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Robert G. Waite

## **‘Ish bin ein Bearleener’ – JFK’s 26 June 1963 Visit to Berlin: The Views from East Germany<sup>1</sup>**

### *Abstract*

US President John Kennedy spent a single day in Berlin, where he gave one of his most famous speeches. The visit was intended to signalize America’s strong and undivided support of the divided city. Well before the formal announcement of the visit, East Germany agencies knew of the planned trip. East German records show the extent of the concern and the measures to counter the President’s visit.

*Keywords:* Berlin, Cold War, President Kennedy

Late in the afternoon of 26 June 1963, President John F. Kennedy sat back and relaxed on board Air Force One, reflecting on the events of the day that had just transpired in West Berlin, as the plane flew from Berlin to Ireland. In three separate speeches and by his very presence in the divided city, the American president had made a decisive commitment to West Berlin, which for the past several years had been at the center of heightened tensions. Kennedy had good reason to be pleased – the trip had accomplished many of his goals and, more importantly, he had received a reception from the Berliners, particularly for the ‘ich bin ein Berliner’ speech, that far exceeded his expectations. ‘We’ll never have another day like this one as long as we live,’ he commented to Theodore Sorensen, a close adviser.<sup>2</sup>

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1 President Kennedy’s phonetic handwritten notes, used for the speech at the Schöneberg Rathaus, West Berlin’s town hall; the original is in the John F. Kennedy Library & Museum (Boston); see ‘President Kennedy’s Speech Card’, [www.jfklibrary.org](http://www.jfklibrary.org). On the preparation and delivery of the speech, see Jürgen Eichhoff, “‘Ich bin ein Berliner’: A History and a Linguistic Clarification”, *Monatshefte für deutsches Unterricht, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur* 85 (1993), 71–80; Andreas W. Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin: Politik, Kultur und Emotionen im Kalten Krieg* (Paderborn 2003), 130–4; and Arne Hofmann, *The Emergence of Détente in Europe: Brandt, Kennedy and the Formation of Ostpolitik* (London 2007), 82–5.

2 Quoted in Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York 1985), 601. West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt termed the day ‘the undisputed climax of the trip’, in Willy Brandt, *Begnungen mit Kennedy* (Munich 1964), 193.

President Kennedy arrived on the morning of 26 June 1963 in Berlin and over the course of the day gave three speeches and toured 35 miles in a motorcade, riding in an open vehicle with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt.<sup>3</sup> Following remarks at Tegel Airport shortly after his arrival and a speech to the Trade Union Congress, the president's entourage proceeded by motorcade and toured parts of West Berlin, stopping at several locations, including the Brandenburg Gate and Check Point Charlie. Wherever he went, dense crowds of Berliners lined the streets, waving and cheering enthusiastically. At 12:50 pm he arrived at the Rudolph-Wilde-Platz and, after a short break, walked to the podium on the steps of the Schöneberg Rathaus, West Berlin's town hall. Standing in front of him was a crowd estimated at 300,000, calling out greetings and words of welcome.<sup>4</sup> JFK proceeded to give what is identified as one great presidential speech, his famous 'Ich bin ein Berliner' address. It lasted less than 10 minutes, but resonated throughout the divided Germany and Europe. West Berliners were ecstatic and they showed their favor through 'thunderous cheers and loud chants of "Ken-nee-dee, Ken-nee-dee"'.<sup>5</sup> The speech was meant not only for his listeners, for the residents of West Berlin who crowded into the square at the Schöneberg town hall. It was addressed 'to the German people on both sides of the Wall [and] to the cause of freedom on both sides of the Wall', the President explained at a luncheon with the city's mayor Willy Brandt.<sup>6</sup> JFK meant that his words were to be heard loud and clear in East Berlin and Moscow, too.

The president's message reached the citizens of East Berlin and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) via live coverage of his visit on Western radio and television broadcasts which were received on the far side of the wall dividing the two states. Filtered and truncated versions were offered in the East German press and radio broadcasts.<sup>7</sup> Officials in the GDR and the Ministry for State Security (Stasi) had known for weeks of the president's visit to Germany and his plans to spend a day in the divided city. By coming to Berlin, the American leader made a very powerful statement about the US commitment to West Berlin, to Germany and to western Europe, and, as JFK put it, to freedom

3 'Kennedy's Itinerary', *New York Times*, 25 June 1963. The Stasi had photographs of the limousine carrying the three political figures: 'MfS', 'ZOS Bild 2, Bild 3', Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR (hereafter 'BStU'), Zentralarchiv.

4 Caroll Kilpatrick, 'W. Berlin Throngs Acclaim Kennedy', *Washington Post*, 27 June 1963; 'Präsident Kennedy: "Ich bin ein Berliner"', and 'Der Berlin-Besuch des Präsidenten der Vereinigten Staaten', *Der Tagesspiegel* (West Berlin), 27 June 1963.

5 Kilpatrick, 'Berlin Throngs', op. cit.

6 'Remarks in the Rudolph Wilde Platz, Berlin', and 'Toast at a Luncheon in the City Hall in Berlin', 26 June 1963, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States. John F. Kennedy. January 1 to November 22, 1963* (Washington, DC, 1964), 524.

7 In West Germany, 'Numerous programs' were dedicated to Kennedy's visit in Berlin; see 'Kennedys Berlin-Besuch im Fernsehen', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 June 1963. On East German television, the visit to Berlin merited a number of short and biting comments; see, for example, the program 'Treffpunkt Berlin', broadcast on 26 June, which carried more than eight shorts on JFK, Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Potsdam-Babelsberg (hereafter 'DRA'), DRAB-H.

and peace. He proudly announced, 'I am a Berliner.' Not surprisingly, the trip was a matter of grave concern for the East German leadership, which for several years had pressed Khrushchev and the Soviet Union to back tougher measures against the Western powers in their bid to gain international recognition of the sovereignty of their territory and control of the access roads to West Berlin. This article examines JFK's visit to Berlin and the East German response, an issue that has gained only passing attention in the literature.<sup>8</sup> How did the Stasi and the political leaders of the German Democratic Republic perceive the visit? What did they know of its details? What specific preparations did they make? How was the visit covered in the East German media: the press, radio and television? What was the reaction of East Germans to the President's visit? Lastly, how did the East German image of JFK and the United States evolve and shift over the weeks preceding the Berlin visit?

GDR leaders knew the details of the president's visit to Berlin, including the itinerary, well before any public announcement was made in Washington. A report prepared within Stasi in late May reveals the extent of its information-gathering operations and what it had learned thus far about the trip. The importance of the report is demonstrated by the fact that it went only to the political leadership, with head of state Walter Ulbricht at the top of the list.<sup>9</sup> Within Stasi, ZAIG (the Central Assessment and Information Group) followed closely the planning for JFK's visit to Germany and to Berlin, tapping sources in the West for details and a sense of West German objectives.<sup>10</sup> The sources were identified in the internal reports only as 'reliable', and they clearly had inside knowledge of the workings of the West German political parties. In late May, for example, a ZAIG officer prepared a report on 'Comments of leading West Berlin CDU and Senate figures on Kennedy's 26 June 1963 visit', which described what the Stasi office had learned of the trip's objectives. From the West German perspective, the visit was, the report noted first of all, planned as a public relations event, an opportunity for Kennedy, through 'strong contact with the West Berlin population, through an extensive tour of the city and the planned massive rally at the Schöneberg town hall to be convinced that the

8 The literature on JFK, Berlin and the Berlin crises is extensive, but few mention the East German response to President Kennedy; see Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, op. cit., 163–6.

9 ZAIG (Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe), 'E.I. über Äußerungen führender Westberliner CDU- und Senatskreise zum Besuch Kennedys am 26.6.63', 30 May 1963, BStU, Zentralarchiv, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 766, 1–2. I am very grateful to Dr Erika Schwarz for obtaining copies of this material. Ulbricht held the post of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED (the Socialist Unity Party), the ruling Communist Party. On the organization of Stasi, see David Gill and Ulrich Schröter, *Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit: Anatomie des Mielke-Imperiums* (Berlin 1991), 17–19, 31–9; and Siegfried Suckut, 'Generalkontrollbeauftragter der SED oder gewöhnlichen Staatsorgan? Probleme der Funktionsbestimmung des MfS in den sechziger Jahren', in *Staatspartei und Staatssicherheit: Zum Verhältnis von SED und MfS* (Berlin 1997), 151–68.

