



Remarks at Opening of Kennedy Exhibit
German Historical Museum, Berlin
June 25, 2003
Ambassador Daniel R. Coats

Start

Minister Fischer,

Mayor Wowereit,

Dr. Ottomeyer,

Dr. Etges,

This is an ambitious exhibit. We are very proud that you have chosen an American theme for the reopening of the German Historical Museum after its magnificent renovation.

A major part of the legacy of President Kennedy underlies the German-American partnership and the history that binds us.

As president, John F. Kennedy instilled hope in a nation -- and a world -- that was tired and weary.

His inaugural address inspired the generation that came of age in the 1960s to serve their nation and their communities. "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Those words reflected a commitment and vision that reawakened the American spirit that Alexis de Tocqueville, writing nearly two centuries ago, said "put liberty within peoples' reach."

President Kennedy's vision for world peace was based on the same kind of commitment. And nowhere else was the evidence of a commitment to the values of freedom, justice and democracy more obvious than here in Berlin. The commitment of the United States to the protection of West Berlin and to the promise of German unity was unwavering -- over four long decades. Years later, another U.S. President visited Berlin and delivered another clarion call for democracy and freedom. President Reagan's appeal to tear down the wall dividing Germany became reality within two years.

For as long as one German out of four was denied the basic right of making a free choice, real, lasting peace in Europe could never be assured. That was President Kennedy's message when he visited Berlin that June day forty years ago. At that time, the international political situation was tense and some in America questioned the wisdom of the President's visit. President Kennedy asked former U.S. High Commissioner to Germany John McCloy for his opinion. McCloy responded that, if the President could not visit Berlin at this critical moment, he should stay away from the Federal Republic altogether. The President took McCloy's advice. He went to Berlin and spoke the now famous words: "Ich bin ein Berliner." With those words, President Kennedy prophesied the day when Berlin -- East and West -- would be joined as one, a symbol no longer of division, but one of unity and of hope.

Today the threats and tensions of the Cold War that shadowed President Kennedy's words are behind us. But the century ahead holds new and equally great challenges. We must find the strength to find renewed meaning in President Kennedy's message of common purpose, of unity and hope, the message that meant so much to Berliners, to

Germans, to Americans, to the world, four decades ago.

Thank you.