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Kennedy in Berlin

Kennedy in Berlin examines one of the most spectacular political events of the twentieth century. This book tells the story of the enthusiastically celebrated visit that U.S. president John F. Kennedy paid to Berlin, the “frontline city of the Cold War,” in June 1963. The president’s tour triggered the greatest political happening in German history and resonated around the world, not least on account of Kennedy’s famous declaration – “*Ich bin ein Berliner*.” Andreas W. Daum sets Kennedy’s visit against the background of the special relationship that had developed between the United States and West Berlin in the wake of World War II. “America’s Berlin” became the place for staging politics as theatrical performance. Political performances helped create a sense of transatlantic community and emotional closeness between the United States and Germany that has now itself become history. *Kennedy in Berlin* is an innovative contribution to the study of transatlantic relations, the Cold War, and the conduct of diplomacy in the age of mass media. Using a broad range of sources, this book sheds new light on the interplay between politics and culture in the modern era.

Andreas W. Daum is a professor of modern history at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He has taught at the University of Munich, where he earned his doctorate, and has been a Research Fellow at the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., and a John F. Kennedy Memorial Fellow at Harvard University. He is the author of *Wissenschaftspopularisierung im 19. Jahrhundert* and the coeditor of *America, the Vietnam War, and the World*, with Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach, and, with Christof Mauch, of *Berlin – Washington: Capital Cities, Cultural Representations, and National Identities*, both published by Cambridge University Press.

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TRANSLATED BY DONA GEYER

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Egon Bahr, former advisor to Willy Brandt and politically active far beyond the years on which my study focuses, kindly presented the original German version of this book to the public in June 2003 at the Schöneberg City Hall, in front of which John F. Kennedy delivered his famous speech to Berliners forty years earlier. My thanks go to Michael Werner, editor-in-chief at Schöningh Verlag, who agreed to a translation, and to the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., for its support of this project, which David Lazar handled with much care. I thank Cambridge University Press for including my book in its program in history and Dona Geyer, who translated it. The text profited from Dona's talent of combining accuracy with ingenuity; it was a pleasure to collaborate with her.

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Once again, I wish to express my gratitude to my parents for all the support and affection they have given me throughout my life. The American edition of this book is dedicated to the memory of my father, Gerhard Daum. I have always admired his boundless curiosity and broad intellectual interests, and I continue to value the virtues he exemplified – his sincerity, his reliability, and his positive outlook on life.

August 2007

Preface to the English Edition

Kennedy in Berlin invites the reader to explore how politics has been staged in the twentieth century. This book wants to demonstrate how statesmen, diplomats, media, and people in the streets have contributed to dramatizing politics and how this drama has been used as a political argument for domestic and international purposes. Closely choreographed as they may be, political performances develop a dynamic of their own, as *Kennedy in Berlin* demonstrates, and their meaning changes over time in our collective memory. Political performances feature actors who follow predetermined roles, but they are equally constituted by those who watch the stage, articulate their reactions, and interfere in the script.

One specific moment in time stands in the center of the book, as its title indicates. On June 26, 1963, one of the most charismatic American presidents ever traveled to one of the most embattled sites of recent history, a city with highly ambiguous symbolical notions. John F. Kennedy toured Berlin – to be more precise: he toured America's Berlin. The president visited the western part of a city that had been, in previous times, the capital of Prussia and Imperial Germany, the metropolis of Weimar Germany, and the center of Hitler's Nazi dictatorship. But the Berlin Kennedy went to had begun to establish a special relationship with America in the late 1940s at the latest, in the early years of what contemporaries already called the Cold War. Kennedy's stay in Berlin, at that time sharply divided between East and West, triggered the greatest happening in German history prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In fact, it generated one of the most spectacular events of the modern era.

For sure, any moment in time is unique and, as in this prominent case, worth being appreciated. Surprisingly enough, we have been lacking so far not only a precise account of what happened on that June day along the Cold War's most dramatic dividing line, but also an explanation of why

things occurred as they did. Any moment in time reflects the epoch at large. It is the result of multiple factors and only possible due to circumstances and developments that both precede and transcend the specific setting. A microperspective, that is, a close examination of a particular moment, may therefore allow new macroperspectives, meaning insights into the era in which the moment was embedded. Yet, as Carlo Ginzburg has rightly argued, the “reconciliation between macro- and microhistory” needs to be pursued consciously by the historian.¹ Using a microhistory to reveal larger issues at stake requires one to read the specific point in time closely as well as to frame this reading in broad terms, provided by general questions and today’s knowledge, and to keep an eye on the historicity of the moment itself. *Kennedy in Berlin* undertakes such an attempt.

By looking at John F. Kennedy’s trip to Berlin, this book identifies major features of the twentieth century and especially the era of the Cold War that have so far received little attention. It highlights symbolic politics, performative action, and emotions as constitutive for transatlantic and especially German-American relations. It emphasizes the tendency to dramatize politics in order to gain legitimacy for specific policies, a technique that characterized not only, as we often read, authoritarian regimes, but also democracies and relations among democratic states. *Kennedy in Berlin* focuses on what I would like to call the politics of visibility, a concern with visual imagery that became essential for gaining consensus in the twentieth century. Last, but not least, this book wants to explain why West Germans, even more so than people in America, cheered an American president so enthusiastically that he appeared almost as a divine sign promising a bright future – certainly a phenomenon that is hard to believe for today’s generation.