10 The ZAIG – Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe – was headed by Lieutenant General Werner Irmeler, who answered directly to Erich Mielke. Mielke led the Ministry for State Security for 30 years and served as a member of the governing Politbüro; see Gill and Schröter, *Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, op. cit., 38, 47.

“desire for freedom” of the population is “unbroken.” Second, the ZAIG officer wrote that West German leaders wanted the American President to ‘gain a strong impression of the “consequences of the division of Berlin”’, something he would experience personally during the tour of the western sectors of the city. Third, ‘Kennedy should become convinced that the political situation of West Berlin can only be maintained through a strengthening of the so-called contacts with the Federal Republic’, thereby bolstering the position of the political leaders in Bonn. The ZAIG report proved to be remarkably accurate.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the West German objectives, the Stasi also knew the details of the visit, the itinerary and the audiences targeted at each scheduled speech. ZAIG agents had determined from sources in the West the time and place of the President’s speeches and learned that the plans for a rally at the site of the Reichstag had been rejected, probably because of its symbolic place in Berlin and German history. Other issues were under discussion, the East German leadership learned, including having West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer accompany Kennedy while the American president was in Berlin. Sources revealed to Stasi agents, however, that US officials did not want Adenauer present and had attempted to dissuade him. In their view, Adenauer was tied too closely to the drive for a unified Germany, an issue that the major powers strove to avoid calling attention to during the President’s trip. Chancellor Adenauer, a Stasi official noted, had insisted, terming it his ‘wish before leaving office’. Kennedy relented, but insisted that the exact wording of Adenauer’s brief speech in Berlin be presented to him well in advance. He did not want any surprises. ZAIG officials understood only too clearly the intentions of Adenauer and his party’s leadership – they wanted him to be seen frequently during the seven-hour live broadcast of the American president’s visit to Berlin, sitting next to and talking with the American president. Kennedy’s concession to Adenauer and other hardliners in Bonn worried East German leaders.<sup>12</sup>

In their analysis of West German activities preceding JFK’s visit, ZAIG detected some ‘opposition’ to Kennedy from ‘leading Bonn and West Berlin politicians’, in spite of the warm ‘official welcome’ that would be so prominently on display. This came from the ‘ultras’, political figures whose main issue was the reunification of Germany, hardliners who wanted JFK to recognize their demands and who felt they could pressure him once he saw divided Berlin in person. Leading this group was, the Stasi and East Germany’s political élite believed, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and they viewed this faction as the most serious threat to the GDR. This faction was also concerned about the Kennedy visit and what stand he would take on the Berlin question.<sup>13</sup>

11 ‘Außerungen führender Westberliner... zum Besuch Kennedys am 26.6.63’, 1–2.

12 *Ibid.*, 3–4.

13 ‘Wochenübericht über feindliche Manöver, Absichten und Maßnahmen gegen die DDR (2.6. – 15.6.63)’, BStU, Zentralarchiv, MfS, ZAIG, Z4415, 3.

ZAIG continued to tap its 'reliable sources' and learned further details of JFK's visit to Berlin in mid-June. It determined, for example, that the route had been changed, but the stops at the Wall would remain a scheduled part of the motorcade's tour of the city. Plans called for the presidential motorcade to pause several times to allow JFK to give speeches and view the Berlin Wall. JFK would arrive at the Schöneberg town hall and deliver 'the most important political statement of his visit to the West Germans and West Berliners'. ZAIG knew that here, on the steps of the city hall, he would renew the 'guarantees of freedom' for West Berlin in what was not anticipated to be 'a biting speech'. The report noted that a visit to 'democratic Berlin', the eastern sector, was deemed 'not advisable'.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after the Stasi learned the details of JFK's visit, members of its ZAIG office prepared memoranda and reports that went to the political élite, to the Central Committee of the SED and the Politbüro. With the specifics of the trip becoming clearer, the Stasi prepared measures to counter the impact of the presence of the American president in West Berlin. The initial discussion by East German political leaders of the JFK visit to Berlin was recorded in a 20 May memo entitled 'Arguments on the Kennedy Visit to West Germany and West Berlin'. This summed up the reaction of the GDR's top leadership, which viewed with alarm the travel plans of the US president, alarm because his presence was seen as playing into the hands of the West German 'ultras' and 'revanchists', hardliners in Bonn. The very first sentence of the lengthy memo set the tone: 'The Kennedy visit is a dangerous concession made to the Bonn and West Berlin ultras and the agitators in the US during the already heightened international tensions.' The trip 'works against reduction of tensions in Europe and creates new tensions.'<sup>15</sup> The issues and concerns raised in the memorandum were addressed and discussed in a number of high-governmental meetings over the next several weeks, as East German authorities recognized that the objectives of the visit worked directly against their own goal of gaining international recognition of their sovereignty and control of the access routes to Berlin. The latter issue was especially important to Western leaders and President Kennedy.

As East Germany's leaders saw the first issue, Kennedy had played into the hands of the 'West German and West Berlin revanchists and their American allies' by not recognizing as a basis for discussion the existence of two 'sovereign German states', or acceding to the 'Seven Point Plan proposed by the GDR for normalizing relations'.<sup>16</sup> Pressure on JFK from this faction shaped his plans, various East German officials believed, and the trip would go far in aiding 'the policies of the reactionary and aggressive circles in Bonn, West Berlin and

14 Ibid., 4.

15 Abt. Rechts- und Vertragswesen, Berlin 20 May 1963, 'Argumentation zum Kennedy Besuch in Westdeutschland und West Berlin', Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (hereafter 'BA, SAPMO'), DY/30/IVA2/9.02, Nr. 91. I am indebted to Florian Dierl for obtaining copies from the Bundesarchiv Berlin.

16 Ibid., 1–2.

Washington'. The President's visit was expected to 'confirm to the entire world the alliance of the US with the Bonn ultras and that will lead the US to constantly new tensions. It will tie the US still more closely to the peace-endangering policies of West Germany.' The memo reiterated what had been stated already, namely that the visit to West Berlin serves the 'objectives' of the 'ultras', who wanted to 'disturb negotiations between the US and the Soviet Union on the most important problems of the day'.<sup>17</sup> Concern in East Berlin was clearly growing. To further their goals, the 'ultras' in West Berlin had initiated provocations along the border and on the access routes to West Berlin, and East German newspapers reported a jump in the number of incidents. Attacks on East Germany in the Western media had also increased, especially in broadcasts on RIAS, Radio in the American Sector.<sup>18</sup>

At the 5 June session of the Politbüro, members of the Central Committee of the SED reached similar conclusions. The meeting of the nation's rulers devoted considerable time to the Kennedy visit, and the notes on the session reveal the depth of East German concern and those aspects of the trip causing them particular anxiety. A memorandum prepared for in-house use and distributed only at the highest levels of government was never meant to be public, and this goes far in revealing the deep-seated concerns. As the memo makes clear, the Politbüro turned to JFK's visit following discussions of pressing economic issues, and members discussed points to be raised during the trip and the measures to be taken. The importance of the counter-measures is further revealed by the note that 'all measures are to be approved on a case by case basis by the First Secretary of the Central Committee Comrade Ulbricht'.<sup>19</sup> An attachment to the protocol of the meeting recorded the 'arguments on the forthcoming Kennedy visit in West Germany and West Berlin' and elaborated the planned counter-measures. It also gave assignments to specific agencies and individuals. The first paragraph of the attachment summarized the concerns and the approaches to be taken. 'The arguments are directed primarily against the unleashing of the aggressive and revanchist politics of the militaristic and imperialistic circles in West Germany,' the Politbüro stated. It was concerned with the 'dangerous policies of Kennedy through which the US can be pulled into warlike adventures against its desires by shirking its responsibility for the taming of the militaristic and revanchist forces in West Germany'. In a point-by-point discussion of the arguments to be made against the visit, the East German authorities repeatedly voiced their anxieties. 'The Kennedy visit to West Germany and West Berlin is dangerous',

because it goes against the growing tide throughout the world for peaceful coexistence, for the relaxation of tensions and disarmament, for the peaceful solution of the German question that

17 'Argumentation zum Kennedy Besuch in Westdeutschland und West Berlin', 2. 'Wochenübericht über feindliche Manöver... gegen die DDR (2.6. – 15.6.63)', 2.

