West.

“That is all over. You are all sitting in a mousetrap now.”

—An East German Transportpolizist on the morning of August 13, 1961, guarding the entrance to the subway tracks at the Friedrichstraße station (Kempe 361)

AS WEST GERMAN REPORTERS peppered Walter Ulbricht, the First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party in the German Democratic Republic and thus its leader, with questions on whether the rumors of the acquisition of thousands of rolls of barbed wire and stacks of concrete blocks were to support the building of a permanent barrier between East and West Berlin, Ulbricht referred for the first time to a ‘Wall.’ “*Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten*,” Ulbricht declared at a rare press conference on June 15, 1961 (Heaps 16). “Nobody has the intention of building a wall.” By doing so, Ulbricht employed apophasis, when a speaker raises an issue by claiming instead not to mention it. Ulbricht created an awkward double-meaning to his message: Before he’d said it, not one of the Western reporters thought about the possibility of a wall.

But on August 13, 1961, the as-yet figurative division between East and West Berlin became a temporary border of concrete and barbed wire. Over the course of the next twenty-eight years, the Berlin Wall would evolve four times into a massive barrier between the two sides of the city, heavily armed and enforced. Its rhetorical impact on the city of Berlin—both in the abstract sense of disunion it represented, and in the physical, concrete, and bloodstained division it hewed—would affect the identities and consciences of the two peoples on either side.

While sudden, this exercise of military and governmental power from the Eastern Bloc was mutually accepted by the four massive military powers with stakes in the region. Privately,

both Western and Eastern governments agreed a great deal on the separation of the two halves of the city, as well as the physical barriers which would be needed to keep the two halves separate. Rhetoric presented in classified governmental communication in both the United States and in the Soviet Union appears nearly identical in their desires to continue to push the narrative of separation, so long as it continued to result in political and economic gains on both sides of the Wall. In fact, both leading powers in the Cold War agreed that a physical *Trennung* was necessary to defend their geopolitical interests.

One common story told in the West about the Wall hinges upon this shocking overnight construction. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, which holds the archives of United States diplomatic histories, writes that “Berlin woke up to a shock” on the morning of August 13; a multimedia history archive of the Berlin Wall writes “The division of West and East shocks Berliners and the Western world” (ADST; Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg). I argue that not only did the United States know of the imminent sealing of the Berlin border (although not specifically the Berlin Wall), but also that the U.S. regime unilaterally supported the construction of such a Wall—if it meant they could maintain their power in the region. The United States saw the Berlin Wall just as the Soviet Union did: as a *necessary evil*, intended to prolong the reunification of Germany until the German people could once more be brought under the same economic and political system and neutralize the immediate threat of a nuclear war over the minor squabble of Berlin. I hope to complicate the story of the Berlin Wall in arguing that the United States plays an active and complicit role in the construction of the Wall itself,

both before, during, and after August 13, and that the United States (and not just the Soviet Union) engages in public propaganda surrounding the Wall for its own political gain.⁶

In this chapter, I analyze classified and publicly available rhetoric from the United States government and its officials in two sections: *geheim* (secret) and *öffentlich* (open, public). I primarily utilize archival material from summer 1961 to frame the general United States understanding of the Berlin Wall just before and just after its initial construction in August 1961. However, some reference to documents in 1962 and 1963 further contextualizes the United States intelligence scene and their critical responses to the Berlin question as a specific manifestation of the Cold War.⁷

II.i WEST, GEHEIM

“Soviets and GDR leaders seem to be creating enough difficulties for themselves in East Germany, without U.S. taking a hand. We, plan, therefore, to do nothing at this time which would exacerbate [the] situation.”

—John Ausland, *Department of State, informs diplomats in Bonn of the looming Berlin Crisis on July 22, 1961*

⁶ “Propaganda” is an increasingly contested term without a clear or universal definition in political science or in rhetorical schematics (See “Propaganda, definitions of” and Viorel 2017). To trace the complicated history of propaganda would require its own thesis; in my writing, I use the term to loosely denote an instance of top-down communication established to either promote or denigrate a specific and certain ideology or power. I look for the explicit usage of the word “propaganda” by the speaker to classify communication as such, rather than assigning the claim myself.

⁷ The Central Intelligence Agency has declassified thousands of documents relating to the Berlin and Germany in the Cold War: in this thesis, I cannot possibly reference them all. I have selected a variety of documents which provide a comprehensive overview of the intelligence available to the United States and the shaping of their public response.

Intelligence in Washington presented concerns that communist ideology had taken too deep of a root in the people of East Germany for a reconciliation and reunification of the countries that they had divided fifteen years previously in the aftermath of the second World War. In a classified meeting agenda prepared by U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union Foy D. Kohler, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) acknowledges that:

The U.S. also has important political interests and aims in Germany which have not yet been realized. These may be summarized as the application to all of Germany of the principle of self-determination and the intimate association of a unified Germany with the West. The key importance of Germany's integration into Europe and thus into the Free World security pattern dictates that the United States could not accept reunification at the price of the "neutrality" of Germany. (Kohler)

Kohler correctly identifies the mindset of the United States and their foreign policy; the reunification of Germany mattered far less than the Western dominance of Eastern ideology. Put simply by Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara in a top-secret meeting on August 21, "[The] West does not want to de-Germanize E[ast] Germany. Our interests would be with refugees not leaving E[ast] Ger[many]" (Lemnitzer). The theoretical future construction of a unified German nation relied on this "Germanization," which the Berlin Wall protected by forcing Germans to remain in all areas of Germany.

President John Kennedy "did not hide his relief" at the construction of the border wall with his inner circle (Kempe 379). His sentiment was echoed among Washington politicians and intelligence, exacerbated by ambassadors to the Soviet Union and to Germany like Llewellyn

Thompson and Walter Dowling, all of whom agreed that a Wall would significantly reduce the East-West government tensions.

Contrary to the reports in the press that the Wall had “shocked and depressed Kennedy,” the U.S. president instead “considered the border closure a potentially positive turning point that could help lead to the end of the Berlin Crisis” (Kempe 379). Kennedy and the U.S. made their stance clear: the only area of concern they faced regarding Berlin was the question of their right to access Berlin, not of the right of Berliners to access Berlin. Since West Berlin remained intact—the Wall was constructed, even temporarily, well within the established limits of the Sovzone—and American, French, and British military officials were still being granted full right to passage across select interior borders, Kennedy and Washington intelligence had cause even to celebrate: Khrushchev had no ambitions to annex or occupy West Berlin. An analysis by the CIA delivered to the White House circa either August 13 or 14 explains that new East German travel and border control decrees “are very specific in making clear that there are no changes in the existing regulations affecting the transit rights of the three [sic] Western powers between West Germany and East Berlin, of West Germans travelling between West Germany and West Berlin, and of West Germans and West Berliners travelling to East Berlin and East Germany” (“Cable to White House” 2). American officials and leaders were more than willing to accept the physical barrier between West and East Berlin, so long as East Berlin remained accessible (J. Smith 277).

Declassified U.S. archives and released personal and private U.S. communiques regarding the “Berlin Crisis” during the Cold War all tell a similar story on the knowledge of the United States government of the imminent border closure in Berlin. Though the midnight construction of the Berlin Wall appeared senselessly and suddenly to the news outlets in West Berlin and the United States, and seemingly surprised officials like Kennedy, Brandt, and

Adenauer, the CIA possessed a good guess as to the imminent border closure as early as the late 1950s and as late as August 10, 1961. The intelligence agency's early knowledge on the upcoming border closure also led to a carefully practiced rhetorical response of inaction from the United States once the construction of the Wall began.

On July 24, 1961, the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, Russia—Llewellyn Thompson—predicted soon-to-be-implemented increased security measures in East Germany. Importantly, Thompson urged the United States not to respond to these measures. In a cable to the Department of State, Thompson wrote that the solution to the Berlin Problem would be “extremely difficult if not impossible” to reach unless the Soviets and East Germans would be allowed to “close escape hatch” (Thompson 1).⁸ He further wrote that if the “escape hatch” had to be shut, geopolitical benefits would emerge from the United States allowing the Soviets to “bear full responsibility rather than our agreeing even indirectly to such step” (Thompson 1). Clearly detailing the rhetorical benefit which might emerge from the closure of the Berlin border for the United States to claim another, even indirect, victory over communism, Thompson encourages the rhetorical response of silence and inaction which the United States practiced in the immediate aftermath of the construction of the Berlin Wall. Furthermore, Thompson ascertained that the West would even benefit from the anti-democratic practice of the closure of the border:

Since I gather that except for danger of building up pressure for explosion both we and West Germans consider it to our long-range advantage that potential refugees remain in

⁸ These, and further, grammatical errors are unaltered from the source material and typical for the nature of cable communication.

East Germany, unilateral East German action has many advantages for us. Would doubt that danger of explosion [sic] greater from stopping refugees than from deterioration economic conditions by continuation exodus trained manpower. (1–2)

This communication counters Western expectations surrounding the democratic practice of freedom of residence and freedom of movement by proving that the West may have encouraged the closure of the Berlin border for their own economic gain. Thompson further writes of his concern of the United States being restricted in their access to the airspace surrounding Berlin, as they were during the blockade in 1958; he wrote, “far better for us that East Germans close Berlin sector border than that they attempt to interfere with our access by air” (2). Thompson advised that the United States avoid making it seem as though they may retaliate strongly should the sector border be closed to avoid losing their access to the city—never mind the citizens of East and West Berlin who would soon lose their homes, lives, jobs, or neighbors. His communication makes the United States’ stance on the preliminary idea of the Berlin Wall clear: The Wall was necessary to protect the economic sanctity of the West, to halt the refugee flow, and, most importantly, to preserve the West’s continued access to Berlin, even if the citizens of Berlin themselves were harmed in the process.

Thompson likely communicated some of Washington’s concerns and West Germany’s struggles to maintain the refugee flow to Nikita Khrushchev, his main point of contact as ambassador to Moscow. Khrushchev, in a phone conversation with Ulbricht in early August, relayed that “If the border is closed, the Americans and West Germans will be satisfied. Ambassador Thompson told me that the exodus causes problems for West Germans” (“Notes” 1961). Ulbricht’s courage to proceed with the construction of the Berlin Wall stemmed handily from this conversation with Khrushchev and, tangentially, with the knowledge of Western

attitudes provided and shaped by Thompson. The Western attitude of indifference toward the Wall took early shape from the West's desire only to maintain their own power within Berlin and stemmed little, if at all, from their desire to protect the people of Berlin.

