

# [Critical analysis of a geopolitical text: ich bin ein berliner essay](https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-of-a-geopolitical-text-ich-bin-ein-berliner-essay/)

“ Ich bin ein Berliner,” or “ I am a Berliner” is the unforgettable speech that was delivered by John F. Kennedy in front of hundreds of Berliners on the balcony of the Schoeneberg Rathaus (city hall) in West Berlin on June 26, 1963. It is considered one of the best rhetorical speeches ever given. My aim here is to provide a deep analysis of its significance and influence on the local and global political arena of that time in the context of the Cold War. For better understanding of significance of the speech we will firstly introduce events proceeding it and briefly explain the Cold War.

Germany no longer existed as a sovereign state once it surrendered at the end of the Second World War because the Allies wanted to avoid another post-war resolution that would once again allow Germany to become a global threat. Instead, military and political representatives of the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France ruled there and policy was coordinated in the Allied Control Council. The Four Powers established four zones of military occupation in Germany and also in Berlin.

Britain, France and the United States’ zones of the country were later consolidated into one zone for reconstruction. Democracy and capitalism were encouraged in the Western zones of Germany with multi political parties’ system whereas socialism took over all aspects of life in the Soviet zone. Both, West and East sought to make their part of Berlin a ‘ show window’ for their system and aimed to make it alluring to people on the other side. The Powers wanted to maintain the status quo in Berlin but….

Berlin was located at the front line of the Cold War between USA and USSR and it became a focus of Cold War tensions between communism and democracy in the 1960’s. Since Berlin, the capital, was located deep in the Soviet Zone and divided into four parts, it was a big threat for the East because democratic West Berlin was a way more attractive for people due to the freedoms and economic prosperity. This presented also an economic threat to East Berlin as lots of the refugees who left for West were skilled and educated people what resulted in an economic ‘ brain drain’.

That unusual geopolitical situation became difficult to handle. Khrushchev unable to compete with and outmaneuver the capitalist West aimed to force the Allies out of West Berlin and to bring them to recognize the existence of the communist East German state. Khrushchev met Kennedy at the summit in Vienna in June 1961, but Kennedy refused to leave and abandon West Berlin arguing that the East German government had not been freely elected. The U. S. leaders feel even more committed to to preserving Western access to West Berlin after The Soviet threats.

The Soviets built the Berlin Wall, a tangible manifestation of the Iron Curtain. It was officially called the anti-fascist protective barrier and should also serve to prevent spies and agents of West Germany from crossing into their territory. However everybody knew the Wall served to prevent the massive emigration and defection. As Kennedy in his speech said “ we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in, to prevent them from leaving us. “ This left West Berlin a vulnerable outpost due to its location 177 kilometers from West Germany’ border.

The West, particularly the USA, was accused of failing to respond rigorously to the building of the Wall. Citizens and the mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt felt betrayed by the US, Britain, and France after they informed they would not challenge it by force. West Berliners trapped inside the Iron Curtain, feared an invasion from East Germany. All this proceeded the John F. Kennedy visit to West Berlin and his speech ‘ Ich bin ein Berliner’ in which he presented his stance and made it clear what his action would be if the East Germany would have invaded West Berlin.

Speech was given in during the time we could consider the peak of the Cold War. Geopolitics in this time was synonymous with the U S-Soviet struggle for global p r i m a c y that was fought on ideological, territorial and cultural level. Kennedy gave this speech in June, 1963, in the time when the West Berliners were seeking for help from outside to stop the tensions between West Berlin and East Berlin. It showed American support and solidarity to the citizens of West Germany 22 months after the erection of the Berlin Wall.

Kennedy demonstrated his solidarity by the quotation “ Ich bin ein Berliner,” and by usage of the plural pronoun ‘ we. ’ “ And there are some who say in Europe and elsewhere we can work with the Communists. Let them come to Berlin. ” Another passage assigning the American solidarity with the West German people was “ I want to say on behalf of my countrymen who live many miles away on the other side of the Atlantic, who are far distant from you, that they take the greatest pride, that they have been able to share with you, even from a distance, the story of the last 18 years. ”

In Kennedy’s speech the US acknowledged for the first time that East Berlin was part of the Soviet bloc along with the rest of East Germany. “ There are many people in the world who really don’t understand, or say they don’t, what is the great issue between the free world and the Communist world. Let them come to Berlin. ” By stating “ In 18 years of peace and good faith, this generation of Germans has earned the right to be free, including the right to unite their families and their nation in lasting peace, with good will to all people,” Kennedy establishes a shared sense of values and attitude with his audience.