18 *Ibid.*, 6–7.

19 'Protokol Nr. 17/63 der Sitzung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees am Mittwoch, dem 5. Juni 1963 im Sitzungssaal des Politbüros', BA, SAMPO-DDR, DY30/JIV2/2–881, 4.

are with other issues contained in the 7 Point program of Comrade Ulbricht, for the recognition of the existing borders, the necessity of solving the Berlin question (the Brussels colloquium), the calls for a non-aggression agreement between the states of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, the calls of bourgeois politicians . . . for negotiations and relaxations of tensions, and so forth.

The West German 'imperialists' aimed to prevent a US-Soviet agreement on non-proliferation, an agreement to keep nuclear weapons out of Germany, the Politbüro concluded. The 'ultras' were trying to initiate 'new provocations and to intensify the Cold War' in an effort to 'torpedo' movement toward a peaceful settlement in Germany. 'For these purposes the West German imperialists are exploiting Kennedy's visit to West Germany and West Berlin.'<sup>20</sup>

East German authorities believed that Kennedy had his own agenda. He intended to use 'his visit to Italy and West Germany to achieve the goal of strengthening NATO under American leadership', a staff member of the Politbüro concluded.

Apparently the ruling circles of the US are interested in the forced rearmament of West Germany, in impeding the German peace movement and the peaceful resolution of the West Berlin question above all because they want to use West German militarism as the base for leading the troops of NATO against the socialist world system.

These circles around the president were seen as lobbying for the contracts to supply the equipment for West Germany's arms buildup. Lastly, the 'annexationist aims of leaders in Bonn toward Berlin have led to an increase of tensions and provocations', whose 'apex is to be reached when Kennedy is in Berlin'.<sup>21</sup>

High-ranking officials gave the Ideological Commission and Agitation Commission of the Politbüro the assignment to prepare 'commentaries and programs' for the press, radio, and television, which were to emphasize

among other issues the responsibility of the USA for the partition of Germany and Berlin, the revanchist mood and remilitarization of West Germany, the suppression of the right of self-determination as well as the imperialistic and neo-colonialist policies of the USA toward Cuba, South Vietnam, the Congo, Latin American countries, and the repression of Negroes in their own country.

In addition, GDR's television network was to 'prepare a special program' for broadcast during the visit of the American president.<sup>22</sup>

The East German media moved energetically, portraying the United States as a failed democracy, a country torn by racial strife, violence and injustices, issues that would be emphasized repeatedly in the coming weeks. The view of JFK in the press during the days leading up to the Berlin visit, and the emerging image of the American president in the GDR, was, however, mixed. While targeted as the leader of a nation where violence against blacks

20 Ibid., Attachment No. 2, 2.

21 Ibid., 2-3.

22 Ibid., 6.



was rampant, some of JFK's recent speeches showed his commitment to peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union. Some members of the press looked to President Kennedy as an advocate of peace, especially after his 10 June address at American University, when he called for 'world peace' and an end to the Cold War.<sup>23</sup> JFK was portrayed as the one leader in the Allied block who could rein in the 'revanchists' in Bonn and West Berlin, Adenauer, Brandt, and others viewed as serious threats to the stability of Europe. This group included those governing in Bonn, who called vigorously for German unity under their direction and who wanted NATO and the USA to position nuclear weapons on their territory. These issues terrified East German leaders.<sup>24</sup> Within the hierarchy of the GDR, the Agitation Commission had the most direct and immediate contact with the media, as well as the responsibility to 'take the political assignments of the state and party leadership, and to realize these in the media'. In East Germany, state control of the media was effectively far-reaching, with the SED publishing most of the district newspapers and exercising day-to-day direction over news coverage.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to elaborating the measures to be taken in response to the planned visit, the memo of the 5 June Central Committee meeting argued that the Kennedy visit could 'only serve peace and international détente' if the president committed the USA to the agreement reached at Potsdam, to 'the commitment to eradicate revanchism and militarism', to halt the spread of nuclear weapons, to 'recognize the existing borders of Europe and Germany', to conclude a non-aggression pact between the states of the Warsaw Pact and NATO, to approve an agreement to 'normalize the situation in West Berlin while respecting the sovereignty of the GDR' and to 'establish normal relations between the two German states as well as West Berlin and the GDR'. The Central Committee looked to diplomacy, to an East–West agreement built upon principles elaborated already in August 1945 at Potsdam, as the guarantee of East German sovereignty and the only way to resolve the tensions over Berlin. The memo cautioned yet again that if Kennedy

23 'Commencement Address at American University... June 10, 1963', *Papers of the Presidents John F. Kennedy* 1963, 461, 462–3. The speech was viewed at the time as 'a strong American plea for peaceful means of solving international problems' and 'another bid for an end to the cold war': see 'A Strategy of Peace', *Washington Post*, 11 June 1963.

24 See, for example, "'Herr Präsident! Frieden für Europa durch Vereinbarung!'" Außengminister Dr. Lothar Bolz im Namen der Regierung und der Bevölkerung unserer Republik an John F. Kennedy', *National Zeitung*, 15 June 1963; 'Bleiben Sie fest, Mr. Kennedy! Außengminister Dr. Bolz warnt USA-Präsidenten vor Bonner Kriegstreibern', *BZ am Abend*, 15 June 1963; and 'Revanchists Alone Support Kennedy Trip, East Berlin Berliner Zeitung 19 June 1963', Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter 'FBIS'), No. 120 (20 June 1963), EE1–2.

25 Ulrich Kluge et al., *Willfähige Propagandisten. MfS und Bezirksparteizeitungen: Berliner Zeitung, Sächsische Zeitung, Neuer Tag* (Stuttgart 1997), 21. On the SED control over regional newspapers, see Michael Heghmanns and Wolff Heintschel von Heinegg, *Der Staatssicherheitsdienst in der Lausitzer Rundschau* (Berlin 2003), 8–16; Günter Holzweissig, 'Massenmedien in der DDR', in Jürgen Wilke (ed.), *Mediengeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Bonn 1999), 573ff.; and Gunter Holzweissig, 'Das MfS und die Medien', *Deutschland Archiv* 25 (January 1992), 32.

yielded to the so-called ultras and permitted Adenauer to join him in West Berlin, 'his trip can only be seen as an open and deliberate support for the revanchist politicians in Bonn and West Berlin and as incentive for new provocations'.<sup>26</sup>

Building upon the recommendations made by the Stasi, East German leaders proposed at the 5 June meeting a number of specific measures to counter JFK's Berlin visit. These included, first, steps on the diplomatic front, such as 'statements from the government of the GDR on the strengthening of Bonn's politics of provocation and aggression'. These announcements were to list 'the series of provocative steps taken by the ruling aggressive and militaristic circles in West Germany'. The Politbüro identified other measures to be implemented, the agency or organization responsible, and the target date for the completion for each. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs was instructed to prepare a statement addressing these points by mid-June. The Agitation Committee was to co-ordinate the preparation of editorials and programs for press, radio and television that identified the USA as 'responsible for the division of Germany and Berlin', the remilitarization of West Germany, 'the imperialistic policies... and the repression of Negroes in their own country'. Second, 'all planned events' in East Germany 'should be used to publicize our arguments against the Kennedy visit' and the preparations for these events also went to the Agitation Commission. Third, the 5 June meeting concluded that 'the unmasking of West German revanchist politics' and JFK's announced commitment to peace and détente could follow only if the President 'acknowledges the obligations of the USA that came out of the Potsdam agreement and issues that emerged from negotiations with the Soviet leaders'.<sup>27</sup> This strong statement of East German objectives was followed by a challenge that should be made openly to Kennedy: 'world public opinion has the right' to expect from the American president before the beginning of his European trip 'a clear statement on the politics of peaceful coexistence in Germany'.<sup>28</sup> East German leaders hoped that JFK would build upon the 10 June speech at American University and include their nation in his call for 'a series of concrete actions and effective agreements' that would lead to 'a just and genuine peace'.<sup>29</sup>

The radio, television and newspapers of East Germany responded quickly and as expected. The intense media campaign began in early June and during the following weeks articles on the repression of black Americans and racial violence in the South appeared regularly in local newspapers, as the East German propaganda machine portrayed America as a failed democracy. The front pages of a number of newspapers carried articles on racial unrest and

26 'Protokoll Nr. 17/63... 5. Juni 1963', Attachment No.2, 3–4.

