

As prepared for delivery.

Meterweise Amerika
Friends of the Amerika Haus Book Donation

Ambassador Coats

Berlin
December 5, 2002

"Meterweise Amerika" - the equivalent of one shelf of books on America, one meter long, the length of one long step -- "ein grosser Schritt." One step on a journey of discovery for the students of the schools represented here, a journey of discovery of some of the things that America is all about and also what our German-American partnership is all about. One meter of books, one step towards maintaining and continuing that partnership.

I would like to thank the Friends of the Amerika Haus for their initiative and commitment to this project. Today with donations to 10 schools from Berlin and Brandenburg, you have broken the 200 meter mark -- a remarkable accomplishment and a remarkable project.

Herr Kasch, Herr Dr. Stratus, Members of the Board of the Friends of the Amerika Haus, please accept our sincere appreciation. I know from the staff here at the Amerika Haus, how rewarding it is to work with you all.

Representatives of the Education Departments of Berlin and Brandenburg,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Students and Teachers,

The German-American partnership in the last half a century is perhaps one of the greatest success stories in modern history. The bonds of unity and strength that united the United States and Germany -- in the face of enormous challenges -- are the basis for one of the most unique country-to-country relationships that the world has ever seen. Out of the ashes of World War II, the United States and Germany forged a very special bond. One that was, yes, government-to-government, business-to-business but, most importantly, people-to-people. These are the ties that bind and these are the ties, the people-to-people ties, that will see us through difficult times and through differences of opinion. These are the ties that will stand -- well into this new century and beyond. As a result of projects like Meterweise Amerika.

Throughout the long years of the Cold War, we shared a common goal. In the end, we realized that goal and the wall that divided this city and this country came tumbling down. However, despite that clear, single purpose, throughout those long years, there were differences of opinion -- varying perceptions of threats and solutions, of motives and goals.

Twenty years ago, in the spring of 1983, at a time when the debate regarding the placement of Pershing and cruise missiles on German soil was intense, Arthur Burns, the Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany at the time, spoke often with groups of students, like yourselves. Ambassador Burns described the world of international politics as "a world in which perception of facts often obscures the facts themselves." He was concerned that the realities -- the hard facts -- of history were often forgotten.

He was concerned about respecting what he called the boundary line between "perception and sheer opinion -- and true knowledge" and the value of historical perspective.

Today, and I speak to the students in the audience, let me return to Ambassador Burns' concerns. My generation looks back and sees decades of division. Your generation has grown up within a completely different society, one that has not known the division of the Cold War. That perspective can open up the opportunities -- rather than simply the problems -- inherent in the vast changes facing our societies. But don't forget the historical perspective. The books here, your school's new "one meter of America" can help you fill in the holes of knowledge you may have about America, may help you answer some of your questions.

And that is a lesson for us all -- to never stop looking for the answers, to never stop learning. During the past year, since I arrived in Germany, I have been fascinated by the history that confronts me here at every turn. Like President Bush said, when he addressed the Bundestag last spring, "The history of our times is written in the history of Berlin."

I am accumulating my own personal "Meterweise Deutschland." The books on my desk are about the history of your country, and also about the history of our partnership. Let us never forget the lessons to be learned from dialogue and understanding.

In terms of understanding, of course, you young people all have an advantage over me. I am sure you understand English, my language, much better than I understand yours. Aber -- da bin ich auch am Lernen!

Noch mal vielen Dank, und viel Erfolg!