My hope is to draw readers interested in American and German history, international relations, and the Cold War era, as well as, more generally, in the interactions between politics and culture. My arguments are meant to contribute specifically to the ongoing debates about the history and future of transatlantic and in particular German-American relations. We keep discussing whether the United States created a “consensual hegemony” (Charles S. Maier) or an “empire by invitation” (Geir Lundestad) in Europe following the Second World War. We continue debating to what degree the United States’ “soft power” (Joseph S. Nye), that is, its ability to attract others by the legitimacy of its policies and the values that underlie them, affected domestic and international politics during the Cold War era. We want to know more about the potential and the limits of “cooperation among democracies” (Thomas Risse). We still ask why some European societies aligned themselves so closely with a hegemonic power located

across the Atlantic. And we need to consider why they ultimately began disassociating themselves from this power and thus raised the challenge of defining a new European-American partnership as “one of equals, of real partners” (Stephen F. Szabo). As the reader will see, the chapters of this book offer a set of nuanced arguments about these and related questions.

Kennedy in Berlin is a piece of historical research, but it has profited immensely from dialogue with neighboring disciplines. It wants to show that source-based diplomatic history and a cultural history concerned with ideas, symbols, and emotions are mutually enriching and share common ground. I am indebted especially to works in the fields of political science and international relations inspired by Karl W. Deutsch. Clifford Geertz’s anthropology and recent historical anthropology have greatly informed my approach to the topic, especially my attempt to provide a thick description of an event in which all action bore symbolic character and deserves to be explained in its historical context. Max Weber’s sociology of community and society provided an important stimulus, as did modern art history with its emphasis on the interplay of images, media, and society. Finally, my analysis of a Cold War event would not have been possible without taking into account historical research that has dealt with very different epochs, especially works on the history of civil society and the emergence of nation states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The city of Berlin – “the hottest spot in the world” as Scarlet, the daughter of a Coca-Cola manager, exclaimed in Billy Wilder’s legendary movie *One, Two, Three* – was, indeed, a Cold War theater in two senses: as an arena of strategic contest and as a stage on which to perform politics. This dual character of Berlin has led me to experiment with the arrangement of the story. *Kennedy in Berlin* is structured along the sequence of a theater performance. Following an introduction that highlights the main analytical interests, the first chapter describes the story of America’s Berlin, its protagonists and transformations over time. The second chapter looks at Kennedy’s actual visit to Germany and its staging in 1963. The third chapter deals with the dramatic climax of Kennedy’s trip, his tour of Berlin on June 26, 1963; it solves the many puzzles and myths surrounding Kennedy’s sentence “*Ich bin ein Berliner*.” The fourth chapter collects the audience’s responses after the curtain fell, including a look at a counterperformance, the visit of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to East Berlin only a few days after John F. Kennedy had triumphantly toured West Berlin. Finally, the epilogue describes how the show went on – from the staging of America’s Berlin as part of a heroic postwar story to the turbulence of the succeeding decades, during which American presidents received a much more mixed reception in

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Berlin, and to the redefinition of Berlin as the capital of unified Germany after 1990.

The translation differs slightly from the German original. I have shortened the text and only occasionally added a half sentence to explain a particular detail. The notes and bibliography have been updated; many references to literature in German have been replaced by ones to more recent works written in English.

Abbreviations

AA	Auswärtiges Amt
AAP	<i>Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland</i>
AFES	Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organi- zations
ARD	Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rundfunkanstalten Deutschlands
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSU	Christian Social Union of Bavaria
DDEL	Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas
EEC	European Economic Community
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States of America</i>
FU	Freie Universität Berlin/Free University Berlin
FU Archiv	Universitätsarchiv der Freien Universität Berlin
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GML	George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, Virginia
GMMA	George Meany Memorial Archives, Silver Spring, Maryland
HIA	Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California
JFKL	John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts
LBJL	Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas
LAB	Landesarchiv Berlin, Berlin
LoC	Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.
MLF	Multilateral nuclear force
NA	National Archives II, College Park, Maryland
NBC	National Broadcasting Company

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NSF	National Security Files
NSF, T & C	National Security Files, Trips & Conferences
PAAA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin
PK 1963	<i>Präsident Kennedy in Deutschland. Sonderdruck aus dem Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung</i> , nos. 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113/1963 (Bonn, 1963).
PPP	<i>Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States</i>
RFK Papers	Robert F. Kennedy Papers, John F. Kennedy Library
RIAS	Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SFB	Sender Freies Berlin
SPD	Social Democratic Party
T & C	Trips & Conferences
UAW	United Automobile Workers Union
USIA	United States Information Agency
USIS	United States Information Service
WBA	Willy-Brandt-Archiv im Archiv der sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn
WH	White House
ZDF	Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen