This thesis attempts to locate the role of Berlin in American discourse during the height of the Cold War using a theoretical model based on the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. It analyzes the historical background of the American investment in Berlin from wartime negotiations through Kennedy’s Berlin visit in 1963, and it draws on official and media representations in order to develop a sense of how Berlin, its people and its events were represented to the American people at the time. Discourse theory is then explained and its key terms illustrated with reference to the role of Berlin within American Cold War discourse. Finally, I argue that Berlin helped to fix the meaning of key terms such as “freedom,” “democracy” and “anticommunism,” thereby contributing to the coherence of American Cold War discourse and the subject positions it produced.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ...........................................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................iii
Vita ....................................................................................................................................................iv
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................1
1. Historical Background of the American Investment in Berlin, 1943-1963 ..........................3
2. American Representations of Cold War Berlin .................................................................30
3. Berlin in American Cold War Discourse: A Discourse-Theoretical Analysis ............61
Conclusion ..........................................................................................................................................81
Works Cited .......................................................................................................................................83
INTRODUCTION

In German director Helke Sander’s 1977 film *The All-Round Reduced Personality* (*Die Allseitig Reduzierte Persönlichkeit*, or *Redupers*), the main character and her mailman, prompted by a missing zip code on a postcard, enter into a brief but telling discussion about the precise location of West Berlin. The mailman asks “Where is West Berlin, actually?” Sander herself, playing the lead role, responds “I don’t know. You should ask Jimmy Carter.” Indeed, West Berlin does seem to have been as much a Cold War construction of the United States as an actual place with determinate geographical boundaries. If this was the case, what was the background of the American investment in Berlin? What place did it occupy within the larger American Cold War struggle, and what was its function? How did it come to represent an outpost of the vague and slippery concepts of “freedom” and “democracy,” and how might it have served to fix the meaning of these concepts for Americans?

In what follows, these questions will be explored through the lens of discourse theory, as elaborated in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Discourse theory combines theoretical insights from Marxist thought, psychoanalytic theory and linguistic theory to develop a useful framework for understanding how social relations and subject positions are constructed through discourse, and how meaning and identity, though always incomplete, are partially fixed by hegemonic articulations.
The first chapter will offer the historical background necessary for a preliminary understanding of the events surrounding Berlin in their international context, and of the American foreign policy investment in the city, beginning with the wartime origins of the so-called “Berlin question.” Other key events will also be covered, such as the Berlin blockade and airlift; the 1953 uprising in East Berlin and the subsequent American food aid program to East Germany; and the successive crises that took place from Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev’s “Berlin ultimatum” in 1958 to the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

The second chapter looks at official and media representations of these events, and of Berlin itself and its citizens, in order to trace the ways in which Berlin came to stand for certain core American values such as freedom, democracy and free enterprise, and how it came to be regarded by Americans as the frontline of the Cold War, a “frontier of freedom” that must be defended at all costs. These representations are drawn from official speeches and documents, from *Time* magazine and several major American newspapers and publications, and also from two films of the period.

The final chapter outlines the key terms of discourse theory and attempts to theorize the role of Berlin within what I call American Cold War discourse. In short, I argue that the polarized world that representations of Berlin helped to construct both shaped and reinforced a more or less coherent American Cold War identity.
CHAPTER 1
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE AMERICAN INVESTMENT IN BERLIN, 1943-1963

Others may find it possible to discuss intelligently the current world debates centering about Berlin without reference to its early postwar history. I find this impossible. Any such attempt can only inspire new questions: “How did we ever get into this situation?” “Why do we have national responsibilities in Berlin?”

- Dwight D. Eisenhower, December 1961

America’s involvement in Berlin during the Cold War is well known, particularly its political, economic and military investment in West Berlin. Less well known, perhaps, is how the United States came to be in Berlin after World War II in the first place, and more importantly, why it remained. This chapter starts off by explaining the historical origins of the American investment in Berlin, beginning with wartime planning and agreements between the Western Allies and the Soviets. This background is important due to the fact that both sides would refer back to these agreements in future disputes. This introductory section is followed by a narrative summary of the major Cold War events in which Berlin played a key role, including the Berlin airlift, the East Berlin workers’ uprising and American food aid program, successive east-west diplomatic crises centering on Berlin, and finally the Berlin Wall crisis and America’s response.

