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HIST133C

Marcuse

M/W 9:30

Source Exploration: Version 2

* The document I chose to explore is President Reagan’s speech at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin at 2:00 P.M. on June 12th, 1987. The speech took place during Reagan’s second visit to Berlin and urged Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the Soviet Union, to take down the Berlin Wall and put an end to the restriction of travel. Reagan’s speech emphasized the importance of working to bring the East and West back together for the good of both sides as well as America’s willingness to help this process in any way possible
* According to Peter Robinson’s editorial “*The Inside Story of Reagan’s Berlin Challenge”*, which is described in detail further down, the idea for the speech came about in April, 1987 before the 750th anniversary of the founding of Berlin. President Reagan was not originally planning to visit Germany, but he was scheduled for a trip to Rome and Venice in early June of that year and, at the request of the West German government, agreed to spend a few hours in Berlin before returning to the United States. The event was originally expected to attract about 10,000 people and the President was advised by his team of US diplomats to talk about foreign policy.
* Transcripts of the speech are widely available on the web. A simple Google search produces a variety of websites that feature the original speech either in text, audio, or video form. I found the document on the **German History Docs** website in text form. An audio file of the speech can be found on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Reagan\_Brandenburg\_Gate\_speech.ogg) and numerous video recordings are available to the public on Youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MDFX-dNtsM).
* The author of the speech is Peter Mark Robinson who was a speechwriter for Vice President George H.W. Bush and later, President Reagan. He was born in on April 18th, 1957 and took over the position of chief speechwriter for Vice President Bush immediately after graduating college in 1982. He was then transferred to Reagan’s staff as a speechwriter assistant, where he crafted the famous 1987 speech. Robinson served the White House for six years and wrote three hundred speeches before leaving the position to attend business graduate school at Stanford University. His biography is available on **Wikipedia**.
* A **Library Catalog** search containing the keywords “Reagan” and “Brandenburg” produced results that indicated the original speech has been published in several books available at the UCSB library. One of them is *American Speeches: Political Oratory from Patrick Henry to Barack Obama* by Ted Widmer, published in 2011, and the other is *The Citizen’s Almanac: Fundamental Documents, Symbols, and Anthems of the united Sates,* which is a government published book. The latter, however, is unavailable at UCSB during the library construction. I did not get a copy of the book by Ted Widmer since the original speech is widely available on the web.
* President Reagan’s speech is translated into German on the German History Docs website by selecting “Deutsch” in the upper right corner.
* More books that analyze Reagan’s speech and its effects can be found using the **Melvyl** search. I chose the keywords “Reagan” and “Berlin” and came across several books with different interpretation of the speech. The first is a book called *The Year that Changed the World: The Untold Story Behind the Fall of the Berlin Wall* by Michael Meyer. It was published in 2009 and challenges the popular belief that Reagan’s 1987 speech is what ended the Cold War. This book is available in 8 UC libraries but not UCSB. Another book, *The Fall of the Berlin Wall* by Jeff Hay was published in 2010 and consists of a collection of nineteen essays with different perspectives on the destruction of the Berlin Wall. However, it is also not available at UCSB. The last book is *Tear Down This Wall: A City, a President, and the Speech That Ended the Cold War* by Romesh Ratnesar. It came out in 2009 and focuses on what Reagan’s speech meant in the destruction of the Berlin Wall while using interviews with eye witnesses, journalists, and Reagan administration officials as supporting evidence. It argues that the President’s bold words were extremely influential in the last couple of years before the Berlin wall came down.
* Using Academic Search Complete and the keywords “Reagan” and “Brandenburg speech”, I found several articles giving details on the creation and reception of the speech. The first publication is an editorial called “*Reagan’s Brandenburg Concerto”* by John C. Kornblum, who was a US diplomat in Germany at the time of the speech in 1987. Although he was not involved the writing the speech himself, Kornblum, among other US diplomats, was responsible for staging and planning the President’s visit in detail. His article was published in The American Interest in May/June of 2007. In it, Kornblum describes the strategy behind staging Reagan’s speech at the Brandenburg Gate as well as different reactions to speech by American and Germans. He states that while the US perceived the speech to be a prime example of the American spirit and how it ended the Cold War, the public opinion in Germany was that the speech was a work of “amateurs” and had done more harm than good. This article gives good insight into different interpretation of the original speech.
* Changing the keywords to “Reagan” and “Robinson” on Academic Search Complete led me to an editorial by Peter Robinson, Reagan’s chief speechwriter, titled *“The Inside Story of Reagan’s Berlin Challenge”* published in American History in October of 2003. Robinson discusses topics that were suggested for the speech and other details that were involved in its making. He states that prior to writing the speech, he was given clear instructions from US diplomats to stay away from any “inflammatory statements” (Robinson 2003, 46) about the Berlin Wall and bashing of the Soviet Union because the Germans had grown used to the wall. He then goes on to say that after talking to several locals, he sensed that this was not the case, and that German citizens wished to have the wall taken down. This led Robinson to include the famously aggressive line “Mr.Gorbachev, tear down this wall” in the speech. Although this decision was vigorously opposed by US foreign policy officials, President Reagan insisted that the line be included in his speech. This information gives behind the scenes insight into how the document was crafted.
* Typing in the speech’s famous line “Tear down this wall” into **Google Scholar**, I found that the speech is cited on the Reagan Foundation website as well as in another article by Peter Robinson that was published in Reader’s Digest. It is his account of how the phrase “Tear down this wall” was nearly eliminated from the famous speech. The line is also cited in a paper titled “The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism” by Paul Kengor. It was published in April, 2007 by The Heritage Foundation.
* I also entered the phrase “Tear down this wall” into the **Google Books Ngram Viewer**, with the language set to English and the years ranging from 1980 to 2008. The graph showed a small peak at around 1987, when the speech first came out, but the most significant increase in the graph happened throughout the nineties and into the 2000s. In my interpretation, this is the result of Reagan’s speech being revisited and reanalyzed after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early nineties as an attempt to understand how the speech may have affected the fall of the Berlin Wall as well as the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
* Upon browsing the **New York Times data base** with the keywords “Reagan Berlin speech”, I found several articles from 1987 that document the German opposition Reagan’s visit and speech was met with. The first article is titled *“24,000 Demonstrate in Berlin Against Reagan’s Visit Today”*. It was written by Serge Schmemann and discusses leftist opposition to American policy in Berlin. Furthermore, *“Thousands of Anti-Reagan Protestors Clash With the Police in West Berlin”* by John Tagliabue provides details on the violence and upheaval that Reagan’s speech and visit caused in Berlin. Lastly, a news article from June 12th, 1987 titled *“Raze Berlin Wall, Reagan Urges Soviet”* by Gerald M. Boyd depicts the events on the day of the speech in detail. These articles indicate that Reagan’s speech was not met with as much German enthusiasm as American literature may suggest.
* There is a **Wikipedia** entry titled “Tear down this wall!” that offers basic background information on the Berlin Wall, the contents of Reagan’s speech, and its legacy. However, it did not include any information on Germany’s reaction to the speech as well as the protests against Reagan’s visit by Germans. The entry seems to be relatively accurate, judging from the fact that its citations include sources such as USA Today, CNN, Scholastic Library Publishing, and TIME magazine.