Kennedy in this speech expressed his solidarity to West Berlin and sharing of the common values, but the main message of his speech was aimed at the Soviet Union in my opinion. This message was ‘ we will not give up on West Berlin. ’ Kennedy felt the US’ reputation was tied strongly to West Berlin. West Berliners were afraid that if Soviets developed enough pressure it would have pushed the Allies away. Kennedy, by saying “ Ich bin ein Berliner” demonstrated this will not be a case. As he could not have taken it back, he could not have left otherwise he would have lost his credibility.

It was essential for the Allies to stay otherwise none of other America’s allies would trust them to defend them in the face of a Soviet menace. It made it clear to the Soviets they would never abandon West Berlin and allow a united Germany under communist control within the Soviet orbit as it could lead the communists to conclude that the USA was weak, and the Soviets would challenge them elsewhere in the world. American administration saw the Soviet Union as an inherently expansionist power.

George Kennan developed the concept that determined ZSSR as ‘ historically and geographically determined power with an unfolding necessity to constantly expand’. It was this view that became the dominant American geopolitical orthodoxy US feared of ZSSR’ expansion that would lead to domino effect. Statement “ There are some who say that Communism is the wave of the future,” represents Kennedy’s fears of ZSSR’ expansion. We can accordingly see the presence of Domino Theory. For the US, West Berlin was a ‘ super-domino. So if they let it fall, many others would follow and fall to communism soon after. US adopted the policy of containment.

The main aims were to stall the spreading of communism and to prevent a domino effect. Kennedy had refused to allow Soviet pressure to force or influence his politics. “… lift your eyes beyond the dangers of today, to the hopes of tomorrow, beyond the freedom merely of this city of Berlin, or your country of Germany, to the advance of freedom everywhere, beyond the wall to the day of peace with justice, beyond yourselves and ourselves to all mankind. Strong identification in the speech is used strategically. Kennedy identifies with the citizens of Berlin in their will for freedom and reunion with their families in East Berlin.

“ In 18 years of peace and good faith, this generation of Germans has earned the right to be free, including the right to unite their families and their nation in lasting peace, with good will to all people. ” American discourse strictly divide between the space of the ‘ Self’ and the space of the ‘ Other. ‘ Iron Curtain’ separates the free world (US world) from Soviets. Soviet geopolitical discourse was the same- ‘ Us’ against ‘ them. ’This is a sign of national exceptionalism. In the midst of the Cold War Kennedy declared, “ There are many people in the world who really don’t understand, or say they don’t, what is the great issue between the free world and the communist world. Let them come to Berlin. ” In substituting “ free world” for “ democracy”, Kennedy persuaded the audience to believe that communism is the opposite of being free.

He, as well as other US leaders upheld their values ideals as general and universal and its aspiration not self-serving but those of humanity. “ You live in a defended island of freedom, but your life is part of the main. So let me ask you as I close, to lift your eyes beyond the dangers of today, to the hopes of tomorrow, beyond the freedom merely of this city of Berlin, or your country of Germany, to the advance of freedom everywhere, beyond the wall to the day of peace with justice, beyond yourselves and ourselves to all mankind. ”

Here we see the main contradiction of his politics. He claims “ lift your eyes beyond the dangers of today, to the hopes of tomorrow, beyond the freedom merely of this city of Berlin, or your country of Germany, to the advance of freedom everywhere, beyond the wall to the day of peace with justice, beyond yourselves and ourselves to all mankind,” putting himself into the position of a freedom fighter, the good one. The US reality was different. Foreign policy of containment of the Soviet Union in praktice meant that US blacklisted those whose ides challenged their perception of world.

And alike they intervened and attacked people and states they considered a threat to their version of ‘ essential truths’. For instance, the United States helped overthrow a left-wing government in Guatemala in the year 1954 s well as supported an unsuccessful invasion of Cuba in 1961. We should not forget to mention also the most important phenomenon of that time geopolitics, balance of power. This term describes a state of affairs in the international system when there is parity or stability between competing forces.

US as well as ZSSR intended to prevent one another from becoming sufficiently strong, so as to enable it to protrude its will upon the rest. Berlin was considered to be the key to the balance of power in Europe of that time. For Kennedy US’ credibility was at stake because a failure in Berlin could subvert NATO, weaken American influence in West Germany, the key to the balance of power in Europe, and lead to already mentioned domino effect. President employed also symbolism and used it to create a sense of solidarity.

His visit was a symbolic act itself when he came to West Germany and told his audience that he is one of them: “ While the wall is the most obvious and vivid demonstration of the failures of the Communist system , for all the world to see, we take no satisfaction in it. ” and “ Ich bin ein Berliner”. Besides, in this passionate speech he portrayed West Berlin a symbol of freedom in a world threatened by the Cold War. “ Two thousand years ago,” he told the crowd, “ the proudest boast in the world was ‘ civis Romanus sum’. “ Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is ‘ Ich bin ein Berliner.