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1 Eisenhower 19
Wartime Origins of the Berlin Question

Conversations concerning the occupation zones and the status of Berlin had taken place at the highest levels of the British and American governments throughout 1943, and also within the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS)\(^2\), with interesting results. The first such plan was drawn up in 1943 and was presented to the CCS at the first Quebec conference, held in August 1943 between American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Churchill. It was essentially a contingency plan in case the Germans collapsed earlier than expected, before the Western Allies could mount their cross-channel invasion, code-named Overlord. Called RANKIN, the plan was drawn up by the Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (COSSAC), Lt. General Sir Frederick Morgan. It called for the quick advance of Allied forces into Germany in order to force the unconditional surrender of Germany. Based on the plans for Operation Overlord\(^3\), it called for the British to end up in Germany’s north, while the Americans would be on their right flank and drive toward the south. For logistical reasons, the plan envisaged separate occupation zones based on where the two armies would end their campaigns. The question of Berlin and eastern Germany was left out of the planning, since it was presumed that the Soviets would end up in possession of this territory (Franklin 5-7).

The British had also been working on an occupation plan under the auspices of the Armistice and Post-War Committee. With Clement Atlee, the Deputy Prime Minister, at its head, the committee completed its report by the end of summer 1943. In contrast to RANKIN, this report took the Soviets into account, and was thus able to discuss

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\(^2\) The CCS was the coordinating body consisting of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

\(^3\) Operation Overlord was the codename for the Allied amphibious invasion of German-occupied Europe at Normandy, more commonly known as the D-Day invasion.
Germany in its entirety. It called for the division of Germany into three separate occupation zones, with Berlin as a separate, jointly administered entity. The British would occupy the northwest, the Americans the south, and the Soviets the East, and the plan drew the borders of the three zones along the existing boundaries of the German states (Länder). Significantly, jointly occupied Berlin would lie 110 miles within the Soviet Zone, according to this plan.

Roosevelt and Churchill had learned of the RANKIN plan from the CCS at the Quebec conference, and had approved of it in its basic form. When Roosevelt, in transit to the conferences at Malta and Tehran, was handed the more detailed and comprehensive British plan, it seemed to mesh well with his thinking on the dismemberment of Germany; the zones of occupation suggested by the British could easily become the basis for this dismemberment. He took exception, however, with the allotment of the southern zone to the United States. He thought the Americans should instead occupy the northwest zone, and that the zone should be stretched eastward to include Berlin. If the Americans occupied the southern zone, he argued, they would have to depend on France for their lines of communication, and this would necessarily involve American responsibility for and dependence on France to a degree that Roosevelt would not tolerate (10-11). The US Joint Chiefs of Staff, on the president’s orders, issued instructions to Morgan to amend the RANKIN plan to put the US in charge of the northwest occupation zone and the British in the south. Contrary to Roosevelt’s earlier stated wishes and quite inexplicably, Berlin was no longer included in this new US occupation zone, though the revised zone did extend further eastward to include the Baltic port city of Stettin (12). Morgan considered the changes suggested by Roosevelt to be unfeasible, because they would
involve either a complete reworking of the plans for Overlord, which were already too far along for such substantial revision, or they would necessitate a complete flip-flop of American and British forces after Germany’s surrender, a logistical nightmare.