Though Thompson suggested that the “escape hatch” from East Germany would likely close—and soon—intelligence officials had no clear idea on how that were to happen. While attempting to determine how the Soviet Union and East Germany would proceed with a massive border control procedure, Ernest von Pawel, head of the U.S. military mission in Potsdam, compared the Warsaw Jewish ghetto of World War II to their current outlook in Berlin. “If you think a wall is the least likely option,” he posited, “then that is where I place my bet, because we’ve never outguessed the Soviets before” (Kempe 356–7). von Pawel’s posturing likely resulted in no real contingency planning from the CIA, and certainly no communication to Kennedy or other forward-facing political actors in the United States, although the Department of State was by this point sharing some knowledge of imminent threat with Albert Watson, the newly appointed U.S. military Commandant in Berlin. Kempe writes:

For weeks, [Albert Watson’s] instructions from the Pentagon had more often than not included warnings that he should not allow himself to be provoked by the East Germans or Soviets into a miliary action that could escalate into violent conflict, as if his superiors had known what was coming (Kempe 355).

Taking the lead from Thompson’s cable, the United States began ushering a nonreactive, nonresponsive policy throughout their Berlin staff. Watson, when confronted with the early-morning construction of the Berlin Wall on August 13, would observe the operation—and do nothing to combat it (Kempe 355).

More confidence in the imminence of the East German implementation of new, restrictive border control practices arrived just days before the first spools of barbed wire unraveled over the streets. The CIA reports that refugees arriving from East Germany via East Berlin began reporting that “special internal security measures,” such as “requiring special passes for East Germans to visit Berlin or restricting travel to a stated local area,” had been publicly “contemplated” as late as August 9 (“East German Security Measures” pp. 1). The CIA sketched on August 10 a memorandum detailing the schematics of the East German refugee flow, also referring to the imminence of restrictive border control policies:

There is some evidence that the regime is considering harsher measures to reduce the flow. [REDACTED MATERIAL.] East German propaganda on 10 August suggested that a decree promulgating new and more vigorous control measures would be forthcoming from the meeting of the East German People’s Chamber on 11 August. (“East German Refugees” 5–6)

The same CIA memorandum refers to Ambassador Thompson’s remarks from Moscow, alleging that Thompson “considers that the refugee flow is a source of embarrassment to Khrushchev” and to the Communist regime as a whole (“East German Refugees” 7). This political embarrassment may contribute, as the CIA reasoned, to the endorsement of “more repressive East German measures to reduce the flow [of refugees]” (7). The CIA considered the constant East German refugee flow as an exemplar of “the regime’s unpopularity, its inability to control its own people” and a mockery of “the declared East German goal of overtaking the West German standard of living” (7). By August 10, the Central Intelligence Agency almost certainly had a clear sense from their variety of intelligence networks that the East German government

would begin the implementation of an extremely restrictive border control policy within the next few weeks, if not days.

But Kennedy seemed to have missed the memo. Kennedy would later request, in 1962, that the President's Foreign Intelligence Board compile a review addressing two intelligence failures regarding the advance intelligence available for both the Berlin Wall crisis and the coup in Syria in September of 1961 ("Memorandum for the President" 3). Upset that he had been caught off-guard by both foreign disasters, Kennedy requested a report on why both incidents happened with relatively little U.S. preparation or foresight. The Board reported that "indications of imminent significant developments were apparently lost sight of in the mass of intelligence reports which were produced [REDACTED] over an extended period of time" (3). The Board correctly estimates that adequate intelligence was indeed available to the United States well before the time of the border closure in August of 1961, as I've noted above with respect to Ambassador Thompson's memorandums, CIA daily and weekly bulletins, and predictions from military officials in and around Berlin or with experience in the area. This retrospective analysis confirms that the "best indicator" of the imminent border closure and construction of what would become the Berlin Wall was Ulbricht's August 10 address, in which he hinted at immediate action by claiming the East Germans and Warsaw Pact states agreed that the refugee crisis had already gone "so far and no further" (6).⁹ The Berlin Wall, as the strictest form of border control, may have come as a surprise to Kennedy and other public-facing administrators, but the CIA and

⁹ Ulbricht addressed a group of steel workers and party members at the Kabelwerk Oberspree factory on August 10, 1961. His speech is unavailable for my analysis, though I have studied other Ulbricht speeches and private and public addresses in *Teil III*.

foreign intelligence agents possessed knowledge of its proximity well before bricklaying began. Ulbricht and Khrushchev accurately predicted that the United States, even when faced with enough knowledge to increase military presence or create a widespread public demonstration, would acquiesce—so long as their right to Berlin was uninterrupted.

Even with a purported lack of knowledge prior to the construction of the Wall, Kennedy and his administration within the United States demonstrated precious little sympathy for East Germans and Berliners. In conversation with journalist Scotty Reston, Kennedy remarked that the United States “had given [East Germans] ample time to break out of their jail,” since the Berlin border had been relatively unobstructed for nearly two decades following the establishment of the Sovzone in 1945 (Kempe 380). The CIA summarized that the only loss to the West due to the new border control features would manifest in its economic loss of those *Grenzgänger* (border hoppers) from the East who, exploiting both economic systems, worked in the West for better pay only to live in the socialized housing of the East. Even this loss was not serious enough to provoke a reaction: the CIA and West Berlin officials “maintain that no ‘serious’ trouble is expected from the loss of 50,000 East Germans who had jobs in West Berlin” (“Current Intelligence Weekly Summary” 6).

Kennedy’s sympathy was a roundly effective measure of rhetorical support, however; West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt sought his approval and support by attempting to source his political sympathy for the oppressed West Berlin. Brandt wrote a “personal and informal” letter to President Kennedy on August 16, begging him to take immediate action to roundly condemn the Soviet actions to divide Berlin. He compared Berlin to a “ghetto,” writing that the city was at great risk of losing “its function as refuge of freedom and as a symbol of hope for reunification” and of being severed from the “free part of Germany,” colloquially understood as the West

(Dulles 100). Brandt's interest in the protection and support of his city far surpassed Kennedy's. Incensed, "shocked and angry," Kennedy reportedly said that Brandt's letter was a mere "election gimmick" (Dulles 70).¹⁰ Brandt's letter leaked to the press; even American papers "showed signs of restlessness over the apparent indifference in the administration" (Dulles 77). Delivering a reply via Vice President Lyndon Johnson's visit to Berlin on August 18, Kennedy expressed his sympathy and support for West Berlin in strong language, while dissuading Brandt from continuing his brash, excited commentary which enthused and inspired the people of West Berlin to protest the Soviet actions.

Kennedy remained cautious in communicating his strong support to Berlin; though Brandt urges Kennedy to take action on behalf of "the life of the German people," beyond simply the West Berliners (Dulles 99), Kennedy carefully replies that the Berlin Wall "constitutes a special blow to the people of *West* Berlin, connected as they remain in a myriad of ways to their fellow Berliners in the eastern sector" (Kennedy, "To Brandt," emphasis mine). Rather than responding to the needs of the Berlin people demanding an answer or a reaction from the Western powers at the construction of the Berlin Wall, Kennedy responded to a cable from Ambassador Dowling in Bonn, writing of the "crisis of confidence" he saw in Berlin. Dowling wrote that the reaction of West Germany and West Berlin to the construction of the Berlin Wall was "highly emotional and disproportionate to gravity of situation" (Dowling 1). This emotional reaction to a sudden loss of access to half of their native city, Dowling asserts, is "further and convincing evidence that German people are not prepared to accept moves which deepen

¹⁰ Referring to the election to the chancellorship held only a month later in the Federal Republic of Germany, which Brandt lost to the incumbent Adenauer.

division of Germany and push reunification further into the future” (1). Dowling further argues that the confidence which West Germans and West Berlin hold in the freedom of movement within their city became deeply disturbed by the East German border control regiments and the subsequent lack of response from the all-powerful Western governments occupying the other half of Berlin. To remedy this crisis of confidence, Dowling suggests:

...a personal message from the President to the people of Berlin (not to Adenauer or Brandt) in which he might say to them that they are much in his thoughts, that he will take all appropriate and peaceful means to restore integrity of Berlin as a whole city, and that he has confidence in them as he knows they have confidence in America and its allies. (2)

Another nail in the coffin of confidence in the Western powers’ ability to maintain their grip in Berlin, reported by the U.S. Mission in Berlin, drew directly from the “morale of political and public leaders,” ostensibly at greater risk “regarding the future of the city than at any time since the Soviet ultimatum of November 1958” (“Daily Brief” i).¹¹ The political actors in West Berlin referred to—certainly Willy Brandt and his casual critique of the lack of interest the United States appeared to pursue in Berlin—apparently used their “outward optimism” to “shield greater doubt” about the future of the city’s existence. Advised by his ambassadors and the CIA, Kennedy understood this “crisis of confidence” needed to be remedied to restore public trust in the United States and continue to maintain their positive public perception in Germany, with the hope that their efforts would be rewarded in the eventual surrender of the Soviet Union and the democratic, capitalist reunification of Germany, referred to earlier by Kohler.

¹¹ See “The Berlin Ultimatum.”

To remedy this “crisis of confidence,” Kennedy, instead of delivering a personal message to Berlin as Dowling suggested, sent his second-in-command, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, and a war hero well-respected in Berlin for his performance during the Berlin Blockade, Admiral Lucius Clay. Johnson and Clay met with Adenauer and Brandt to encourage both German politicians to continue placing their faith and confidence in the United States (Johnson, “Report”). Kennedy’s refusal to travel to Berlin highlighted the United States’ privately held opinions on the Berlin Crisis: it was not a matter of importance large enough for the President himself. Johnson’s visit and Kennedy’s refusal to consider counteraction both made clear their state’s policy of inaction. Berlin, as Johnson wrote in his trip report, is only “basically one battle—even though an important battle—in the world wide struggle” of the Cold War (Johnson, “Report”). For the West, Berlin could not be important enough to risk nuclear war over. The loss of and to Berliner lives only marginally bookended the international tug-o-war between the East and West.

Kennedy, and the United States, as a representation of the West, understood the construction of the Berlin Wall as offensive inasmuch as it grossly limited his own country’s access to power within the city and as another step toward a potentially disastrous nuclear war. However, the construction of the Berlin Wall also spurred a great boost in public opinion for capitalism and the Western world. As Kempe writes:

The communist enemy had been forced to build a barrier around its people to lock them in. Nothing could have been more damning. One couldn’t buy a better argument in favor of the free world, even if the cost was the freedom of East Berliners, and, more broadly, Eastern Europeans. (Kempe 379-80)

Kennedy no doubt appreciated the free advertising that the Soviets had just inadvertently given to his regime: If Communism couldn't convince its brightest minds to stay, and had, instead, to "lock them in," the capitalist West would greatly benefit from the public relations boost to their preferred economic and political modes. In his letter to Willy Brandt on August 18, Kennedy reminded Brandt of the importance of West Berlin's "link to the free world:" "West Berlin today is more important than ever, and its mission to stand for freedom has never been so important as now" (Kennedy, "To Brandt"). Mayor Brandt has, in Kennedy's eye, a moral and political responsibility to promote the West's agenda, because West Berlin's "life of the city... its economic life, its moral basis, and its military security... runs primarily to the West" and the "citizens of West Berlin" should become "more actively conscious of their role, not merely as an outpost of freedom, but as a vital part of the Free World and all its enterprises" ("To Brandt"). The United States clearly demonstrates its lack of empathy or sympathy for the West Berlin citizens, instead encouraging Brandt to remember his rhetorical positioning as mayor of the last-standing homage to capitalism, a hundred miles inside the communist half of Germany.