“ By comparing the West German people with the proud Roman people who lived two thousand years ago, Kennedy wants the Berliners to be proud of their freedom and their democracy. Afterwards, when Kennedy and mayor finished their speeches, their words were followed by the tolling of the ‘ Freedom Bell’ from the bell tower of the Rathaus in memorial of East Germans. idealistic Germany in this paragraph without even mentioning communism. US economy was much stronger and its nuclear weapons exceeded the Soviet Union’s in both number and quality.

But the powers were still competing. So one could argue USA feared ZSSR because of the heartland theory created by Mackinder in 1919. The theory can be summarised as: “ Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island controls the world. ” And the Soviet Union ruled the area the Heartland. Eventhough, I personally disagree with this theory. For better understanding of strength of Kennedy speech we will now have a closer look at its rhetorical analysis. Kennedy used kairos very effectively.

It means he chose the right time and the right place to say the right thing. This speech is also structured very well. It accurately hits its target audience. Kennedy used also mimic, facial expression and body posture to ignite the West Germans for ‘ their’ thing. The epizeuxis, “ Two thousand years ago, two thousand years ago” was also used to induce the audience to realize this huge time frame. There has not been anyone else for two thousand years as significant as them. He says that he is proud to be one of them which makes them feel a sympathy for him.

It is easier for Kennedy to persuade his audience when there is some kind of bonding between him and the West Germans. By using the ethopoeia, “ Ich bin ein Berliner” Kennedy puts himself in place of the West German people so as to both understand and express his feelings more vividly. The rhetorical analysis also makes it obvious that his goal is the advertise freedom (and democracy) everywhere by repeating the words “ freedom” and “ free. ” He repeated it together thirteen times in this speech. This is called diacope.

He appeals to the audience’s emotions when he refers to a “ free world”. In employing this pathos, Kennedy moves the West Berliners to seek for freedom and democracy instead of communism. The usage of diacope and pathos emphasizes his message and provide his view on the idealistic (democratic) Germany. He used repetition throughout the speech. Kennedy used the phrase “ Ich bin ein Berliner” twice and ended his speech on it. By employing the diacope “ Let them come to Berlin” he used Berlin as an example in order to explain to everyone why communism does not coincide with democracy.

In order to increase the memorability of this message, he enforced the diacope by translating it into German language: “ Lass’ sie nach Berlin kommen”. Kennedy used a rhetorical leap from the local to the universal, what was characteristic for American Cold War geopolitical discourse. The geographical complexity of Berlin Wall was ideal for this purpose. Through the use of earth- labelling categories like “ the free world” he presented” the geopolitical monochrome of good versus evil” (Geopolitical Reader, page 60).

Now it was America versus the Soviet Union. As I already mentioned, During the Cold War the geopolitical reasoning of American administration contributed to a dangerous simplification of politics as global areas were divided into ‘ frendly’ and ‘ hostile’ spaces; ‘ us’ and ‘ them. ’ Kennedy addresses indirectly those people who see any kind of advantages in communism: “ There are many people in the world who really don’t understand, or say they don’t, what is the great issue between the free world and the Communist world. Let them come to Berlin.

There are some who say that communism is the wave of the future. Let them come to Berlin. And there are some who say, in Europe and elsewhere, we can work with Communists. Let them come to Berlin. And there are even a few who say that it is true that communism is an evil system, but it permits us to make economic progress. Lass’ sie nach Berlin kommen. Let them come to Berlin. ” Kennedy uses many rhetorical devices in this paragraph in order to persuade everyone that communism is wrong political path. In order to stop people believing in the ood of communism he used deduction.

He opened with a statement many people believe is true about communism and finished a statement which is believed by just a few people. When after Second World War Germany together with its capital Berlin were divided into East and West the events there became increasingly influential in the Cold War. Soviets, who established their sphere of influence over the states of Eastern Europe, build the Berlin wall, a physical representation of ‘ iron curtain’ and a symbol of the Cold War.

This divided friends and families who forced to lead significantly different lives. At this time, president Kennedy gave a speech whose universal message was easily understood. It carried the message: We are in the Cold War and we are not going to give up, neither in Berlin nor anywhere else in the world. It sent a defiant message of unity to the Soviets and Berliners and baffled Moscow’s hopes of driving the Allies out of West Berlin. The speech is considered one of Kennedy’s best, probably it is the most famous one and it was a notable moment of the Cold War.