With respect to Berlin, Philip Mosely, who was privy to American wartime planning⁴, describes the strategic and symbolic importance of the city, shedding light on the thinking in American policy-making circles at the time:

[W]e had to assume either that there would or would not be a German central administration in operation at the time of surrender. In the former case, the Allied authorities could work through it, though of course drastically changing its composition and policies. Berlin then would be the logical seat of the joint Allied authority. If there were no German administration in being, it would still be necessary to use the German staffs and records, and Berlin again would be the natural center. A further factor making Berlin the seat of Allied authority was that any proposal to create a new capital, especially one situated in a western zone, seemed bound to meet with unrelenting Soviet opposition. (587)

If postwar Germany was to be jointly occupied and administered, then, Berlin would be the best possible locus of power for such an authority. These considerations would circumscribe subsequent negotiations concerning the German capital.

At the end of 1943, Germany still had incredible military potential and was putting up fierce resistance against the Soviets on the Eastern front, and the Western Allies had not yet opened a second front. Nevertheless, it was clear that the tide had measurably turned against the Hitler regime. The Big Three of the anti-Hitler coalition, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union, knew that the postwar situation could not be left to chance and improvisation, and that they must agree on concrete plans.

⁴ Mosely succeeded George Kennan in June 1944 as political adviser to John G. Winant, American Ambassador to the European Advisory Commission, discussed on the next page.
In this regard, they had learned from the experience of the Italian surrender - the “cross-
purposes and frictions revealed during the negotiations over Italy showed how urgent it 
was to begin coordinating Allied purposes and arrangements for the surrender of 
Germany, and to do so well before the event” (Mosely 580). At the Moscow Conference 
of foreign ministers in October 1943, Anthony Eden of Great Britain, Cordell Hull of the 
United States and Vyacheslav Molotov of the Soviet Union agreed to establish a 
European Advisory Commission (EAC) to hammer out the surrender conditions for 
Germany, and to develop a coherent Allied occupation policy for that country. There had 
been general agreement at the Moscow conference that Germany should be jointly 
occupied by the three major powers, but no details were discussed (Franklin 4). Instead, 
the foreign ministers left the deliberations for the EAC. The leaders of the Big Three 
signed off on this arrangement shortly thereafter at the Tehran conference, and the EAC 
had its first meeting in London on January 14, 1944.

The main delegates to the EAC from the United States and the Soviet Union were 
John G. Winant and F.T. Gousev. These two men were logical choices, since they already 
served their respective countries as ambassadors in London. William Strang, a career 
diplomat with the British foreign office, represented Great Britain. All three men held 
ambassadorial status for the duration of the commission’s work. As ambassador to Great 
Britain, Winant already took his orders from the Department of State. However, the 
Departments of War and Navy also had to be involved on such important matters, so the
Working Security Committee (WSC) was set up in December 1943 by the Department of State to coordinate the policy-making efforts of the three departments\(^5\) (5).

On the second day of the conference, the British delegation presented their plan for the occupation, along with a proposal for handling the German surrender (13). This plan was essentially identical to the COSSAC plan, slightly but not substantively revised and without any of Roosevelt’s proposed changes. The Soviets followed on February 18 with their own proposal for surrender, including a paragraph on occupation zones. Their proposal agreed with the British plan, except that the Soviets claimed East Prussia for their zone. Strang agreed to this change, but on the American side, Winant’s hands were tied, since he had to await the response of the WSC. This response was not immediately forthcoming. The Department of State had not been kept abreast of the planning by the CCS, or of Roosevelt’s instructions on the disposition of the American and British zones of occupation. Thus, when the War Department dropped the amended COSSAC plan, with the expanded northwest zone under US occupation, in the lap of the WSC to be forwarded to Winant and the EAC, it was like a bolt from the blue. Nevertheless, the WSC sent the plan to Winant, who responded that he could not possibly present it to the EAC, since the Soviets and British had already agreed to the western boundary of the Soviet zone (18). The matter was eventually brought to the President, who agreed to the Soviet zone boundary, but continued to insist that the US should have the northwest zone. It was not until June 1 that Winant finally gave the American response to the British and

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\(^5\) On the dysfunctional nature of the WSC, mostly due to the antipathy of the War Department to the role of the EAC, see Mosely, pp. 584-86. Although his bias against the War Department is clear, he nonetheless puts forward a convincing argument.
Soviet proposals by accepting only the western boundary of the Soviet zone, thereby keeping the U.S. claim to the northwest zone alive (19).