Not only did the United States know that the Wall was well on its way before the first bricks were laid in Berlin on August 13—proving the well-crafted narrative of shock and surprise on the morning of August 13 was entirely rehearsed—but the evidence I've analyzed from declassified internal communication from the United States government points to the idea that the Western powers supported this flagrantly anti-democratic action to restrict freedom of movement within Berlin. Kennedy's conversation with his aide O'Donnell neatly sums the internal Western attitude toward Berlin: "It isn't very nice, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war" (Kempe 363). For the United States, the construction of the Berlin Wall served as a dog-eared bookmark in the silently raging war between communism and capitalism. The Soviets, in

shouldering the expense of the formal separation of two Berlins—the socioeconomically and geopolitically advisable solution to the Berlin crisis as a tangent of the greater Cold War—had just saved the American taxpayers millions of dollars in rehousing refugees. By walling West Berlin off and isolating East Berliners from their link to the free world, the United States government believed the Soviets had done a great deal of free advertising on the merits of capitalism, as well.

The only problem the Americans faced now? How to conceal their relief.

II.ii. WEST, ÖFFENTLICH

“Berlin is holding its breath this sunny weekend, waiting for drastic measures to stem the refugee flow to West Berlin.”

—Adam Kellett-Long of Reuters on August 11, 1961, the first news correspondent to predict the imminent construction of the Berlin Wall (Kempe 333)

For those of the rest of the world without access to carefully protected CIA and foreign intelligence, the construction of the Berlin Wall really was a total surprise. Adam Kellett-Long of Reuters, the only Western news correspondent based in East Berlin, had the first crack at the beat based on a tip from Horst Sindermann, the Communist party’s propaganda operations manager (Kempe 333). On August 12, he wrote of the “imminent” action of the East German government, listing his best guesses as to what that action might include in his report: tighter controls over travelers within the Warsaw Pact states, greater penalties imposed on those caught while leaving East Berlin, and the most daunting and unlikely option: “if the East Germans shut off transit routes altogether” (Kempe 334). It was Kellett-Long, still awake at one in the morning on

August 13 when the barbed wire barriers around East Berlin first appeared, who broke the news to the world (Chapman): The Berlin Wall had been born.

The Western world reacted with shock and awe to the new barbed wire barrier arbitrarily splitting a city in half—a sure indication of a heightening of tensions between the East and West and perhaps even a hallmark of an impending war. West German newspapers branded the construction of the Wall with the terminology of a “bloody incident;” the cover story of the *Hannoversche Volkszeitung* proclaimed that “In the night on Sunday in Berlin, the last free connections between the two divided Germanys were destroyed”¹² (“Pankow riegelt Ostberlin ab”).

United States newspapers published front-page headline pieces on August 13 reacting to the news of the construction of the Berlin Wall. None of these headlines utilized the figurative language that West German newspapers documented, thus demonstrating a more lackluster attitude toward the construction of the Berlin Wall and its consequences. *The New York Times* published their frontpage newsletter with the title “East German Troops Seal Border with West Berlin to Block Refugee Escape” and the subheading “Commuting Ended.” *The Augusta Chronicle*, the South’s oldest newspaper, headlined a story about the “arrival” of Lila, an organization formed to improve the gardens of Augusta (“Lila Arrives in Town with Eager Following”). But underneath this headline reads “Tough Wait Period Seen for Berlin.” *The Dallas Morning News* announced “Reds Close Border to E. Germans;” the *Knoxville News Sentinel* bolded “E. Germans Seal Berlin Border” with the subheading “Action Follows Growing

¹² “Blutige Zwischenfälle” and “In der Nacht zum Sonntag in Berlin die letzten freien Verbindungen zwischen den beiden Teilen Deutschlands zerstört...”

Exodus.” *The Seattle Sunday Times*’ largest headline wrote about the Hood Canal, but their second story of the day proclaimed “Border Watch: E. Germans Seal Off West Berlin to Refugees.” United States-based newspapers used altogether less figurative language and decentralized the stories on Berlin and East Germany as compared to local or national news, thereby deescalating the stakes of the Berlin border closure as opposed to the West German newspapers reporting on the crisis at the same time.

Evidence of rhetoric and policy of inaction and even of celebration, internally dominant within the governments of Western powers, is of course only available in a retrospective view of the Cold War. Publicly, immediately after the construction of the Berlin Wall, Western powers presented themselves as allies to the West Berliners, utilizing the Wall as a metaphor for communist ideology.

Internal communication from the Department of State explicitly utilizes the word “propaganda” in referring to the rhetoric planned and released by the United States immediately following the construction of the Berlin Wall. In a meeting of the Berlin Steering Group on August 15, the committee ended their meeting with discussions of “psychological measures and propaganda.” If the immediate implementation of pro-capitalist propaganda appears in West Berlin, West Germany, and Europe, the United States believed “we should reap a large harvest on this front” (Bundy). In a memorandum on August 14, Kennedy asked Secretary of State Dean Rusk what steps he thought were advisable to “exploit politically propagandawise” the closure of the Berlin border. “The question we must decide is how far we should push this,” he wrote to Rusk; “[The Berlin Wall] offers us a very good propaganda stick which if the situation were reversed would be well used in beating us” (Kennedy, “Memorandum”). The United States intended to create politically motivated propaganda to convince both the Western and Eastern

world of the mistake the Soviets had made by ordering the construction of the Wall, even if the tripartite military powers in West Berlin would continue their policy of inaction.

A vital example of the United States' ensuing public propaganda was Vice President Johnson and Admiral Clay's visit to Berlin. Though I interpret Kennedy's refusal to visit West Berlin in August 1961 as a demonstration of the United States' lack of serious commitment to the Berlin crisis, Johnson and Clay *did* represent the United States in their visit to Berlin, to the marked emotional improvement of the West Berliners; Clay especially garnered trust and sympathy from the Berlin locals, who regarded his visit as "the most convincing proof yet that America remained determined to defend West Berlin's freedoms" (Kempe 399). Perhaps sending Clay instead of traveling himself was Kennedy's demonstration of utmost support to West Berliners.

On August 19, Johnson delivered a hallmark address to the Parliament in West Berlin. The keystone of his visit, Johnson's address serves as the first American response to the Berlin Wall, in one of the first public opportunities for the United States to communicate its standpoint on the Berlin crisis and the construction of the Wall to both its allies and enemies. This address is one prominent example of the above propaganda that the Department of State worked to produce in the days before Johnson's visit. Johnson's address praised the American government and people for their great "sacrifice" to assist Berlin and West Germany and encouraged the German people to remain hopeful and faithful to the American cause of democracy. After acknowledging the "pain and outrage" and "anger" West Berliners faced in the days following the construction of the Wall, Johnson also carefully acknowledged the "crisis of confidence" Ambassador Dowling had reported, assuring Westerners that the United States remained staunchly behind them and required their commitment now more than ever:

It is also a time for faith in your allies everywhere in the world. This island does not stand alone. You are a vital part of a whole free community of free men. Your lives are linked not merely to those in Hamburg, Bonn and Frankfurt. They also are linked with those who live in every town of Western Europe, Canada and the United States, and with those on every continent who live in freedom and are prepared to fight for it.

I repeat: This is a time for confidence, for poise and for faith—qualities with which you have associated the name of our city, from one end of the world to the other, since 1945.

Johnson not only refers to the Berlin population as “vital” in protecting the interests of the free world, but also reminds them that they are not the only population in the world facing the threat of communism: their confidence must be protected, ensured, and reapportioned, so as to ensure the entire world’s continuing faith in capitalism and in the United States. His statement that those free men “on every continent who live in freedom and are prepared to fight for it” directly contrasts Kennedy’s private communication with Mayor Brandt, which Johnson delivered to Brandt immediately following his address to Parliament, which reads quite clearly:

“...This brutal border closing evidently represents a basic Soviet decision which only war could reverse. Neither you nor we, nor any of our Allies, have ever supposed that we should go to war on this point.” (Kennedy, “To Brandt”)

Additionally, the Department of State’s minutes from the August 15 Berlin Steering Group meeting identify the closing of the Berlin border as a “non-shooting issue” (per Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, and his division of “shooting issues and non-shooting issues,” in an effort to keep the United States out of a third World War) (Bundy). Johnson’s claim that the United States is “prepared” to fight for the freedom of Berlin falls short of the actual foreign positionality of the West—which, indeed, strongly opposed going to war or fighting the Soviet Union over the

Berlin border blip. Evidently, the difference between the public-facing and private or classified information that the United States created as their rhetorical reaction to the construction of the Berlin Wall occupies two distinct and opposite positions.

Johnson further emphasizes the undesirability of communism in the long-run and reminds the West German government that the United States' ultimate goal for Germany is not simply reunification, but reunification under capitalism. Johnson refers to the Berlin Wall as an "unwise effort" which would "soon fail." He frames the Berlin Wall as an already-past historical event, referring repeatedly to a time in the future in which the Wall would be an event of the past or another lesson against communism. "Who can really believe that history will deny Germany and Berlin their natural unity?" he asks the Parliament. "Who can really believe that the German people will choose communism after what they have seen on their own soil?"

Because Johnson, and the United States administration, remained outwardly confident that history would agree with their account of events during the Cold War, it seemed outlandish to Johnson and Kennedy to not treat the Berlin crisis as though it was already solved, and the capitalists had already won. Projecting this measure of confidence, the administration hoped, would remedy the "crisis of confidence" as seen in West Berlin by United States ambassadors and military troops.

Thinly veiled under the layer of confidence and support Johnson projected to the Parliament, an unspoken threat to quell any uprisings or doubts in the Western government system, and, especially, in President Kennedy, emerged in the latter half of Johnson's address. Likely emerging as a reaction to not only Mayor Brandt's letter begging for additional aid and immediate action from Kennedy's administration, but also the storied protests of the West German citizenry at the foot of the newly-constructed Berlin Wall, where their anger criticized

the United States more than the Soviets, Johnson attempts to placate the anger of West Berliners by reminding them unsubtly of the amount of aid they receive from the United States. “We in America know our commitments and live up to our obligations,” Johnson reminded the Parliament, saying that he had flown across the Atlantic Ocean for this purpose alone. He reminded the gathering that Kennedy had increased the United States’ military budget in an unprecedented manner for a country still technically at peace. Johnson also reminded West Berlin that their concerns were ultimately secondhand to the United States, labeling the Berlin crisis as a “burden” which the United States was “prepared to carry”—but a burden nonetheless. After all, Johnson admonished, Germany was not the primary concern for the United States—Americans and their welfare, protection, and well-being came first. However, America, a nation full of willing contributors and free men willing to defend freedom across the world, could be convinced to “make the sacrifices and do our part to see that freedom is preserved in the world.” “All we ask,” Johnson reminded the Parliament, “is that you exchange with us confidence for confidence, sacrifice for sacrifice, and that together we share the burden that freedom requires.” United States aid could not remain a thankless get-out-of-jail-free card for the West German government. Reciprocity, Johnson suggested, and especially thankfulness, gratefulness, and cooperation between the two governments within their aligned channels, would ultimately result in the willingness between the Kennedy administration and West Berlin to protect the Western interest in Germany.

