

= Tear down this wall ! =

" Tear down this wall ! " is a line from a speech made by US President Ronald Reagan in West Berlin on June 12 , 1987 , calling for the leader of the Soviet Union , Mikhail Gorbachev , to open up the barrier which had divided West and East Berlin since 1961 .

= = Background = =

The " tear down this wall " speech was not the first time Reagan had addressed the issue of the Berlin Wall . In a visit to West Berlin in June 1982 , he 'd stated " I 'd like to ask the Soviet leaders one question [...] Why is the wall there ? " , and in 1986 , 25 years after the construction of the wall , in response to West German newspaper Bild @-@ Zeitung asking when he thought the wall could be " torn down " , Reagan said , " I call upon those responsible to dismantle it [today] " .

On the day before Reagan 's 1987 visit , 50 @,@ 000 people had demonstrated against the presence of the American president in Berlin . During the visit itself , wide swaths of Berlin were shut off hermetically from the event to suppress further anti @-@ Reagan protests . The district of Kreuzberg , in particular , was targeted in this respect , with movement throughout this portion of the city in effect restrained completely (for instance the subway line 1 was shut down) .

The speech was also a source of considerable controversy within the Reagan administration itself , with several senior staffers and aides advising against the phrase , saying anything that might cause further East @-@ West tensions or potential embarrassment to Gorbachev , with whom President Reagan had built a good relationship , should be omitted . American officials in West Germany and presidential speechwriters , including Peter Robinson , thought otherwise . Robinson traveled to West Germany to inspect potential speech venues , and gained an overall sense that the majority of West Berliners opposed the wall . Despite getting little support for suggesting Reagan demand the wall 's removal , Robinson kept the phrase in the speech text . On May 18 , 1987 , President Reagan met with his speechwriters and responded to the speech by saying , " I thought it was a good , solid draft . " White House Chief of Staff Howard Baker objected , saying it sounded " extreme " and " unpresidential , " and Deputy US National Security Advisor Colin Powell agreed . Nevertheless , Reagan liked the passage , saying , " I think we 'll leave it in . "

Chief speechwriter Anthony Dolan gives another account of the line 's origins , however , attributing it directly to Reagan . In an article published in The Wall Street Journal in November 2009 , Dolan gives a detailed account of how in an Oval Office meeting that was prior to Robinson 's draft Reagan came up with the line on his own . He records vivid impressions of his own reaction and Robinson 's at the time . This led to a friendly exchange of letters between Robinson and Dolan over their differing accounts , which The Wall Street Journal published .

= = The speech = =

Arriving in Berlin on June 12 , 1987 , President and Mrs. Reagan were taken to the Reichstag , where they viewed the wall from a balcony . Reagan then made his speech at the Brandenburg Gate at 2 : 00 pm , in front of two panes of bulletproof glass . Among the spectators were West German president Richard von Weizsäcker , Chancellor Helmut Kohl , and West Berlin mayor Eberhard Diepgen .

That afternoon , Reagan said ,

We welcome change and openness ; for we believe that freedom and security go together , that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of world peace . There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable , that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace . General Secretary Gorbachev , if you seek peace , if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe , if you seek liberalization , come here to this gate . Mr. Gorbachev , open this gate . Mr. Gorbachev , tear down this wall !

Later on in his speech , President Reagan said , " As I looked out a moment ago from the Reichstag , that embodiment of German unity , I noticed words crudely spray @-@ painted upon the

wall , perhaps by a young Berliner , ' This wall will fall . Beliefs become reality . ' Yes , across Europe , this wall will fall . For it cannot withstand faith ; it cannot withstand truth . The wall cannot withstand freedom . "

Another highlight of the speech was Reagan 's call to end the arms race with his reference to the Soviets ' SS @-@ 20 nuclear weapons , and the possibility " not merely of limiting the growth of arms , but of eliminating , for the first time , an entire class of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth . "

= = Response and legacy = =

The speech received " relatively little coverage from the media " , Time magazine reported 20 years later . East German Politburo member Guenter Schabowski considered the speech to be " absurd " , and the Soviet press agency TASS accused Reagan of giving an " openly provocative , war @-@ mongering speech . "

Former West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said he would never forget standing near Reagan when he challenged Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall . " He was a stroke of luck for the world , especially for Europe . "

In an interview with Reagan himself , he recalls the East German police not allowing people to get near the wall , which prevented the citizens from experiencing the speech at all . The fact that West German police acted in a similar way has however seldom been noted in accounts such as these .

Peter Robinson , the White House wordsmith who drafted the address , said its most famous line was inspired by a conversation with Ingeborg Elz of West Berlin who had remarked in a conversation with him , " If this man Gorbachev is serious with his talk of Glasnost and perestroika he can prove it by getting rid of this wall . "

Despite Reagan urging Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall , there are some such as Romesh Ratnesar of Time who commented that there is little evidence that the speech had any impact on the decision to tear down the wall , let alone an impact on the people he addressed . Another critic is Liam Hoare in a 2012 article in The Atlantic , who points to the many reasons for the tendency for American media to focus on the significance of this particular speech , without weighing the complexity of the events as they unfolded in both East and West Germany and the Soviet Union .

John Kornblum , senior US diplomat in Berlin at the time of Reagan 's speech , and US Ambassador to Germany from 1997 to 2001 , said " [The speech] wasn 't really elevated to its current status until 1989 , after the wall came down . "