While the disagreement between the Americans and British over zones ran its course, the EAC drafted a tentative protocol, signed on September 12, 1944\(^6\) by the three ambassadors, that drew the zonal boundaries as previously agreed. The Soviets were assigned the eastern zone, but in the text the other two zones were left blank pending final agreement between the Western Allies. The special status of Berlin was emphasized throughout the protocol. Lying within the Soviet zone, it would also be divided into three sectors\(^7\) using the boundaries of existing districts (\textit{Bezirke}), with the eastern sector of Berlin allotted to the Soviets, and the northwestern and southern sectors left to the Americans and British, with a provision that left open the possibility of French participation in the occupation. The protocol also stipulated the establishment of a Kommandatura, made up of three Commandants appointed by the commanders-in-chief of the three occupying powers, that would jointly administer the special area of Greater Berlin.

At the second Quebec conference in September 1944, Roosevelt finally caved to mounting pressure within his administration to strike a deal with the British and accept the southern zone. The British, in order to secure American acceptance, agreed to allow American control of the ports of Bremen and Bremerhaven in the north for supply purposes, and to guarantee transit rights through the British zone connecting the southern

\(^6\) The full text of this protocol can be found in \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS). Conferences at Malta and Yalta, 1945.} pp. 118-121.

\(^7\) The word “sector” became commonplace no later that November of 1945 to refer to the four occupation sectors of quadripartite Berlin. For the sake of clarity, I have used “sector” for Berlin and “zone” for the larger occupation zones of Germany throughout the text.
zone with these ports. In addition, the borders between the two zones were altered slightly, and the British expressed their “willingness to carry the major burden in Austria and southeastern Europe,” allaying some of Roosevelt’s fears (Franklin 21). The two sectors of Berlin that had been left blank were also filled in, with the British occupying the northwestern sector and the Americans the southern sector. In this way, the division of Berlin directly mirrored the division of Germany. The EAC included these changes in the protocol already signed, and approved the amended protocol on November 14, 1944. After some further negotiations between the British and Americans regarding the specifics of the port agreement and American transit rights, the Soviets were the last to sign the amended protocol on February 6, 1945. With this protocol in force, “the Western Powers [were] assured of their right to be in Berlin, regardless of which army arrived there first” (26). Furthermore, this agreement did not diminish in significance as the Cold War ramped up and continued on into the 1960s. On the contrary, the U.S. would continually refer back to it to argue for their continued presence in an increasingly embattled city.

The EAC signed another important document concerning Berlin on November 14, 1944, the “Agreement on Control Machinery in Germany.” Article one of the agreement specified that each Commander-in-Chief would exercise supreme authority within his own occupation zone. For “matters affecting Germany as a whole,” article three set up the Allied Control Council (ACC), made up of the three Commanders-in-Chief of the occupying armies, whose decisions had to be unanimous in order to take force (FRUS

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8 The amendments to the protocol are in ibid. pp. 121-123.
9 The full text can be found in ibid. pp. 124-127.
As far as Berlin was concerned, article seven of the same agreement laid out in greater detail the command structure and role of the Inter-Allied Governing Authority, or Kommandatura, for Berlin, placing it, significantly, under the “general direction” of the ACC (126). It also stipulated that the Commandants would serve in rotation as Chief Commandant, or head of the Kommandatura, which would jointly decide matters directly relating to the administration of the defeated Nazi capital.