Finally, Johnson focused on ending the speech with a reminder of the greatness of the United States, a tribute to the fact that the country had faced crisis before and emerged victorious. As a last plea for an increase in trust and a decrease in outward criticism, Johnson spoke on his own experiences growing up in the Great Depression:

And then a great young President emerged to take oath of office to lead the nation forward out of its difficulties just as we now have another young President to lead our great nation. The President of that time said, and I believe this has a great meaning at the present time, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Johnson’s emphasis on Kennedy’s age and tenure works to remind the West Berlin audience of the United States’ energy thus far in maintaining the peace between East and West. Early in the speech, Johnson mentions Kennedy’s just-over six-month tenure in office, as though to encourage grace and forgiveness for any of his logistical missteps while he sorted through a number of international crises and a burgeoning global war. Likening Kennedy to former President Franklin Roosevelt reminds the West German audience once again of the need for trust: With confidence and support—including quelling or crushing the anti-United States protest and critiques emerging in West Berlin—the United States could better assist, and perhaps even solve, the Berlin crisis. Though Johnson suggests that to take down the Wall itself is impossible, he leaves a metaphorical hole in the Wall in which the United States can continue to offer resources, political guidance, and military funding to the people of West Berlin. For their comrades, neighbors, coworkers, and friends in the East, however, no such support could, or would, exist.

Another well-known historical exemplar of the United States’ external response to the Berlin crisis appeared in 1963, when President Kennedy visited the divided Berlin for the first time since the construction of the Wall in 1961.¹³ He denounced the Eastern Bloc and recognized

¹³ I have refrained from an in-depth analysis of Kennedy’s 1963 visit, as it falls significantly after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. I cannot argue that Kennedy’s 1963 *Ich bin ein Berliner* address represents the “different

the plight of West Berliners living in the center of East Germany. “We have never had to put up a wall to keep our people in – to prevent them from leaving us,” he said in his famous *Ich bin ein Berliner* address (Kennedy 1963). “I know of no town, no city, that has been besieged for eighteen years,” Kennedy proclaimed, “that still lives with the vitality, the force, and the hope, and the determination of the city of West Berlin” (Kennedy 1963).

External support from the United States appears, with the benefit of hindsight, merely fabricated, disingenuous in comparison to the internal communication of Kennedy or of the greater United States government, military, and intelligence agencies. American powers had no interest in the salvation of West Berliners. But externally, it was necessary that Western powers branded their political interest in the area as an interest of defending those citizens “trapped” by the Soviet Union. Restricted by decorum, they could not publicly communicate their geopolitical interest in converting the East to a democratic, capitalistic country. Rhetorically, the advantageous position relied on capitalistic propaganda, painting the city as a tragically trapped case study on the evils of communism and the Soviet Union.

and opposing” rhetorical positionality of the United States in their reaction to the construction of the Berlin Wall, as the time between his speech and the actual construction of the Wall itself disqualifies any notion of causality in the arguments. The difference in address in *Ich bin ein Berliner* (i.e. expressing his wholehearted support for the unified city of Berlin, versus the internal communiqué placating the construction of the Berlin Wall) cannot be simply accountable to the difference between public and private communication; the United States could feasibly have altered its opinion or response to the Berlin Crisis in the two years between the Wall’s construction and Kennedy’s visit, or Kennedy’s personal opinions may have changed. I make no scholarly comments on the United States’ rhetorical positionality in 1963 as it is beyond my scope of study (1961). However, Kennedy’s speech is well-read and represents, in a historical lens, the United States’ “immediate” reaction to the Berlin Wall. See “Ich bin ein Berliner.”

Through an extensive review of internal and external communication created by the United States and its embassies in 1961, I conclude that the United States occupies “different and opposite” rhetorical positions on the Berlin Wall: both decrying its existence and celebrating its construction. Geopolitically, economically, and propagandistically, the construction of the Berlin Wall benefited the United States. As such, their primary aim was to not discourage its continued construction. However, the United States worked to communicate their public denouncement of the construction of the Berlin Wall. Vice President Johnson’s address served as propaganda, couching an encouragement for West Berliners to renew their faith in the West by denouncing the Berlin Wall’s existence as an enemy to the freeman. To the United States, the Berlin Wall existed as two walls: a wall which benefited their geopolitical aspirations in Europe and should therefore stand; and a wall which represented the evils of the Communist regime and should therefore fall. It would be another twenty-six years before the United States felt comfortable enough to issue the plea to the Soviet Union to “Tear down this Wall!” (Reagan).

II.iii. BRANDT und BERLIN: DIE AUSNAHME

“[This Wall] will not endure. We will, in the future, bring many more people to Berlin than before—from every part of the world—so that they can see the cold, the stark, the brutal reality of a system which promised its people paradise on Earth.”¹⁴

—*Mayor Willy Brandt, speaking to a special session of the FRG House of Representatives, on August 13, 1961*

¹⁴ “Es wird keinen Bestand haben. Wir werden in Zukunft noch sehr viel mehr Menschen als früher nach Berlin bringen, aus allen Teilen der Welt, damit sie die kalte, die nackte, die brutale Wirklichkeit eines Systems sehen können, das den Menschen das Paradies auf Erden versprochen hat.”

As the governing mayor of West Berlin—and campaigning candidate for the West German Chancellor—Willy Brandt championed the initial attitude of trepidation and anger of West Berliners. His rhetoric, both public and private, is identical in its goals: Brandt wanted a unified, peaceful Berlin at any cost and believes deeply in the responsibility of the West in making his city whole again. His positionality as a Berlin rhetor creates the necessity for the identity of his public and private speech. Unlike Kennedy, Johnson, and the United States’ messaging, Brandt’s public communication did not differ at all from his private, internal demands.

On August 13, upon hearing the news of the preliminary Berlin Wall cutting through the heart of Berlin, Brandt cut his campaign travels short. He spoke on the same day to the House of Representatives in West Berlin. In this address, he compared the budding Wall to the brutality of the Third Reich: “The concrete pillars, the barbed wire, the “Death Strips,” the watchtowers and the machine guns, these are all the hallmarks of a concentration camp” (Brandt, “Erklärung”).¹⁵ Brandt likened the Wall to “cold concrete stakes” and expressed his pain that “the heart of unity and... the living organism of our single city of Berlin” (Deutsche Welle) had been forcibly split. He was the first to coin the nickname *Schandmauer*—Wall of Shame (Sonnevend 47). He named the Soviet regime “a clique, which names itself a government” and said that they were “searching to imprison their own people” (Brandt, “Erklärung”).¹⁶ Ulbricht’s regime, according

¹⁵ “Die Betonpfeiler, der Stacheldraht, die Todesstreifen, die Wachtürme und die Maschinenpistolen, das sind die Kennzeichen eines Konzentrationslagers.”

¹⁶ “Eine Clique, die sich Regierung nennt, muß versuchen, ihre eigene Bevölkerung einzusperren.”

to Brandt, “intensifies the situation around Berlin” and “disregards... the precepts of humanity” for the civilians in East and West Berlin involved in the newest inter-state conflict (“Erklärung”).

¹⁷ Brandt also understands the move of the Soviet and GDR regime as distinctly illegal, in restricting the freedom of movement of citizens of Berlin. The (perceived or real) illegality of the regime’s border control precludes his immediate action to press the *Westmächte* for a response.

Brandt’s letter to Kennedy on August 16 contains many of the figurative hallmarks of his public speeches and is underpinned with the same intensity. Unlike the Western communication stemming from the United States, or even from Konrad Adenauer, Brandt seems to represent the West Berlin people’s energy, anger, and vitriol towards both the Soviet Union and the United States for the responsibility of the construction of the Berlin Wall. In his letter to Kennedy—albeit toned down with a measure of decorum¹⁸—Brandt continues his campaign against the illegality and deep hurt of the construction of the Berlin Wall to the German people as a whole. He refers to the Wall as a “deep wound in [the] life of [the] German people” (Brandt, “Letter”) and that an “increasing assurance of the East Berlin regime” would result in Berlin “resembl[ing] a ghetto” (Dulles 100). Berlin, a symbol of the hope for reunification of Germany, was deeply endangered by both the action on the East and the inaction from the West (Dulles 100).

¹⁷ Excerpts from: “Mit Billigung der Ostblockstaaten verschärft das Ulbricht-Regime die Lage um Berlin und setzt sich erneut über rechtliche Bindungen und Gebote der Menschlichkeit hinweg.”

¹⁸ I use both Eleanor Dulles’ translation of Brandt’s letter and the translation by telegram by Allan Lightner (or his staff). Like any translation, Dulles’ or Lightner’s may change the implication of Brandt’s original messaging. I cross-reference the figurative language with the original German copy of the letter available on *Chronik der Mauer*. All three are cited below (Lightner translation: Brandt, “Letter;” Original copy: Brandt, “Brief;” Dulles, “The Wall”) for best reference.

Brandt even goes as far as to criticize Kennedy in private, reflecting the opinions of the West Berlin citizenry he represents, by writing:

I can't help thinking with bitterness of the policy that negotiations with the Soviet Union were refused with the reason that one should not negotiate under pressure. We now have a situation of utter blackmail and I hear already that one won't be able to refuse to negotiate. In such a situation, it is all the more important to show at least political initiative even though the possibility for initiative and action is so small. (Dulles 100)

His brash language and lack of fear in confronting such a powerful political authority reflects his commitment to “oneness” in his rhetoric: what he says to his populace and voting bloc, he repeats in private to other political actors. It's perhaps this commitment to transparency and candor that Kennedy finds himself the most upset at.

Because of Brandt's rhetorical and physical positioning in Berlin, he understands and communicates the unity and rhetorical “oneness” of Berlin better than the exterior political actors from East or West can understand. Berlin, according to Brandt and the Berliners he represents, is one city made into two—not two cities made to be kept separate by the Berlin Wall. Splitting the one city, thus, is, as Brandt refers to it, a deep wound to the German people.

Teil III. Ost.

“Berlin is the most dangerous place in the world. The USSR wants to perform an operation on this soft spot to eliminate this thorn, this ulcer.”