27 *Ibid.*, 4, 6–7.

28 *Ibid.*, 4.

29 See the long discussion in 'Wochenübersicht... (2.6. – 15.6.1963)', 1–2. 'Commencement Address at American University... June 10, 1963', 461–2, 464. 'Kennedy zu Dreiergesprächen', and 'Zarapkin: Die USA müssen endlich guten Willen zeigen: Kennedys Worte und die Taten der amerikanischen Militärs zwei verschiedene Dinge', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 12 June 1963.

violence in the American South, often with photographs of police dogs attacking blacks, vivid portraits of the ongoing brutality. The public was reminded repeatedly of the racial injustices of the USA and that the state sponsored violence against blacks. On 4 June, for example, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* ran an article entitled 'Concentration Camp Tactics Used Against Coloreds' that described the heavy-handed actions of the Jackson, Mississippi police. Three days later, the headlines of the same newspaper read 'Dogs, Water Canons Used Against Negroes Fighting for Their Rights'.<sup>30</sup> On 6 June a lengthy front-page article in East Berlin's *National Zeitung* quoted Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who described racial unrest as 'the most serious problem that we have in the US'. The same page carried shorter pieces on America, with one headline announcing 'Kennedy Should Cancel His Trip' and another reading 'Prominent US Citizens for the Recognition of the GDR', which echoed the calls of the country's political leaders.<sup>31</sup> On 7 June East Berlin's *Der Morgen* ran an article entitled 'Send Jim Crow to His Grave', which recounted a demonstration against racism and the so-called Jim Crow statutes.<sup>32</sup> Several days later, *Der Morgen* told readers in a headline that 'Kennedy Shrugs Off Responsibility'; that he had shifted responsibility for 'measures against the whites' racial terror' to local governments, to the mayors of cities and towns across the South. JFK took these steps when 'more than 3,000 members of the fascist terrorist organization the Ku Klux Klan' had assembled near Tuscaloosa, Alabama, to prevent the enrollment of black students.<sup>33</sup>

The murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers gained widespread attention in the weeks prior to JFK's visit. The *Leipziger Volkszeitung* ran a front-page article headlined 'Negro Leader Murdered in USA'. East German radio, the *Deutschlandsender*, broadcast a commentary stating that 'only a few hours after President Kennedy's radio and television broadcast on the equality of Negroes', civil rights leader Medgar Evers was 'treacherously murdered in Mississippi, the center of racial terror'. This was 'the US racists' answer to President Kennedy's latest speech in which...he said many correct and proper things about racial discrimination and the extension of equal rights to American Negroes... the answer of the hate-mongers'. The East German news service asked pointedly in reference to the murder of Medgar Evers: 'How is it possible that in a country, which even today claims to be the leading nation of the civilized world, such crimes are the order of the day?' It urged JFK to 'shorten his trip by several thousand miles because states and cities in his own country need his presence now' and because 'nobody in America, nor

30 'KZ-Methoden gegen Farbige', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 4 June 1963. 'Mit Hunden, Wasserwerfen gegen Neger, die um Ihre Recht Kämpfen', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 7 June 1963.

31 'R. Kennedy: Rassenkrawalle schwierigstes Problem', "Kennedy soll Besuch absagen", and 'Prominente USA-Bürger für DDR-Anerkennung', *National Zeitung*, 6 June 1963.

32 'Ins Grab mit Jim Crow!', *Der Morgen*, 7 June 1963.

33 'Kennedy schiebt Verantwortung ab', *Der Morgen*, 11 June 1963. See also 'Gouverneur Wallace in Tuscaloosa', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 12 June 1963.

he himself, can wipe off the blood and dry the tears of those left behind by this. Evers, the father of four children'.<sup>34</sup>

As the date of JFK's visit to West Germany and Berlin came closer, the SED moved to implement a number of counter-measures, and the barrage of media reports and newspaper articles highlighting America's racial injustices intensified. The radio network *Deutschlandsender* editorialized on the violence against blacks, referring to the recent turmoil as 'the US racists' medieval contempt for human beings' and calling upon the President to take 'effective steps against racial discrimination'.<sup>35</sup> Headlines on the front page of the *National Zeitung* reported 'Police Attack Funeral Procession for Evers', the slain civil rights leader. Demonstrations spread across the South as the situation worsened and East German newspapers provided extensive coverage of the growing unrest and mounting police repression.<sup>36</sup>

With the campaign on America's racial upheavals and violence running smoothly, the Politbüro turned to other issues, to the details of the President's forthcoming trip to Germany. The bulk of its 20 June meeting focused on the 'Kennedy visit' and identified the specific responses, the next steps to be taken. The Politbüro directed Heinz Renner, a well-known political figure who had lived in West Germany, to issue a long missive emphasizing peace, the Potsdam agreement, and the revanchist politics of Bonn. Renner was to make his statement public following JFK's 22 June speech at the landmark Paulskirche in Frankfurt. He would conclude with a challenge to the West to take decisive steps for peace and disarmament. The Politbüro called for radio programs that reiterated the arguments for the 'fight against revanchism', and broadcasts soon followed.<sup>37</sup>

The East German Foreign Ministry joined the attack and its chief, Lothar Bolz, spoke in a television broadcast aimed directly at the American president. While praising JFK's recent speech at American University, his call for peace and an end to the Cold War, Bolz directed the bulk of his commentary against West German political leaders, the 'revanchists [who] step by step are increasing the aggressiveness of their policy'. The Foreign Minister warned JFK of the dangers presented by West German officials and gave examples to show that 'revanchism is the official state policy in West Germany'. Bolz insisted that the 'the policy of revenge' was directed against East Berlin and that Western leaders had 'recently instigated a whole chain of new provocations'. These incidents

34 'Negerführer in USA Ermordet', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 13 June 1963. 'Racists Answer Kennedy Plea With Murder', East Berlin *Deutschlandsender*, FBIS, No. 115, 13 June 1963, EE2. 'US Racial Situation Reports Continue', East Berlin Domestic Service, 13 June 1963, FBIS, No. 116, 14 June 1963, EE1.

35 'Racists Answer Kennedy Plea With Murder. East Berlin *Deutschlandsender*. . . 12 June 1963', FBIS, No. 115, 13 June 1963, EE2.

36 'Polizei überfiel Trauerzug für Evers', *National Zeitung*, 14 June 1963; and 'Neger in Jackson verhaftet. Brutaler Polizeiüberfall', *Berliner Zeitung*, 15 June 1963.

37 'Sitzung des Politbüros, Donnerstag, 20. Juni 1963', BA, SAMPO, By1, 2633, Kennedy Besuch. Heinz Renner was a prominent member of the KPD, the German Communist Party, who served in the West German parliament before settling in East Germany in 1960.

and West German policies, Bolz cautioned the US president, increase 'the danger of a nuclear war' or at the very least 'a confrontation between the two atomic powers'. He urged JFK to take a strong stand for peace, to 'profess your adherence to US obligations under the Potsdam agreement and to the right of the German people to a peace treaty' and added these are the views of 'all peace-loving Germans'. Foreign Minister Bolz's speech was reprinted in several newspapers. East German radio carried the speech and commentators praised the Foreign Minister's call for peace.<sup>38</sup>