The Soviets agreed to French participation in the occupation of Germany at the Big Three conference at Yalta in the Crimea in February 1945. However, French integration into the plan for the occupation of Berlin did not come without further negotiation. Initially, the Americans and British wanted the French sector to consist of three Bezirke. Each of the three occupying powers would sacrifice one district, and sector boundaries would be readjusted to give the French three contiguous districts. The Soviets objected on the grounds that the Yalta agreement between the Big Three stipulated that French participation in the occupation of Germany would not come at the cost of the Soviet occupation area. In July 1945, the Soviets added weight to this argument by making it clear that Berlin would be a separate economic area, and they would not be solely responsible for its supply. As a result, according to Mosely, the Americans realized that they would have to supply the British and French zones in Berlin, in addition to their own, and this made the thought of taking on one more district from the Soviet zone less attractive (601-602). The Americans and British relented and agreed to keep the Soviet sector of Berlin intact and carve the French sector from their own. The EAC protocol for the zonal division of Germany and Greater Berlin was then amended to include occupation zones for France and representatives of the four governments signed it on July 1945 124-25).
26, 1945. The agreement on control machinery had already been amended to include France on the Control Council and Kommandatura, and the EAC approved it on May 1, 1945. The EAC agreements discussed above, governing the disposition of occupation zones and the control machinery of occupied Germany, were put into force by the Berlin Declarations, dated June 5, 1945.

The leaders of the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union met at Schloss Cecilienhof in Potsdam, just outside of Berlin, from July 17 through August 2, 1945 to come to an agreement on various outstanding issues, including several involving the postwar situation in Germany. J.K. Sowden, in the second chapter of his book The German Question 1945-1973, highlights those parts of the Potsdam Agreement that would prove to be particularly consequential in the early years of the Cold War (82-88). He notes that the Big Three explicitly stated that the occupation zones of Germany should be recombined at some point in the future under a single German government, but that it gave no specifics on how such a government was to be elected, only that it would be through “democratic” methods. In terms of the Germany economy, the Potsdam Agreement stipulated that it would be managed as a single economic unit, in contrast to the supreme authority that the zonal commanders would exercise within their own zones. The question of reparations was particularly vexing, and required extensive deliberations and compromise during the conference; the Soviets demanded far more in reparations from the defeated Reich than the Americans and British thought Germany could sustain without impeding the recovery of Western Europe. A compromise was reached whereby each occupying power would take reparations from its own zone. As Sowden points out,
the “Potsdam Agreement’s principle of reparation payments on a zonal basis torpedoed all attempts to treat Germany as a single economic unit” (85).

The question of Western Allied access to Berlin, which would later become so important, was never settled, or even formally discussed, during the wartime negotiations of the EAC. However, the assumption of the EAC representatives was fairly clear: since the “right of the Western Powers to be in Berlin was expressly guaranteed… so the right of access followed as a matter of course” (Franklin 24). Nevertheless, the lack of a formal agreement would have dire consequences for the future political struggle over Berlin, and the story behind why the agreement was never formalized is instructive. By the time of the German surrender, the American army had advanced beyond the boundary of the Soviet zone, into Thuringia and Saxony. Pushed by his staff to use this situation as leverage to gain access to Berlin, Truman sent a telegram to Stalin on June 14, offering “to have instructions issued to all American troops to begin withdrawal into their own zone on 21 June in accordance with arrangements between the respective commanders, including in these arrangements simultaneous movement of the national garrisons into Greater Berlin and provision of free access by air, road, and rail from Frankfurt and Bremen to Berlin for U.S. forces” (quoted in Franklin 29). Stalin, in his reply, put off the matter, and Truman agreed to delay the movement of troops until July 1. In further negotiations, American General Lucius Clay, British General Sir Ronald Weeks, and Soviet Marshal Georgi Zhukov agreed on June 29 that the Western Allies would have access to Berlin via the Helmstedt Autobahn, and a rail line and two air corridors via Magdeburg (31). Strangely enough, the EAC never specifically put these transit rights to Berlin in writing. Instead, the Soviets assured the Western delegates that the Austrian
protocol, which stipulated Western Allied transit rights in Austria and Vienna, also applied, by analogy, to Berlin (31). This lack of an explicit, written agreement would have important consequences for the Allied presence in Berlin in the years to come.