—Premier Nikita Khrushchev to President John Kennedy in July 1961, at the Vienna Summit (Kempe xv)

“WE HAVE A YES FROM MOSCOW,” Mikhail Pevukhin—Soviet ambassador to East Germany—relayed to his aide on July 6, 1961, ordering him to find and inform Walter Ulbricht immediately. This ‘yes’ referred to a long-awaited decision after months of Ulbricht’s extensive pestering of the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev; Ulbricht, and the East German government, desperately wanted the Soviet Union to acknowledge and assist the mounting economic and sociopolitical struggle in East Germany. Now, Ulbricht’s extensive reporting on the internal borders of Berlin had paid off. Khrushchev had agreed: The Berlin border could ostensibly be closed.

Ulbricht agreed to carry out the task under the highest secrecy, himself informing only five East German government officials of his plans. He named it Operation Rose, perhaps suggesting the imagery of a beautiful rose—the Soviet Union and their system of socialism—protected by the (necessarily) evil thorn of Berlin (“Protokoll”). Their goal was political and economic stabilization: entirely too many valuable workers, many of them highly intelligent or skilled, had already fled the West, a burden East Germans named *Republikflucht*. Additionally, some 50,000 workers crossed the East and West Berlin border each day to work, living cheaply in the East, earning inflated currency in the West. These *Grenzgänger* and fleeing workers caused a massive brain drain in East Germany, one that Soviet officials had elected to write off for the previous decade, but now which was faced with too much consequence to deny: Nearly 3

million people had fled, and more were leaving every month. The most prominent reason to construct the Berlin Wall, from the East's perspective, was to protect the economic agency and independence of the Eastern Bloc.

Understanding the rhetoric of the East German government and the Soviet Union during the supremely important months leading up to the construction of the Berlin Wall, and their carefully rehearsed response to the beginning of construction, creates a twofold understanding of the construction of the Berlin Wall itself. Often, blame is assigned to the East for the Berlin Wall's creation, but I've shown in the previous chapter that the Soviets and East Germans had it on good authority that their massive move would be mutually celebrated by Western powers—in short, that the Wall was artificially constructed by both powers long before the East began purchasing and laying out the brick-and-barbed-wire that would create the longest-lasting symbol of the Cold War.

Some records of Nikita Khrushchev and Walter Ulbricht's correspondence, memorandums, phone calls, and private conversations with Western ambassadors are publicly available. However, a large portion of the classified information from the USSR's Committee for State Security (KGB) is still unavailable, especially to researchers with Western positionality, making a true one-to-one comparison between these declassified sources (CIA and KGB) impossible. I've included information and letters largely sourced from the German project *Chronik der Mauer* for this section.

Even this limited source of declassified information reveals another perspective to add to the narrative of the construction of the Berlin Wall. For one, a seemingly unified conglomerate of Warsaw Pact powers strongly disagreed with one another in the years leading up to 1961, both about the importance of East Germany within the Warsaw Pact and about Berlin's necessity in

its realm. East powers did not plan to construct a Wall for years; instead, the project was planned and executed in just under two months, an enormous effort that exhausted Soviet and East German troops. The Wall was constructed, as I've relayed, with just short of explicit permission from the West on its legality. Kennedy's concern with American rights to West Berlin ensured that the Soviets did not gamble on the American complacency—they operated under well-informed guides who as much as told them that Kennedy would accept whatever infringements to the four-power agreement so long as they were sequestered in East Berlin. Additionally, I argue that the East powers of 1961 did not foresee a future marred by the Berlin Wall. Operating under the same pretenses of reunification as the United States—under communist, rather than capitalist, control—the Soviet Union and East Germany pushed for the *temporary* necessary evil of the Berlin Wall.

In this chapter, I analyze classified and publicly available rhetoric from the Soviet Union and German Democratic Republic governments and its officials in two sections, a mirrored structure from Teil II. West. Again, I utilize primarily archival material from summer 1961, with more extensive reference to documents from 1960 to understand the final Soviet and GDR push to permanently close the Berlin border in August of 1961. As I am an American researcher, and as the Soviet Union does not provide the same declassification of formerly classified documents by federal law as the United States is sometimes required to do, I cannot source as much private communication from the Eastern perspective. I believe the private conversations, notes, and meetings I have presented between Ulbricht and Khrushchev paint a comprehensive overview of the intelligence and planning which shaped the private and public Eastern approach to the Berlin Wall.

III.i. OST, GEHEIM

“In order to solve the GDR’s fundamental problems, and to catch up with West Germany, we must over several years bring about more investment and a close economic community—fusion with the economy of the USSR. There is no other way.”¹⁹

—Walter Ulbricht, in a letter to Nikita Khrushchev in January 1961

Popular modern understanding of the Soviet Union centers around (and caricaturizes) the state the United States knows today as Russia, controlling a system of occupied countries and enforcing the ideology of communism across the Eastern European front. Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev, and, later, Mikhail Gorbachev, seemed to the West to be the supreme force in charge of the satellite countries of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc.²⁰ However, in the case of the Berlin Wall, leadership from inside East Germany proved more effective and convincing at necessitating the Wall and pushing for its completion. The Warsaw Pact-united states often disagreed on the strategic importance of protecting Berlin, both as a visible example of communism in the Western world and as a potentially dangerous border-crossing opportunity for all Soviet-aligned citizens to leave the Bloc or the Union into the Western world. Led by East German politicians, namely Walter Ulbricht, the First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party in

¹⁹ With assistance from Daniel Magilow. “Um die grundlegenden Probleme der DDR zu lösen und Westdeutschland einzuholen, muß für eine Reihe von Jahren in der DDR mehr investiert und eine enge Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft, ein Verwachsen mit der Wirtschaft der UdSSR herbeigeführt werden. Einen anderen Weg gibt es nicht.”

²⁰ A clear difference between the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc existed in the twentieth century. I refer to the Soviet Union referring mostly to the Kremlin leadership in Moscow, Russia; the Eastern Bloc comprises the countries not officially part of the Soviet Union but still Soviet-allied. For more information, visit Britannica, cited.

East Germany, the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries agreed after a long period of debate to demonstrate marked financial and military support for East Germany. What Ulbricht saw and understood, and what he needed to convince Khrushchev, the Kremlin, and other Warsaw Pact countries, was the vitality of East Germany as the westernmost Soviet satellite—the most accessible entryway into socialism for the Western world. East Germany had to hold its own under such intense scrutiny.

Ulbricht set about convincing Khrushchev of the necessity of economic support to Berlin, as well as the possibility of severely restricting travel and immigration measures at the inner-city border, by heavily pressuring Khrushchev in private phone calls and meetings in 1960 and early 1961. For a party attempting to prove the superiority of its economic system on the world stage, an economic lens proved the most successful bargaining chip. Indeed, Ulbricht told Khrushchev, at their meeting on November 30, 1960, that the economy of East Germany symbolized the greater interaction of communism with capitalism. “We believe that this is a question of how trade relations between the socialist camp and the capitalist countries will develop further,” Ulbricht stressed (“Record” 1960). Additionally, Ulbricht and East German authorities believed the West German government’s collaboration with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was not only an armaments issue but an “economic, ideological and political mission” (“Record” 1960). All parties concerned themselves with the defense of their own economic ideology, which bled into its political ideology and governance policies.

Ulbricht relayed his concern on the instability and insufficiency of the East German economy to Khrushchev in this pivotal November 30 meeting. The key problems hinged upon Eastern workers exploiting the Western economy for more gain; Ulbricht carefully avoided placing blame on his own East German citizens on this front, instead calling attention to the lack

of overall surveillance and scrutiny from the Kremlin and the GDR. The “about 50,000” *Grenzgänger* from East Berlin, crossing the border daily to work for inflated wages in West Berlin, caused West Berlin to grow significantly stronger, at the direct expense of East Berlin (Kempe 47; “Record” 1960). Salaries for all Eastern workers, but especially the “intelligentsia” (teachers and doctors, in Ulbricht’s testimony), were significantly higher in the West—and the GDR could not afford to raise the salaries to compete (“Record” 1960). Additionally, the living standards in the West were markedly better, causing tensions among Eastern residents who, upon seeing their neighbors in the West, struggled with their own government to receive better support (Kempe 47). Ulbricht explained that the East German economy could not supply the goods to satisfy the East Berlin purchasing power, even should their salaries be increased (“Record” 1960). The worsening economic crisis was congruent with the massive refugee exodus, which, month by month, steadily increased from a drip to a flow. Ulbricht recognized the refugee exodus as both a symptom and cause of the economic crisis in the GDR; the flight of many qualified intelligentsia, as well as able-bodied, military-aged men, worried Ulbricht deeply. For a politician who wanted to maintain his grip over a country, and a man who believed deeply in a socialist Germany, the refugee crisis “was an important factor in his aggressive tone with Khrushchev” (Harrison 157). Ulbricht knew action was necessary to create a better East Germany.

In late 1960, a Politbüro advisor, Hans Tzschorn, assembled a report on migration from East to West Germany from January to September of 1960 alone. His report concerned itself quite deeply with Berlin; he wrote “The open border with West Berlin facilitates the crossing,” damning the quality of the border as the reason that East Germans consider their crossing to be aided, or facilitated, by the governments themselves (Harrison 158). But Tzschorn highlights

several influences in the decision to migrate—political, personal, and economic. Going beyond what other East German or Soviet officials declared to be the primary and prurient reasons to emigrate—that being the failure of the struggling eastern economy to compete with the Marshall Plan-bloated western economy—Tzschorn listed people’s doubt and mistrust about the Soviet regime altogether, “insufficient patriotism,” and “the absence of any public campaign in the GDR against those leaving” as alternate reasons for migration (Harrison 158). Tzschorn also highlighted “the cold, impersonal way many state officials treated ‘the people’ and their concerns” as another key factor in the East-West flight. Lack of citizen satisfaction with the GDR drove much of Tzschorn’s analysis of the refugee flight in early 1960. If East Germans thought that life on the West would be better, not only economically, but also personally and politically, the East German regime had a lot more work to do than they initially feared to protect the sanctity of their country and economic system.

Still, Ulbricht, Khrushchev, and the driving forces behind the Berlin Wall continued to focus their attention on the economic nature of the refugee flights. At a Politbüro meeting in early January of 1961, Ulbricht argued that “the main battle in 1961 will be economic” (Harrison 159). Khrushchev finally relented. His assent and approval of Ulbricht’s constant demand for attention for East Germany allowed the other Eastern Bloc and Warsaw Pact countries to relent, too. Khrushchev would begin to demonstrate noticeable favoritism toward East Germany throughout 1961. He pleaded with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc:

We must understand that the GDR’s needs are also our needs. We can’t permit it that they come to us in such a state that either they sink or we throw them a rope. Let’s stop playing games about this question.

What Khrushchev was beginning to understand, after months of Ulbricht's pressure, was that the Soviet Union had its furthest-reaching link to the West via East Germany. Demonstrating the economic and political independence of East Germany could convince the West to recognize the country as sovereign—a political move that Adenauer and Kennedy still staunchly refused. Such a prime example of the successes of socialism could not afford to sink.