The East German media continued to remind readers of West Germany's aggressiveness right up to the President's visit. Newspapers carried news stories calling upon JFK to lead the drive for peace in Europe, to build upon his 10 June speech.<sup>39</sup> The *Berliner Zeitung* insisted that 'Revanchists Alone Support Kennedy Trip', telling its readers that 'Kennedy's trip is being supported only by the Bonn and West Berlin revanchist politicians'. The headline in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* read 'Revanchists Slander Poland' and asserted that 'Kennedy's visit to the western zone is to be exploited for revanchist propaganda'.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly before JFK's arrival in West Germany, the SED mobilized organizations within East Germany for the public-relations campaign. On 22 June the head of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship sent to its local branches a 12-page set of questions and answers, all directed pointedly at US policy. These talking-points addressed many of the same issues that the GDR leadership had emphasized. First, the letter cited the Potsdam agreement, 'the basis for the development of a peaceful, democratic order in all of Germany', and suggested that JFK be asked if the United States has lived up to its part of the agreement; clearly, the memo explained at length, it had not. Second, the Society for German-Soviet Friendship asked: 'what is behind the surge of revanchism coming from Bonn?' The answer was a number of issues, foremost among which was the effort of West German leaders to 'pull the USA... to the dangerous, aggressive revanchist politics of Bonn's ultras'. Third, the letter asserted that the GDR had been shaped by 'the right to self-determination', that is,

38 'Kennedy Must Use Visit to Control Bonn. Bolz Official Statement. East German ADN... 14 June 1963', FBIS, No. 117, 17 June 1963, EE1-5. The speech was printed in the *Berliner Zeitung*, 'Außenminister an Präsident Kennedy', 15 June 1963; *Freiheit*, 'Außenminister Dr. Lothar Bolz an USA-Präsident Kennedy', 15 June 1963; and *Der Morgen*, 'Europa will Ruhe und Frieden', 17 June 1963.

39 See, for example, "'Herr Präsident! Frieden für Europa durch Vereinbarung!'" *National Zeitung*, 15 June 1963; and 'Rusk: Kontakte notwendig', *Berliner Zeitung*, 15 June 1963. 'Wochenbericht über feindliche Manöver... gegen die DDR (2.6. – 15.6.1963)', 1.

40 'Revanchists Alone Support Kennedy Trip, East Berlin, *Berliner Zeitung*, 19 June 1963', FBIS, No. 120, 20 June 1963. 'Revanchisten hetzen gegen Polen', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 21 June 1963. See also 'Bonner Ultras planen Mißbrauch Kennedys', *Neue Zeit*, 22 June 1963. On another issue, the East German press service announced on 19 June that 'Kennedy Should Rehabilitate Rosenbergs', the tenth anniversary of their execution, which it called 'an act of revenge of the ruling class of the United States which had lost the atomic bomb monopoly', in 'Kennedy Should Rehabilitate Rosenbergs. East Berlin Domestic Service... 19 June 1963', FBIS No. 121, 21 June 1963.

the people had freely chosen this political system. Fourth, it emphasized the achievements of the GDR, especially the economic growth that has made it one of 'the most productive industrial states in the world', and the memo even included figures to back this claim. Fifth, the letter asked the question 'what are the politics of humanity?' It gave the answer: in the GDR 'all efforts are targeted toward a goal at the center of which are humans, their happiness and prosperity'. The GDR was a state where 'all work in the construction of socialism.' Lastly, 'the American and German people want to live in peace as do all other peoples,' much as JFK had announced in his 10 June speech at American University, which the letter quoted at length. The logical consequence of this drive for peace was a peace treaty with the GDR, the Society's director insisted. These points were to form the basis of statements or discussions, and those functionaries receiving the letter were asked to emphasize these issues in newspaper articles, on the radio and television.<sup>41</sup>

Another line of attack came on 24 June when a commentator on East Berlin's *Deutschlandsender* told listeners that sentiment in the USA was firmly against JFK's European tour. He quoted from the *New York Herald Tribune* that 'the President has left the United States where a social crisis prevails to travel to Europe which is dotted with political crises and where his presence might be unwelcome', and went on to emphasize the 'differences in the global assessment of the world situation between Washington and Bonn, between Kennedy and Adenauer'. JFK continued to be seen by some in East Germany as an agent of peace, concerned now with the strengthening of NATO unity, while Adenauer, the 'revanchist' leader in Bonn, wanted a multilateral NATO nuclear force with West Germany's participation. 'He ought to curb the Bonn rulers,' the commentator added. JFK missed 'the opportunity to teach a lesson' to Adenauer and others who have 'interpreted with bias and distorted Kennedy's latest speech [on 10 June at American University]... which struck a note of reason and good will for an understanding, and those who – as did West German news agencies – deliberately mistranslated his speech in West Germany, turning an 'era of peace into a "period of relative calm" because the word "peace" is evidently already banned in West Germany'.<sup>42</sup>

Having expressed strongly their misgivings about JFK's trip and the deep suspicions that he and the visit would be exploited by the 'revanchists', especially West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt, the East German media reported in a decidedly understated

41 Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft, Zentralvorstand, Berlin, 22 June 1963, BA, SAMPO, BY32, 6736, Kennedy Besuch 1963. East Germany's Foreign Minister referred to the American University speech in his own address of 14 June 1963. Kennedy's 10 June speech was, the *Washington Post* commented, 'A Strategy of Peace', 11 June 1963, because of its strong calls for 'world peace'.

42 'Martin Radmann Commentary, East Berlin Deutschlandsender,' 24 June 1964, FBIS, No. 123, June 25, 1963, EE3-5. For East German analysis of the unstable political situation in West Germany, Britain and Italy, see 'Kein guter Stern über Kennedy's Europatrip', *Freiheit*, 22 June 1963; and 'Kennedy: Ich reise in die Unsicherheit', *Neues Deutschland*, 22 June 1963.

manner the President's arrival at the Bonn-Cologne Airport on 23 June.<sup>43</sup> 'Kennedy Landed in Bonn', read headlines of an article on the President's arrival in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* which was relegated to page two. *Freiheit*, the SED newspaper in Halle/Salle, carried only a brief article on the front page of the 24 June edition. Its headline announced: 'Revanchists Greet Kennedy', when he landed at the Cologne-Bonn Airport, which the article pointed out was ringed with 'more than 4,000 policemen', suggesting a police-state atmosphere. Overshadowing this article was another on the same page whose headline read 'America's Horrible Reality' and which described the recent racial unrest, what it termed the 'racial terror and sadism' prevalent in Birmingham, Alabama, and Jackson, Mississippi. In these two cities 'an estimated 120,000 to 130,000' had been arrested and the police had released 'bloodhounds against the demonstrators'. The press emphasized again the racial turmoil sweeping across the South and concluded: 'This is America's reality in 1963 – horrible, criminal, inhuman!'<sup>44</sup> The headline on the front page of East Berlin's *BZ am Abend* announced, 'New Racial Murder in the USA. The Balance of Terror in Two Months – about 130,000 Colored Americans Incarcerated.' No article on the arrival of the American president was to be found in this newspaper.<sup>45</sup> An East German television broadcast during the evening of 24 June mentioned JFK's visit to Germany only briefly and reminded viewers of America's racial problems and the activities of the 'revanchists' in Bonn, the recurring themes of the propaganda campaign.<sup>46</sup>

The several East German newspapers that carried the news of JFK's arrival at the Cologne-Bonn Airport on 23 June continued to write harshly of West Germany's leaders and their nefarious objectives. 'Revanchists Receive President Kennedy' was the headline on the front page of the *Berliner Zeitung*. Upon arrival, the newspaper reported, the president had been greeted on the runway by Chancellor Adenauer, 'Minister of War von Hansel and the Nazi-general Foertsch', as well as 'the Jew murderer Globke'. The article continued on page two, right below a longer story article entitled 'Some Information for Mr. Kennedy', which recounted the nazi past of members of the West German Foreign Ministry – 'more than 340 diplomats currently there played an important role' in the nazi regime. The same page carried an article headlined 'Police Attack a Negro Church', which highlighted racial injustice in the American South.<sup>47</sup>

43 Coverage in the West Berlin press was more extensive: see, for example, 'Kennedy heute in Deutschland', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 23 June 1963.

44 'USA-Präsident in der Westzone. Revanchisten begrüßten Kennedy', and 'Grausige amerikanische Wirklichkeit', *Freiheit* 143 (24 June 1963). See also 'In den USA wüten Rassenterror und Sadismus', *Leipziger Volkszeitung* 170 (24 June 1963).

45 'Neuer Rassenmord in USA. Terrorbilanz zweier Monate: Etwa 130 000 farbige Amerikaner wurden Inhaftiert', *BZ am Abend* 143 (24 June 1963).