Ulbricht next needed to convince his allies that the best possible way to ensure the economic vitality of East Germany as part of the Eastern Bloc was to eliminate all cross-sector travel between East and West. In theory, the idea to restrict travel from East to West emerged in conversation between Ulbricht and Khrushchev at least as early as their November meeting in 1960; Khrushchev references this meeting and the agreed-upon “measures in the territory of economic stabilization in the GDR” in his January letter to Ulbricht (“Brief”).²¹ (Notable is Khrushchev's acknowledgement that “we [the Soviet Union] completely share your [the GDR] views;” Ulbricht drives Khrushchev, not the other way around, to consider the Wall.) The “measures” Ulbricht suggests, and Khrushchev agrees to, would become the Berlin Wall. As Ulbricht concerns himself with the stabilization of the East German economy, the simplest and most effective method for the economy to achieve independence and maintain the stability of its workforce is emigration restrictions—e.g., the Berlin Wall. Khrushchev agrees in the course of his letter to assemble the Warsaw Pact countries and discuss a German peace treaty, which almost certainly included discussions of these economic stabilization measures. Though the

²¹ “Natürlich teilen wir vollkommen die von Ihnen vorgebrachten Ansichten über Maßnahmen auf dem Gebiete der ökonomischen Stabilisierung der DDR und der Erweiterung der ökonomischen Zusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und der UdSSR.”

Berlin Wall appeared as a potential measure—essentially foreshadowed—for at least a year before its construction, Ulbricht needed the approval of Khrushchev and the Soviet Union, as well as Khrushchev’s ability to convince the Warsaw Pact states, to enact his plan.

Critically, Khrushchev’s approval of Ulbricht’s strict border control measures hinged upon his belief that President Kennedy would also approve. Khrushchev needed Ulbricht to wait until 1961, when Kennedy was inaugurated, to gather a sense of Kennedy’s foreign policies and answer to the Berlin question. But even before his inauguration, Khrushchev had the critical sense that Berlin was not important enough—to the U.S. or other Western actors—to prompt significant government or military action. Put simply, “No one in the world will declare war over Berlin or the German question,” Khrushchev confided in West German ambassador Hans Kroll (Kempe 12). On the heels of World War II and with the threat of nuclear annihilation, one wrong move from either the Soviet or American perspective could lead to disastrous consequences. Both the Soviet Union and the United States understood the geopolitical consequences of treating Berlin as though it were, in Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s words, a “shooting issue.” On this, Khrushchev would find Kennedy’s agreement: Berlin wasn’t worth a nuclear war. The problem was convincing Ulbricht (and Mayor Willy Brandt) of the same conclusion. Politicians with local claims to the area possessed a much higher sense that Berlin was, as Khrushchev had claimed, “the most dangerous place in the world,” and wanted Berlin defended, from both sides, as such.

Regardless of Ulbricht’s pushing for stricter border control faster, Khrushchev needed Kennedy’s preapproval. In his letter to Ulbricht, Khrushchev asserted that “Intelligence shows that it will require some time before Kennedy clearly stakes out his position in the German question” and that Ulbricht needed to wait to see if “it becomes clear if the regime in the United

States is willing to aim for mutual, acceptable decisions” (“Brief”).²² Once Kennedy took office, Khrushchev and Ulbricht gleaned his attitude on Berlin from his public speeches to the American people and his participation in international summits with the Soviet Union. On this attitude-discovery process, reflecting Khrushchev’s thought process after Kennedy’s third presidential candidate debate in October of 1960, Kempe writes:

For all Kennedy’s apparent conviction, Khrushchev senses the makings of compromise. Kennedy talked of U.S. contractual rights in Berlin, but not of moral responsibility. He wasn’t sounding the usual Republican clarion call to free captive nations. He wasn’t even suggesting that freedom should spread across the city’s border to East Berlin. He had spoken of *West Berlin* and of *West Berlin* alone. (Kempe 40)

Kennedy’s assumed pre-approval of the stricter border control measures, which Khrushchev gathered from his campaigning debate statements on the necessity of protecting West Berlin, served as the final key in unlocking Ulbricht’s plan to revitalize the GDR economy. With confidence that Kennedy seemed only preoccupied in protecting the United States’ claim to West Berlin—and the American freedom of movement as guaranteed by the Four Powers agreement—Khrushchev could proceed to give Ulbricht a go-ahead, and work on his own to convince other Warsaw Pact members of the necessity and timing of protecting Berlin Wall. This wait-and-see from the Soviet Union before proceeding on the ideation and construction of the Wall is precisely the reason I argue that the Berlin Wall indeed was built from both sides. Short of an

²² “Die vorgenommene Abtastung zeigt, daß es einiger Zeit bedarf, bis Kennedy seine Position in der Deutschlandfrage deutlicher absteckt und es klar wird, ob die Regierung der USA gewillt sein wird, gegenseitig annehmbare Beschlüsse zu erzielen.”

explicit approval, Kennedy delivered everything the Soviets needed to assure themselves of his complacency with strict border control measures, so long as they did not encroach upon the Western side of the city.

Unlike Erich Honecker's eventual claim that the Berlin Wall was such a well-constructed bulwark that it would continue to stand for the next century,²³ Khrushchev and the Soviet Union's initial understanding of the Berlin Wall centered around its temporary nature. Because Khrushchev promised Ulbricht that "we supported a socialist Germany," and the failing GDR economy exacerbated the conditions for the construction of a permanent barrier keeping one economic system in place, any means necessary to support and protect the idea of a socialist Germany needed to come into fruition ("Record"). Khrushchev wrote to Ulbricht that he only supported "the discussed measures from your letter, which will prove necessary under certain circumstances" alongside, or better, paired with, "the conclusion of a peace treaty," and only if "to come to an understanding with Kennedy" proved impossible should the two parties "agree to a date of the measures' implementation" (Khrushchev, "Brief").²⁴ This Wall, it seemed, was to Khrushchev only to be enacted as a last-ditch effort to prevent the mass migration reported by Ulbricht and Tzschorn. Additionally, and critically, as compared to Honecker, Khrushchev understood the Wall to be a *temporary* measure. He told West German ambassador Hans Kroll that "The Wall will disappear again someday, but only when the reasons for its construction

²³ See p. 20.

²⁴ "Darum ist es wünschenswert, die in Ihrem Brief behandelten Maßnahmen, die sich unter gewissen Umständen als notwendig erweisen werden, mit dem Abschluß eines Friedensvertrages zu koppeln. Wenn es nicht gelingen wird, mit Kennedy zu einer Verständigung zu kommen, werden wir, wie vereinbart, gemeinsam mit Ihnen den Zeitpunkt ihrer Durchführung bestimmen."

disappear” (Kempe 294). To fully deconstruct the Wall was to accept an entirely socialist—or capitalist—Germany.

Khrushchev additionally demonstrates an enhanced sense of rhetorical understanding of the danger of constructing Ulbricht’s Wall. He predicted the critiques and potential for Western propaganda when faced with so drastic a measure as containment but saw no other option forward to support the floundering GDR economy. In *Khrushchev Remembers*, Khrushchev himself reflected that “bourgeois societies” would find it easy to blame the Soviets, saying that “the gates of the Socialist paradise are guarded by armed troops” (Kempe 329). But Ulbricht had left him no other path forward because he had not effectively utilized “the moral and material potential that would someday be harnessed by the dictatorship of the working class” (329). And the West’s rapid economic (and, thereby, moral) improvement, thanks to the United States’ Marshall Plan, created a world in which East Germany and the rest of the Eastern Bloc had no way to “reach a level of moral and material development” to render “competition with the West” possible (329). His only option was the Wall. Khrushchev needed Ulbricht to contain his workers inside a socialist Germany to prove that the socialist dream could be realized in the West. Reluctantly, with full knowledge of its rhetorical danger for the Soviet Union and the message of socialism they were attempting to sell—as well as an assurance that the United States and the West would not step in to sabotage their attempt—Khrushchev allowed Ulbricht to begin blueprinting.

III.ii. OST, ÖFFENTLICH

“13 August made clear once again that our people has but one future, a future of peace and socialism. Both are inseparable, and their homeland in Germany is the German Democratic

Republic, the first workers' and farmers' state. To strengthen it is the patriotic duty of every good German."

—Excerpt from a 1961 SED-published pamphlet justifying the construction of the Berlin Wall

Soviet public-facing rhetoric faced a broad range of rhetorical needs, including concealing the imminent construction of the Berlin Wall once it was approved and defending its construction in accessible and appropriate terminology once GDR citizens woke to find their freedom of movement severely restricted on August 13. Both the Soviet Union and the Kremlin, under the leadership of Khrushchev, and the GDR, under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht, promoted propaganda both to justify the construction of the Wall and to conceal its imminent construction. Speeches, party-controlled newspaper articles, and public addresses served as methods to entrench the Eastern public-facing rhetoric about and for the promotion of the Berlin Wall.

Most prominent of these distraction tactics in the concealing of the construction of the Berlin Wall was the continuing Soviet plea for a peace treaty between East and West Germany. The Kremlin fought for the approval of this peace treaty long before it approved East German plans to construct the Wall and saw the treaty as politically and propagandistically necessary for the promotion of socialist values in the Eastern republic. But the peace treaty proved an essential avenue for Soviet rhetoric during the months of July and August, in which the concealment of the burgeoning Berlin Wall became paramount.

In his "Letter to the American People," published on August 12, 1961—the Saturday just before the Berlin Wall's first bricks were laid—Khrushchev called for the immediate signing of a peace treaty, recognizing the legal right of the German Democratic Republic's existence and making the relationship between East and West altogether friendlier. In Berlin especially,

Khrushchev hoped these tensions would noticeably lessen—the peace treaty would call for the repatriation of all foreign troops and allow for the four-power status in the city to marginally dissolve. By framing his viewpoint of ratifying the peace treaty to be the only viewpoint of promoting peace, Khrushchev used his platform to publicly call out Kennedy for his purported lack of cooperation and willingness to resolve conflict peacefully. “We are striving for only one thing: for peace, peace and only peace,” he wrote. “For the sake of this we stubbornly insist on the urgent signing of a peace treaty—I once more repeat, not a military agreement, not a pact preparing for war, but a peace treaty—with the two German states which have come into being on the territory of the old Germany” (“Letter” 9). In addressing the American citizens, Khrushchev hoped to convince them of his view that the brash American government was too concerned with its own protection that it could not promote the democratic growth of nations across the world. His rhetoric strategy is to include the American people and bourgeoisie, and tactfully exclude their decision-makers in Washington, making the average American reading his letter believe they have common ground with the Kremlin: “*Everyone* can see that the solution of the German problem will ensure normal international relationships and provide favorable conditions for the development of economic, cultural and scientific contacts” (8). Khrushchev wagers a bet with his inclusive language that *every* American values the culture of globalization beginning to emerge with the first vestiges of the Cold War. Not only would the peace treaty improve international relations, Khrushchev wrote, but it could also “provide the basis for the development of normal and even friendly relations among all countries which want peace,” implying that by not accepting the peace treaty, the United States does not want peace (8). Additionally, solving the Berlin problem should be left up to only the countries which “really understand the need for the coexistence of two existing systems, the capitalist and the socialist”

(8). Here, Khrushchev plays on the different and opposite nature of the two economic systems to allegorize the capitalist free market, where competition is valued, respected, and necessary. Should the global economy not function the same way, Khrushchev suggests—and isn't competition healthy for a well-functioning economy? His letter implies that the United States stations themselves as a warmongering, anticapitalistic country by stationing themselves rhetorically opposite a peace treaty between East and West. Khrushchev plays with the image of America as a global democratic and capitalist power and reminds his American readers that their duty, as citizens of such a country, should be first and foremost to protect the peace.