46 'Der Schwarze Kanel, eine Sendung von und mit Karl Eduard von Schnitzler', 24 June 1963, DRA, DFF/DDR-F-Hauptbestand (BRAD-H).

47 'Revanchisten empfangen Präsident Kennedy', 'Eine Information für Mr. Kennedy', and 'Polizei überfiel Negerkirche', *Berliner Zeitung* 176 (24 June 1963). Headlines on the front page

A brief article in *Neues Deutschland* described JFK's press conference at the Foreign Ministry in Bonn and the questions directed to the President, 'who tried to defend himself against the world wide criticism of his trip'. An analysis of the first day in Bonn in *Neues Deutschland* 'confirmed what we predicted: This visit and the President himself are being exploited by the extremists to increase revanchist agitation.'<sup>48</sup> When JFK spoke on 25 June at Paulskirche in Frankfurt he emphasized the common goals of the USA and Germany: 'peace and freedom for all men, for all time, in a world of abundance, in a world of justice'. These were the reasons, he asserted, 'why our nations are working together to strengthen NATO, to expand trade, [and] to assist the developing countries'.<sup>49</sup> East German media put its own spin on the president's address, with the press service commenting: 'The speech made clear the U.S. Government's effort to possibly concentrate all imperialist forces under its leadership', to consolidate its authority within NATO. Another commentator voiced the disappointment felt by many after JFK's 10 June address on 'coexistence and lessening the cold war'. Following that speech 'one might have expected him, speaking at one of the main centers of the cold war among the principal opponents of peaceful coexistence, to go into further details', he stated. 'Nothing of the kind has happened.'<sup>50</sup>

Upon arrival at Tegel Airport in West Berlin on the morning of 26 June JFK's tone sharpened and he spoke forcefully and repeatedly about the divided city and country in memorable speeches.<sup>51</sup> The President told his audiences that he was one of them, that he was bound by more than international agreements to their city. 'West Berlin is my country,' he explained to a group of trade unionists.<sup>52</sup> Following this address, JFK's motorcade proceeded through West Berlin, pausing at the Brandenburg Gate and Check Point Charlie. At each location, the vehicles stopped and the president stepped out and walked to a viewing platform to glimpse the infamous Wall and to look into East Germany. An East

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of *Neues Deutschland* read 'Wozu die Bonner Militaristen Kennedy mißbrauchen wollen', 23 June 1963. On JFK's arrival, see 'Kennedy in Bonn eingetroffen. Adenauer versucht USA-Präsidenten auf verständigungsfeindlich Bonner Politik festzulegen', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 24 June 1963, and 'Adenauer nutzt Kennedy-Besuch zur Schürung der Revanchehetze', *Neues Deutschland* 170 (24 June 1963).

48 'Material on Kennedy West Germany Trip. 24 June Press Conference. East Berlin *Neues Deutschland* 25 June 1963'; and 'Consequences of Visit. East Berlin *Neues Deutschland* 25 June 1963', FBIS, No. 124 (26 June 1963), EE3-5. 'Kennedy blieb allgemein. Zurückhaltende Antworten auf der Bonner Pressekonferenz', *BZ am Abend*, 25 June 1963.

49 'Address in the Assembly Hall at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt. June 25, 1963', *Papers of the Presidents John F. Kennedy* 1963, 517.

50 'Report on Paulskirche Speeches. East Berlin Domestic Service... 25 June 1963', and 'Press Comment on Speech. East Berlin ADN... 26 June 1963', FBIS, No. 124 (26 June 1963), EE5-6.

51 His itinerary was published on the front page of West Berlin's daily *Der Tagesspiegel*, 'Der Weg des Präsidenten durch Berlin', 25 June 1963.

52 'Remarks in Berlin to the Trade Union Congress of German Construction Workers. June 26, 1963', *Papers of the Presidents John F. Kennedy* 1963, 522. 'Der Kennedy-Besuch im Spiegel der Reden', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 June 1963.



German work-detachment had hung tall red banners between the columns of the Brandenburg Gate, effectively blocking much of his view and that of East Berliners hoping to catch a glimpse of the American president.<sup>53</sup> Local authorities had also posted a large sign in English for him. ADN, the East German news agency, maintained that the American president was 'obviously embarrassed when he arrived near the GDR state frontier at Brandenburg Gate and saw a large poster in English' that 'recalled the Potsdam and Yalta agreements' and read in part that the American Presidents Roosevelt and Truman had agreed 'to eradicate German militarism and Nazism, to arrest and hand over war criminals to the courts, to prevent the revival of German militarism, to ban all Nazi and militarist propaganda, and to take measures to insure that a threat to Germany's neighbors and world peace never again originates in Germany.'<sup>54</sup>

Next, the motorcade proceeded to Friedrichstraße, to Check Point Charlie, where Kennedy climbed a viewing platform and was again greeted in the East by two posters proclaiming 'the peace policies pursued by the USSR and GDR'. One poster stressed the 'German people's concern for the conclusion of a peace treaty and transformation of West Berlin into a neutral and free city' and the other carried the text of Ulbricht's 'seven-point proposal for an agreement of reason and good will between the GDR and West Germany'. The ADN news agency reported that JFK remained at each location only a few minutes, much shorter than scheduled. The suggestion was that the posters had affected him with their pointed messages and calls for peace, and had prompted the President to cut short the visits to the Wall.<sup>55</sup>

From Check Point Charlie the motorcade, with JFK, Adenauer and Brandt riding together in an open car, passed through streets lined deeply with West Berliners, who cheered the American President.<sup>56</sup> The vehicles drove to the Rudolph-Wilde-Platz, arriving at the Schöneberg town hall shortly before 1.00 pm. Following a break, JFK stepped up to the podium on a platform erected over the steps to the entrance and delivered a brief speech that has endured as one of his most memorable.<sup>57</sup> To the chagrin of East German officials, JFK began with acknowledgments of West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt,

53 'Weg des Präsidenten durch Berlin'; 'Rote Fahnen sollen Blick in Sowjetsektor versperren', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 June 1963. 'Zum erstenmal an der Mauer,' *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 June 1963. The ZOS – Zentraler Operativstab (Central Operational Post) obtained a photograph of the scene at the Brandenburg Gate from the West Berlin side; see MfS ZOS 4043 Bild 5, BStU Zentralarchiv. 54 'West Berlin Activities. East Berlin ADN ... 26 June 1963', FBIS, No. 125 (27 June 1963), EE8. 'Kennedy wurde an Potsdam und Jalta erinnert', *Neue Zeit*, 27 June 1963; and 'Kennedy ist verlegen. Peinliche Erinnerung vor dem Brandenburger Tor an Potsdam und Jalta', *Lausitzer Rundschau*, 27 June 1963. A photograph of the poster, with the Brandenburg Gate in the background, ran in *Das Volk* (Erfurt), 27 June 1963. The American press viewed the hanging of the banners as 'security precautions to keep people from seeing the President', 'Berlin Is Ready To Hail Kennedy', *New York Times*, 26 June 1963.

55 Kilpatrick, 'Berlin Crowds', op. cit.

56 MfS ZOS 4043 Bild 1 – 4, BStU Zentralarchiv.

57 Eichhoff, "'Ich bin ein Berliner'", op. cit., 71–80; and Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, op. cit., 32–134.

'who has symbolized throughout the world the fighting spirit of West Berlin', and West German Chancellor Adenauer who, JFK stated, 'for so many years has committed Germany to democracy and freedom and progress.' The American President, who had recently spoken of peace and coexistence, had now praised the 'revanchists', the two political leaders singled out by the GDR as the true enemies of peace.<sup>58</sup> And to reinforce his bonding with them and with Berlin, he announced, '*Ich bin ein Berliner.*' JFK spoke of freedom and communism, the differences between the West and communist nations, and that some think communism 'is the wave of the future'. His response to both points was clear – '*Lass' sie nach Berlin kommen, Let them come to Berlin,*' to see for themselves. He called the Wall 'the most obvious and vivid demonstration of the failures of the Communist system' and praised Berliners for having maintained their 'vitality . . . force . . . hope and . . . determination' after having been 'besieged for 18 years'. The president universalized the call of freedom, concluding, 'All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words "*Ich bin ein Berliner.*"'<sup>59</sup>

East German radio and television reported on JFK's speeches in West Berlin only in brief segments, thereby admitting in a backhand manner that East Berliners had listened as well and that his words were powerful, well chosen, and effective. Kennedy's speech was rhetorically powerful and aggressive, its tone much more severe than ZAIG had anticipated in late May. It appeared that the West German leaders had been correct, that a drive through the divided city would harden the American President's stand on Berlin. One of the few comments on the 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech came from the domestic news service. 'The US President . . . made some remarks deploring the partition of Germany', stated journalist Goetz Gaertner in his commentary. 'He is, after all, the President of the country which is largely responsible for Germany's being divided.' And, Gaertner continued, 'What is the point of Mr. Kennedy's "deploring" the existence of the wall, the GDR state frontier? He should instead have deplored the policy of imperialism, both the West German and the U.S. variety, which made it necessary for this protective wall to be built.'<sup>60</sup>

Another East German commentator told listeners that he 'felt obligated to say a few words to West Berliners about the visit of John Kennedy, the American President.' The crowds greeting him on the streets and 'the demonstrations remind us of the worse times in German history', equating the jubilant

58 'Remarks in the Rudolph Wilde Platz, Berlin. June 26, 1963', *Papers of the Presidents John F. Kennedy* 1963, 524. "Alle freien Menschen sind Bürger West-Berlins." Die Ausführungen Adenauers, Kennedys und Brandts vor dem Rathaus Schöneberg', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 June 1963.

59 'Remarks in the Rudolph Wilde Platz, Berlin. June 26, 1963', 524–5. On the discussion of JFK's grammar in announcing 'Ich bin ein Berliner,' see Eichholz, "'Ich bin ein Berliner'", op. cit., 71–2, 75–9.

60 'Kennedy Intransigence, Hypocrisy Rapped. Goetz Gaertner Commentary. East Berlin Domestic Service. . . 27 June 1963', FBIS, No. 126 (28 June 1963), EE2–3.

reception to nazi rallies.<sup>61</sup> A journalist on GDR radio termed JFK's speeches 'warlike tirades'.<sup>62</sup> The chairman of the East Berlin SED spoke out strongly against the visit, describing JFK's 'blitz visit' as having 'not changed anything'. Furthermore, 'the GDR state border has demonstrated even more clearly to the President the limits of Western power.' The West Berlin visit of JFK was condemned as a gain for 'the revanchist Bonn ultras', and a number of newspapers ran articles emphasizing this theme. In the days following the visit to Berlin, local newspapers carried more articles on the racial unrest and violence in the American South, as the political leadership of the GDR tried to reinforce their earlier arguments.<sup>63</sup>

Reactions of ordinary East Berliners and East Germans to the visit are more difficult to gauge. To be sure, many learned the details of JFK's speeches through West German radio and television that reached a large audience in the East.<sup>64</sup> Several incidents revealed the public's interest. Early in the day a West Berlin labor leader presented JFK with a bouquet of carnations with a card reading 'Greetings from the East Berlin populace'. He explained that workers had tossed the flowers over the Wall the previous evening, with a note requesting that they be 'given to the President as a greeting from East Berlin'.<sup>65</sup> As the President's motorcade wound its way slowly through West Berlin it drove close to the Wall on several occasions and the procession stopped for Kennedy to step out of the vehicle, to view more closely the forbidding Berlin Wall at the Brandenburger Gate and Check Point Charlie. At the Brandenburg Gate, long one of the busiest thoroughfares in Berlin and now closed off to traffic by the Wall, the long red banners hung between the columns prevented East Berliners from catching a better view of the famous visitor.<sup>66</sup> At Check Point Charlie, East German officers retreated behind the toll-bar barricade and monitored the scene through field glasses. A Soviet camera crew filmed the event from the roof of a nearby building. The 'Vopo', *Volkspolizei* (People's Police), could be seen holding back 'more than 2,000 East Berliners' well past the 100-yard line of demarcation imposed the day JFK arrived in West Germany. Several hundred individuals had assembled at the Friedrichstraße and 'a few, right under the nose of the Vopos, waved

61 'Eisler zum Besuch von John F. Kennedy in West Berlin', DDR-Rundfunk, 27 June 1963, DRA, Nr. Z093776 001.

62 'Kurt Erich... zum Besuch Chruschtschows in Ost-Berlin und Kennedys in West-Berlin', DDR Rundfunk, 28 June 1963, DRA, Nr. Z093774-003.

63 'Gerhard Danelius Statement. East Berlin Domestic Service... 26 June 1963', FBIS, No. 125 (27 June 1963), EE9. See, for example, 'Wendung zur Aktion. USA-Zeitschrift: Rassenproblem im ganzen Land sehr groß', *Neue Zeit*, 26 June 1963; 'Bonn nutzt Kennedy-Besuch für Provokationen', *National Zeitung*, 26 June 1963; 'Kennedy ermutigt Revanchisten', *Sächsische Zeitung*, 27 June 1963; 'Amerikanischer Präsident ermuntert Revanchisten', *Freie Presse* (Karl-Marx-Stadt), 27 June 1963; 'Kennedy an Potsdam und Jalta erinnert', *Ostsee-Zeitung*, 27 June 1963; and 'Kennedy predigte kalten Krieg', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 28 June 1963.

64 'Kennedy Heute in Deutschland', *Tagesspiegel*, 23 June 1963.

65 'Blumengruß aus dem Sowjetsektor', *Tagesspiegel*, 27 June 1963.

66 'Rote Fahnen sollen Blick in Sowjetsektor versperren', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 June 1963.

cautiously,' a West Berlin newspaper reported. A street car stopped in the East as JFK stood on the viewing platform, and an East German inner-city train slowed almost to a stop. 'Even the train crew waved,' West Berlin's *Der Tagesspiegel* reported. Not far away, a sign could be seen that read, 'we also greet Kennedy for the East Berliners.'<sup>67</sup>

Reports prepared by GDR officials asserted that the interest among its citizens was negligible. The Section Party Executive Body maintained that 'all district leaders have reported that Kennedy's visit to West Germany and West Berlin has hardly been discussed at all.' The Section compiled two pages of quotes from individuals throughout East Germany echoing and endorsing the official view. Most of those who spoke contrasted Kennedy's visit with that of Soviet Premier Khrushchev who arrived a few days later. Several individuals stated that the American President ought to have taken care of things at home before coming to Berlin, echoing the sentiment of the government's press campaign. 'Kennedy should look after his own country, establish peace and order there and bring an end to the mistreatment of Negroes,' was the sentiment voiced by several. A worker added a personal view, stating that 'the current television programs are so good that we don't follow the Kennedy visit on West Germany television,' an admission that many East Germans were in fact watching the West's extensive television coverage.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, the tumultuous response given to the American President by the residents of West Berlin startled the Kremlin and East German leaders. They countered with the visit of the leader of the communist block, and just two days after JFK's triumphant eight-hour visit to West Berlin Nikita Khrushchev arrived in East Berlin, ostensibly to celebrate Walter Ulbricht's seventieth birthday. The announcement of the visit came only on 25 June and it reflected the Kremlin's and East Berlin's troubled reactions to the enthusiastic welcome given to the American President.<sup>69</sup> Not to be outdone, local East German officials worked 'to prepare a reception that will rival President Kennedy's rousing visit yesterday', a *Washington Post* correspondent wrote. They decorated the city with flags and banners, and hung placards on lampposts reading 'Welcome Nikita' and 'Friendship'. Newspapers called upon East Berliners to 'come out in the thousands' to greet the communist leader. Factory workers received the day off so they could line the streets, and in fact it was their duty to appear. East German authorities courted the Western media, with the Foreign Ministry scurrying to catch journalists in town to cover President Kennedy's

67 'Pankow errichtet Sperrgebiet an der Mauer', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 23 June 1963. 'Ost-Berliner winkten am Checkpoint', 'Acht Stunden eines großen Tages', and 'Kennedy und die übrigen Berliner', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 June 1963.

68 Abt. Parteiorgane, 'Erste Argument zum Besuch Kennedys in Westdeutschland und Westberlin', Berlin, 26 June 1963, and 'Weitere Argument zum Besuch Kennedys in Westdeutschland und Westberlin, 28 June 1963', BA, SAMPO, DY/30/IVA2/9.02, Archivnummer 91.