Khrushchev gambles with his letter to the American people; he accuses and blames the United States of ideologically violating the conditions of the four-power treaty guaranteed by and to them in the Potsdam Conference. By refusing to sign the peace treaty, Khrushchev argues, the United States capitulates themselves into the rhetorical positioning of dominance, rather than cooperation. If they do not want peace, he suggests, “there is obviously only one explanation possible: these gentlemen would like to swallow up the German Democratic Republic” (8). Without a peace treaty, “such situations” as the United States and Soviet Union would find themselves in over the Berlin Question “are solved not through negotiations and contacts, but only by war. No state on earth will ever agree to being swallowed by its neighbor” (8). Further, Khrushchev questions the American right to involvement in a country such as Germany, vilifying the regime for its hierarchical dominance over the country's decision-making; in what way is the United States, in limiting the political capabilities of the FRG's actors like Adenauer, any different from the Soviet's single-party elections? He asks,

...On the strength of what rights do the USA and its allies assume the role of gendarmes, protecting certain regimes to their liking in other countries? On the strength of what

rights are they the ones to decide which system is suitable for this or that nation? Why are they entitled to declare war to preserve a regime which suits them in a foreign country? Such practices constitute high-handed arbitrariness in international relations. An arbitrary rule of this kind may have the gravest consequences. Only those who want war can act in this manner. (9)

Khrushchev wants to push his American readers into distrust of their own regime to consider the political merits of a peace treaty for the German people, not for the Soviet actors pushing for the treaty's ratification. In doing so, Khrushchev emphasizes his rhetorical manipulation of the Berliners and Germans at hand. He's not the only one to exploit the entrapped and separated people of Berlin for his own political gain: Kennedy, too, uses the plight of Berlin in the geopolitical middle of the Cold War to remind the citizens of his own country of the great dangers of socialism.²⁵

His final pages of his letter clearly and firmly point blame at the United States government, and their allies in the West, of "artificially whipping up a controversy around the Berlin question" by "introducing a spirit of military hysteria into it" (11). The goal of the United States could only be "to further aggravate international tensions and create a pretext for unleashing war against the Soviet Union and the whole socialist camp" (11). Khrushchev plays on two fears of the American people early in Kennedy's presidency—the fear of the ultimate nuclear war and mutually assured destruction, and the United States' sole responsibility for unleashing it. Here, Khrushchev asks the American readers not only to critically examine the Western powers' involvement in actual peace in Berlin, but also to question if their country

²⁵ See Lyndon Johnson's August 19 address to the Parliament assembled in Berlin, pp. 40–44.

would really wage the lives of their citizens in a war—just so the regime could avoid signing Khrushchev’s peace treaty. Khrushchev adds a final insult to his readers by insinuating that only “if people are sober-minded and capable of reasoning logically, of understanding plain truths” could people begin to realize the merit of a simple, easy solution to the German problem and the Berlin Crisis: his peace treaty (10). In comparison to a war, which Khrushchev argues that Kennedy promotes by *not* signing a peace treaty, peace seems the preferable—even the humane—option.

Khrushchev’s letter to the American people fell just one day before the Wall’s construction began in East Berlin. He may not have convinced citizens of the United States of the genuineness of his plea for “peace, peace and only peace” by immediately, rhetorically, following up his letter with a city divided down the middle, but his remarks, at least, struck a nerve somewhere: Kennedy’s secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, saved Khrushchev’s letter among her Germany files. Khrushchev’s rhetoric frames the Soviet perspective of peace above war by insinuating, propagandistically, the American perspective as the opposite.

Both Kremlin and East Berlin actors framed their approach to pushing for a peace treaty as explicit propaganda. Ulbricht, in the November 30, 1960 meeting in Moscow, tells Khrushchev that “for now we will be careful with propaganda about a peace treaty” because Khrushchev’s emphasis on the treaty above all else dissatisfied the East German citizens wanting real change: “among our population there is already a mood taking shape where they say—you only talk about a peace treaty, but don’t do anything about it. So we have to be careful” (“Record”). From this conversation, evidence suggests that the propagandistic approach to the peace treaty was only effective towards an international audience, like as evidenced in Khrushchev’s “Letter to the American People.” However, the Soviet Union and the German

Democratic Republic engaged in plenty of propaganda aimed toward their own people, especially once the Wall was constructed and needed to be justified.

Kennedy's Presidential Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board noted that Ulbricht's August 10 address at the Kabelwerk Oberspree—where he spoke to a number of party members and the steel workers employed at the factory about the dangers of continued *Republikflucht* and the “plundering of the GDR by the disruption center of West Berlin”²⁶—served as the best evidence that the threatened action on the incoming strengthening of the immigration measures was imminent (“Memorandum;” Grunert). In a review of the activities on August 10, 1961, Brigitte Grunert argued that “Through a propaganda campaign that intensifies every day from the SED, the East Berliners are prepared for the construction of the Wall, even without a word said about a Wall” (Grunert).²⁷ Ulbricht's address at the Kabelwerk Oberspree clearly spoke to an imminent moment “in which major decisions for our city and the nation lie ahead” (Grunert).²⁸ Additionally, Ulbricht reminded them of the importance of living and working within the GDR, denouncing the some 50,000 *Grenzgänger* who crossed the state border each day to work in the West and live in the East. For Ulbricht, it was “incompatible with the honor of the citizens of the GDR to slave for the militarists and capitalists over there” (Grunert).²⁹ Meanwhile, 1,709

²⁶ “...Ausplünderung der DDR über das Störzentrum Westberlin...”

²⁷ With assistance from Daniel Magilow. “Mit einer täglich sich steigernden Propaganda-Aktion der SED werden die Ost-Berliner auf den Mauerbau vorbereitet, ohne dass ein Wort darüber fällt.”

²⁸ “Der SED-Chef und Staatsratsvorsitzende Walter Ulbricht spricht im Kabelwerk Oberspree „in einem Augenblick, da große Entscheidungen für unsere Stadt und die Nation bevorstehen“.”

²⁹ “Es sei „mit der Ehre des Bürgers der DDR nicht vereinbar, für die Militaristen und Kapitalisten drüben zu schuften“.”

refugees registered at Marienfelde in West Berlin on August 9 alone—the refugee flight had grown increasingly dangerous for East Germany as a whole (Grunert). Ulbricht’s message to the cable workers and party members feels panicked, yet determined: That imminent moment, and the time to act to end the refugee flight (thereby, the economic plight of the East), was now.

Privately, government officials agreed that the economic plight of the East served as the most exigent reason for the construction of the Wall. Publicly, however, they strove to present a political narrative for the need for separation. Khrushchev and Ulbricht’s lengthy conversation on August 1 proves the rhetorical importance of political messaging for the success of the intended rhetoric. Ulbricht explains that “We must explain to the state bureaucracy how we envisage our future economic policy...” (“Notes”). Khrushchev counters that “The measures should not be explained to your people in this way... The border closure must be explained politically, and the economic consequences are then to be derived from this” (“Notes”).

Ulbricht’s Kabelwerk Oberspree address also reflects the rhetorical decision to focus on political, rather than economic, reasons to manufacture a separation from the West. He calls for “peace and freedom of the people, for a German peace treaty, against war and capitalist enslavement!” (Grunert).³⁰ The political goal for the presentation of the construction of the Wall is mirrored in the language DDR officials referred to the Wall with; *Antifaschister Schutzwall*, or “antifascist protection bulwark.” Note that Eastern powers did not name the wall *Anticapitalistischer*

³⁰ “Für Frieden und Freiheit des Volkes. Für einen deutschen Friedensvertrag, gegen Krieg und kapitalistische Knechtung!”

Schutzwall; economic implications are not at the forefront of the publicized rhetoric from the East.

Another example of publicly issued government communication following the construction of the Berlin Wall appeared in a 48-page pamphlet distributed after the Wall's construction entitled "Da schlug's 13." The pamphlet contained humorous stories surrounding the average military man working to build and protect the Wall, praise for the SED, and rhetoric surrounding the advancement of a peace treaty after the implementation of border control measures by Ulbricht. To explain the necessity of the Wall, the SED advanced the official line that "13 August was a victory for the forces of peace and socialism. The forces of war and reaction were defeated" and that the Wall was built to defend East Berlin against the Western militaristic invasions ("Da schlug's 13"). The pamphlet also reminded East Berliners that the forces responsible for the Wall were "peace-loving Germans...good Germans" and that "those in [the measures'] interest... implemented these measures... Men of the people" ("Da schlug's 13"). Centering the responsibility of the Wall on the people of the Republic—and not the government, or Ulbricht or Khrushchev as representative actors of their respective governments—allows for the Wall to emerge as a decision made not only in the best interest of East Berlin, but also *by* East Berliners themselves. The Wall became not a prison, as the West would paint it, but a true safeguard: constructed by and for its own people.

It is vital to recognize that the narrative that East Germans were all completely trapped and helpless, suffocated by the Soviet and Eastern powers in Berlin, is entirely centered in Western pro-capitalist values and propaganda, as well as our own collective Western unwillingness to hint that people under an oppressive regime, only a mirror image of our own, feel loyalty and fondness for their country. East Berlin was not a wholly undesirable place to

live. Some East Germans believed strongly in the concept of socialism, and distrusted the West, whom they believed to not have engaged in the process of denazification.

Rhetoric produced by East Germans, sourced from academic texts published out of the control of the state-sponsored newspapers and media, indicates that East Germans found the initial construction of the Wall deplorable, but soon adjusted to its presence just as West Berliners did. Hanns Werner Schwarze, a broadcast journalist with experience in both the West and the East, suggests in *GDR Heute* that the construction of the wall was an unavoidable, but “notorious” and “inhumane,” action for a “State whose inhabitants are running away” (Schwarze 100). He believes East Germans were keenly aware that a belief that the GDR would open the Berlin border was to “harbor an illusion” (Schwarze 101). Schwarze identifies the commentary from East Berliners who raise a sort of defense of the Wall, acknowledging its benefits of improving the East German economy by removing the overbearing influence of the West. But this rhetoric is more so “an attempt to explain the causes of a measure which they [DDR citizens] nevertheless find repugnant” (Schwarze 101). Jonathan Steele, a British journalist, wrote in his novel *Inside East Germany* that “for people who were unhappy in the GDR it was more of a sense of *faute de mieux*, a negative feeling that they had to make do with the GDR because they could no longer leave it” (Steele 200). But a distinctly East Berlin conscience would develop in the generations born after the construction of the Wall – generations which had never had any interaction with the West. These generations were more likely to understand and even accept the rhetoric of the Wall’s necessity, and its position as a political border between two separate countries – and not one country, separated into two.