69 'Kennedys Besuch verwirrt Moskau. Chruschtschow kommt mit gemischten Gefühlen nach Ost-Berlin', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26 June 1963.

historic visit and urging them to remain for the arrival of Khrushchev. 'Elaborate facilities' were even provided for the Western correspondents, and a special 'press bus' joined the Premier's motorcade as it traveled from Schönefeld Airport through the city.<sup>70</sup>

It appeared to many that the Khrushchev visit was 'an attempt to counteract the enthusiastic reception Mr. Kennedy has received in West Germany' and to give East German communists 'a psychological lift'.<sup>71</sup> The crowds for the Soviet Premier were less enthusiastic and smaller, however, than those greeting Kennedy – an estimated 25,000 versus 1.4 million. The weather did not co-operate either, and by the end of the day the city faced 'the heaviest rainstorm of the year'. A reporter commented that the Khrushchev visit 'obviously did not impress Berliners of either East or West and all it probably gave weary workers were bad colds'.<sup>72</sup>

Following the JFK visit, the Stasi offered its own view of the events and the purpose of the trip. 'The result of the Kennedy visit' and the president's 'main intent' was to 'find new ways for unifying the western camp, to renew America's leadership ambitions, at a time of growing imperialistic contradictions between the USA and the west European nations,' and to curb the efforts of Bonn's 'ultras'.<sup>73</sup> The Stasi added that JFK had provided 'psychological and ideological support for Bonn's and West Berlin's ultras'. His presence had encouraged them and led to a number of provocations, as seen from the East German perspective, incidents along the city's borders.<sup>74</sup> During the night of 27–28 June, 'several 1,000' balloons with 'inflammatory pamphlets' directed against Walter Ulbricht and demanding his resignation landed in Frankfurt, Halle, Potsdam and 'democratic' Berlin. The press remained critical and 'demanded' that the 'reunification question be the first item of discussion in all East-West negotiations'. East German leaders did recognize, however, that Kennedy's pledges had not met the expectations or the demands of the West German and West Berlin political leaders, who saw German unification as the premier issue and who wanted a strong statement of support from the American president.<sup>75</sup>

JFK was clearly delighted with the impact his presence and speeches had on Berliners, and the more than 1.4 million individuals who lined the streets to catch a glimpse, to show the American President their appreciation for his visit and strong words of support. West Berliners gave him 'the most overwhelming reception of his career', Kennedy's chief aide Theodore Sorensen wrote.

70 Jack Altman, 'Banners Go Up In E. Berlin for K's Visit Today', *Washington Post*, 28 June 1963. Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, op. cit., 162–4.

71 'K Visits E. Berlin Friday, Advancing Trip 2 Days', *Washington Post*, 26 June 1963. Katharine Clark, 'K Berlin Visit Fails To Offset JFK Trip', *Washington Post*, 29 June 1963.

72 Clark, 'K Berlin Visit', op. cit.; 'Chruschtschow in Ost-Berlin', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 29 June 1963.

73 'Wochenüberischt über feindliche Manöver, Absichten und Maßnahmen gegen die DDR (17.6. – 29.6.63)', BStU, Zentralarchiv, MfS, ZAIG, Z4415, 14–15.

74 Ibid., 15–16, 20, 21. 'Transitstrecken mißbraucht', *Berliner Zeitung*, 20 June 1963.

75 'Wochenbericht über feindliche Manöver... (17.6. – 29.6.63)', 1–3.

'The size of the crowd [at the Schöneberg town hall], their shouts and the look of hope and gratitude in their eyes' deeply moved the President and those Americans accompanying him.<sup>76</sup> A handful of East Berliners had also shown their positive feelings for the President. The trip to Berlin, the motorcade through the city, and the speeches had been very successful for JFK. He had stood up strongly to the Kremlin and the East German rulers, with his defiant words and the harsh contrast between a free West Berlin and the unfree East he portrayed in the 26 June speech. In that speech he committed the status of his office as President of the United States to the freedom of West Berlin, much to the delight of Mayor Brandt.

Over the next few months JFK had little to say about Berlin, and the East Germans continued their attacks on the 'revanchists' in Bonn. The Berlin visit and the President's speeches were no longer issues covered in the media. The reports from Dallas on 22 November 1963 that President Kennedy had been assassinated changed that, as the news swept quickly across the world. Berliners on both sides of the Wall were deeply affected. Walter Ulbricht stated solemnly, 'We have received the news of the treacherous assassination... with sadness and deep indignation.'<sup>77</sup> The East Berlin media echoed these thoughts. 'The world grieves with the American people,' wrote a columnist in the *Berliner Zeitung*. 'It has lost a first-rate statesman.' Reaction throughout the country was 'overwhelming... [and] the people expressed their deepest sympathy at the murder of Kennedy,' a report to the Central Committee stated. While expressing the deep sympathy of the leaders of the German Democratic Republic, the Central Committee blamed the shooting on 'right wing extremists' in the American south and called Texas 'a center of racial terror and repression of Negroes'. East Germans saw the assassination as an act of vengeance by the 'ultras', by 'right-wing extremists' who vehemently opposed JFK's domestic policies.<sup>78</sup>

Another SED committee prepared a lengthy report on the assassination, because 'the murder of the American president has in recent days been the main topic of discussion', and from the first announcements most believed that the 'American ultras', those against 'solving the race problem', had 'organized' the assassination. Some East German citizens believed that the ultras would try to blame communists, African Americans 'or other progressive forces'. The committee's report contained numerous comments, filling a dozen pages, taken from East German citizens, virtually all of whom were saddened by the death of the President. A few voiced their concern about how it would affect American policies, whether it would interrupt the steps taken toward a *détente* and a halt to nuclear testing. The East German

76 Sorensen, *Kennedy*, op. cit., 600–1.

77 'Beileid Walter Ulbrichts', *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 November 1963.

78 Peter Baranowsky, 'Der Mord an Kennedy', *Berliner Zeitung*, 24 November 1963. 'Erste Information über Diskussionen zur Ermordung Kennedys', Abteilung Organisation Gruppe Parteiorganisation und – Information, Berlin, 29 November 1963, BA, SAPMO, DY/30/IVA/2/9.02, Nr. 91. Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, op. cit., 167–8.

populace had been more deeply affected by Kennedy's peace speech of 10 June than by what he said during the visit to West Berlin. An office worker in the town of Suhl summed up the feelings of many East Germans: 'The murder of Kennedy is a crime not only against the U.S. but against the entire world.'<sup>79</sup>

JFK was clearly delighted by the events of 26 June 1963, and especially the reception of his 'Ish bin ein Bearleener' address to record crowds. The visit to the divided city, deep within communist territory, embodied many of the tensions, contradictions, expectations, and disappointments that surrounded Berlin during the Cold War. By visiting West Berlin, JFK defied critics at home, challenged the East German leadership, aided Mayor Willy Brandt, bolstered the position of Chancellor Adenauer, strengthened US leadership of NATO, and boosted his popularity. The visit went far in meeting the president's goals. The careful preparations of East German authorities made little impact on JFK, his visit, or Western responses to its demands. These preparations reveal the insecurities of the East German regime and its vigorous efforts to gain recognition of its sovereignty from the Western powers. In the weeks leading up to the June visit, the GDR leadership and various intelligence agencies repeatedly discussed the details of the trip. What emerges from the careful planning and discussions is that the GDR strove hard to persuade its citizens of the legitimacy of the nation's existence and the seriousness of the threats coming from Bonn. East German leaders and the Kremlin had looked upon the 10 June address at American University as a call for peace, for an end to the Cold War, and hoped Kennedy would build upon it during the visit to West Germany and Berlin. The speech from the steps of the Schöneberg town hall seemed to show that JFK had allied himself with the so-called 'revanchists', those German political figures who were decidedly anti-East German. Still, the mixed views of JFK in East Germany persisted, and this is expressed nowhere more clearly than in the outpouring of emotion that followed his assassination.

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79 Abteilung Organisation, Berlin, 29 November 1963, 'Erste Information über Diskussionen zur Ermordung Kennedys'; and 'SED Hausmitteilung, An Gen. Norden, 28 November 1963', BA, SAPMO, DY/301/IVA2/9.02, Nr. 91.