Abschluss.

“The Berlin Wall as a single, coherent wall dividing a nation is an abstraction, an imagined entity, whose name was somehow accepted from the start. ...If we want to understand the Berlin Wall as a symbol, we must consider its real material qualities.”

—*Julia Sonnevend, Stories Without Borders, a rhetorical examination of the 1989 Fall of the Berlin Wall* (36)

Citizens of the global world view a wall as synonymous with division; the act of bricklaying creates a barrier which, no matter how short or how tall, alters the dynamic between the two sides being divided. In the case of Berlin and Germany, the psychological and geopolitical concept of “two Germanys” would last much longer than the physical life of the Wall. Each side of the Berlin Wall created their own, different and opposite, understanding of the Wall, which was reflected physically in its literal structure of two encasing bulwarks and an interior “Death Strip.” However, the language and rhetoric of power surrounding the Berlin Wall in 1961—in justifying, decrying, celebrating, or denouncing its construction—occupies a rhetorical similarity which changes the way that we as scholars and citizens of a global world must recognize. The Berlin Wall was willingly and enthusiastically constructed by both the Eastern and the Western powers. President John Kennedy’s administration and the United States government offered just shy of a guarantee of approval to First Secretary Walter Ulbricht and Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who in turn gamely waited to shore up their precarious economic plight until they had received the necessary confirmation of complacency from their peers in the West. The twoness of communication instead splits between public and private in both governments, where the Berlin Wall became the source of and cause for propaganda. But there exists no “different and opposite” rhetorical positioning between East and West, as might be

expected when confronted with the historical and Western or Eastern narratives of the Berlin Wall and about the Cold War.

This thesis represents only a portion of rhetorical analysis upon the Cold War case study that is the Berlin Wall. A groundbreaking way to continue studying the Berlin Wall is in its contemporary memorialization. Despite the Berlin Wall's status as a symbol of the separation inherent in the narrative of the Cold War—and the source of death for almost three hundred citizens—the city of Berlin and its people persistently preserve the Wall. Carole Blair, rhetorical scholar of contemporary monuments, writes of the linkages between memorial sites and other texts, arguing that memorial sites, simply by their existence, engage in “enabling, appropriating, contextualizing, supplementing, correcting, challenging, competing, and silencing” other forms of text or rhetoric (Blair 39). The Wall, as a contemporary memorial site to the Cold War and, in its time standing, as a monument in its own fashion, also abides by these patterns of multimodal rhetorical communication. Thus, the story of the Berlin Wall changes again in its current, modern form—preserved as a historical rhetorical text through museums, memorial sites, and infographics throughout the modern city of Berlin.

The Wall is reproduced and preserved through these standing monuments, which not only communicate its lasting rhetorical influence but also remember its impact on humanity in Berlin. One such memorial is the *Berliner Mauerweg*—a hiking and biking trail running along a former patrol route or border control route, encircling West Berlin on its exterior borders (those touching East Germany) and its interior city border (touching East Berlin). The *Mauerweg* contains info markers, photographs, memorials to 29 victims of the Berlin Wall, maps, and listening stations throughout the route (“Mauerweg”).



Figure 5. One panel of the East Side Gallery, covered in graffiti, January 2024.

The Wall is literally preserved in several sections, including at the Topography of Terror, the East Side Gallery, and Bernauer Straße (“Traces of the Wall”). All these preservations carry an entirely different rhetorical context from the Wall in 1961. Their consequence is to inspire retrospective reflection and collectively memorialize a city, its people, and its history, as a rhetorical text within the greater worldwide context of the Cold War. Whereas the

consequence of the Wall during the time of its legal standing in Berlin served as a state border, the consequence of its surviving, preserved parcels are educational, or serve as a warning to tourists on the inhumanity of such methods of division.

The question of the Wall’s reproduction and preservation is complex. As Blair writes, “Even the bare materiality of a memorial site does not guarantee that it is the same text on a cloudy day as on a sunny one, on a crowded day as when almost deserted, at dawn as at midday. In fact, its capacity to be engaged physically actually determines its extreme mutability” (Blair 39). Once the Berlin Wall passed from current policy into history, its rhetorical features became likewise altered; it could no longer exist as the same state barrier once political policy and legislation nullified its existence as such. But its presence as a public memorial remains, demonstrating the extreme versatility of rhetorical text, even when the text is constructed in concrete. Honecker’s claim of the Wall’s continued existence over the course of one hundred years may live to be proven, after all.

Additionally, contemporary memorialization of the Wall—oftentimes accomplished by citizens and governments of Berlin, and not outsiders (e.g. the United States or Soviet Union governments)—exists to focus on the division and reunification inherent in the construction of the Wall, rather than the war between democracy and communism or capitalism and socialism. Because citizens of Germany and Berlin, who experienced the division of one people into two and live in the direct shadow of separation, created these memorial sites to remember the Wall itself, their rhetorical reimagining of the

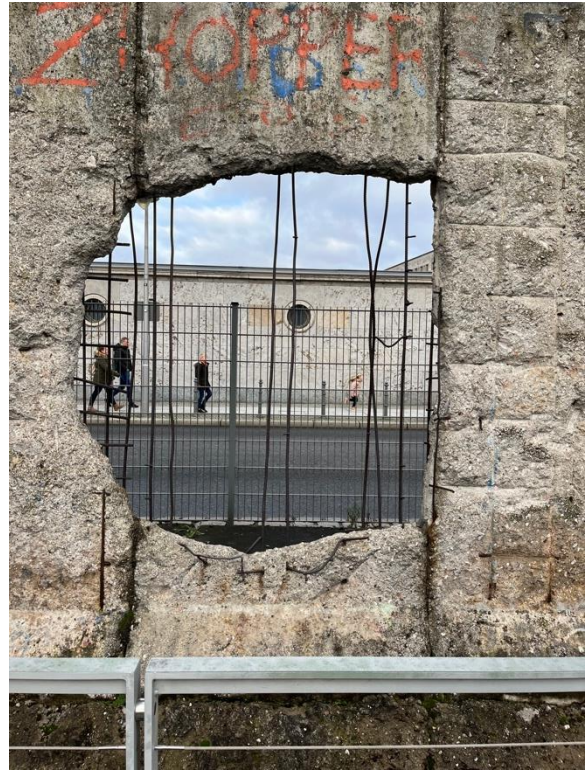


Figure 6. A preserved section of one of the exterior walls at the Topography of Terror, January 2024.

Wall paints a story focused on the inhumanity of rhetorical and physical separation. Other memorials of the Cold War, or even a Berlin Wall memorial created by American or Soviet forces, again alter the rhetorical throughline; giving power back to the people of Berlin allows the twoness of the Berlin Wall to take full shape in the public conscience. Knowing the change in symbolism in the modern era, as compared with the historical perceptions, again changes the story we are obligated to tell about the Berlin Wall. Understanding the Berlin Wall as a symbol again requires us to consider “its real material qualities” (Sonnevend 36) and its positionality as a “powerful propaganda object for both [East and West]: maybe neither side had an interest in seeing it as complex and ever-changing” (44). The Berlin Wall thus gains a third dimension and a third designation of “Wall” in its memorial. Now it is not only the two barrier walls that we see in historical photos, but it is also the memorial Walls preserved and reconstructed for educational

and memorial purposes in contemporary Berlin. Additionally, its story continues to unfold in a dichotomy, just as the story I've shaped of its construction did: memorials constitute a public sphere of rhetoric, whereas the city of Berlin's government and officials still must make private rhetorical decisions on how to frame their memorials and what stories to tell about the Berlin Wall to residents, historians, and tourists alike.

Through this thesis, I hoped to emphasize the change in rhetoric positionality that we must challenge as scholars in an increasingly globalized—and divided—world. Where a rhetoric of separation dominates, we must recognize the false cognates of different and opposite positioning. We should be made responsible to retell stories like of the Berlin Wall to emphasize the responsibility of both East and West in creating and maintaining rhetorical and physical separation for geopolitical and economic gain.

Western and Eastern rhetoric surrounding the construction of the Berlin Wall displays their eerie similarities in priority, despite their exterior opposing political ideologies. The people of Berlin were physically, rhetorically, and ideologically separated—torn by hands and powers above them, and not of them. It would be another twenty-eight years before their hands would join over the rubble of the Berlin Wall.

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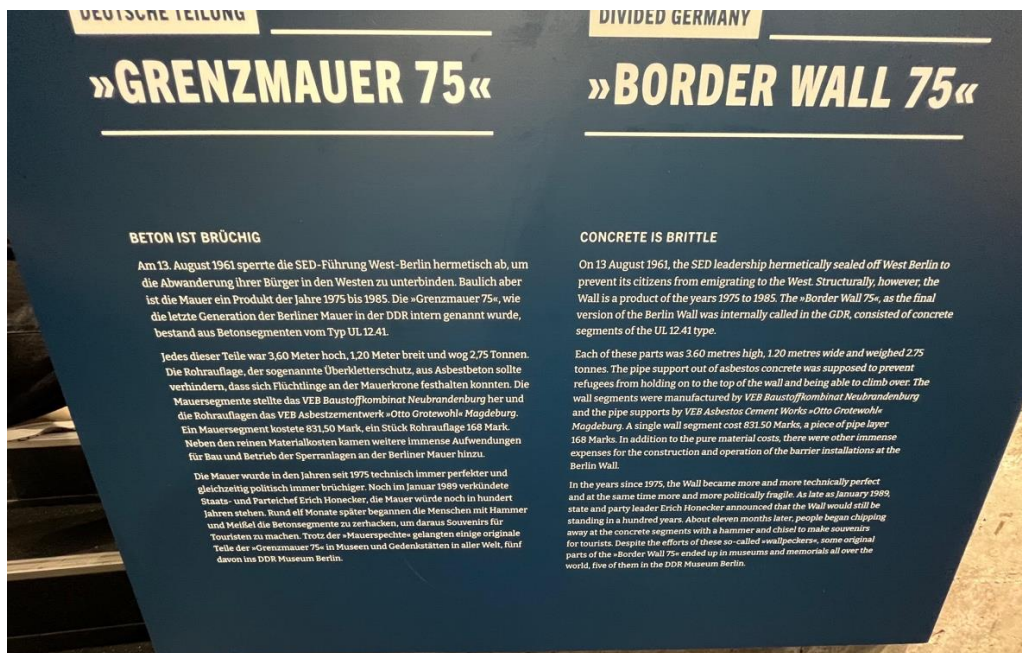
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