The Berlin Blockade and the Allied Airlift

Tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies mounted throughout 1946-47. At the same time, American policy, which was both a reaction and a contributing factor to this rising friction, took on a much more combative stance. The year 1947 brought an American diplomatic offensive meant to counter the perceived Soviet threat in Europe. At that time, fears were mounting among American policymakers that the Soviets meant to dominate Europe, and that this domination would have profound consequences for the American economic and political way of life. Specifically, they thought that defense against a “totalitarian foe with a command economy and a resource base covering much of Eurasia” would require huge sacrifices on the part of the American people and drastic changes in the organization of the economy and legal system (Leffler 63). In short, many American officials viewed the Soviet threat as a threat to the American “way of life.”

The first American move had come on September 6, 1946, when Secretary of State James F. Byrnes unveiled a plan to unify the western zones of Germany economically. The Americans and British partially implemented this plan on January 1, 1947, creating an economic “Bizone” comprised of their two occupation zones. A second major diplomatic initiative came on March 12, when Truman came before congress to request $400 million in economic assistance for Greece and Turkey and read

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10 The “Trizone” was formed on May 8, 1949 with the addition of the French occupation zone.
off what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine, pledging American support for any people in danger of oppression by a minority. As Walter LaFeber has written, the Truman Doctrine “marked the point at which Truman used the American fear of communism both at home and abroad to convince Americans they must embark upon a Cold War foreign policy” (57).

The third major initiative was the Marshall Plan, the official title of which was the European Recovery Program (ERP), announced by the new Secretary of State George Marshall at the Harvard Spring commencement and released to the press on June 4, 1947. The plan called for massive U.S. aid to get Europe back on its feet, and Marshall made clear in the speech that the United States had a vested interest in an economically viable Europe. ERP assistance would theoretically be available to any country that needed it, though American policy-makers “had assumed that the conditions of aid would so greatly impinge on sovereignty as to effectively preclude Soviet [and Eastern European] participation” (Eisenberg 322), as confirmed by the subsequent Russian refusal of aid for the Soviet Union and countries under its sway. This somewhat disingenuous offer, then, allowed the U.S. to play up the humanitarian aims of the ERP without actually lending material aid to the Soviets or their allies.

While the Truman Doctrine set the rhetorical tone for the coming clash, the bizonal economic agreement and the Marshall Plan established the specific points of contention that would lead the Soviets and the Western Allies into conflict over the German question the following year. Carolyn Eisenberg, in her book Drawing the Line:
The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949\textsuperscript{11}, argues forcefully that “[b]y the beginning of 1948 the Americans and British were resolved: There would be two Germanies” (363). A significant first step toward this goal was the six-power conference between France, Great Britain, the United States, and the Benelux countries that convened in London beginning on February 24, 1948. Significantly, the Soviets were not invited to the conference. A number of issues involving Germany were on the agenda, including German participation in the ERP and western Germany’s political make-up. Eisenberg details the specific attempts, in the end successful, made by the Americans and British during the conference to allay the fears of the French and other Western Europeans about Germany. In addition, they had to make German officials amenable to a division of their country when most Germans wanted the opposite, a unified Germany. The first two-week session of the six-power talks recessed on March 6. Significantly for the future of Germany, the participants had agreed, in broad terms, to go ahead with the formation of a West German government, and also to allow the participation of the western occupation zones in the ERP.

Along with the move toward setting up a West German state, the Americans were also moving forward with a contingency plan for setting up a currency for the western occupation zones, in case quadripartite negotiations for an all-German currency fell through. Although the U.S. was still paying lip service to cooperating with the Soviets over currency, Eisenberg cites conversations between American Military Governor Lucius Clay and the State Department to show that, by March, the Americans were no longer interested in quadripartite currency reform, and Clay agreed to ensure that the

\textsuperscript{11} This section relies heavily on Eisenberg’s account.
talks would fail (381-82). All in all, American officials were not in a very conciliatory or cooperative mood, at least in part due to their perceptions of Soviet intentions. Eisenberg sums up the prevailing attitude at the time: “Among American officials [in early 1948] it was an article of faith that the Russians were out to communize western Germany and destroy the Marshall Plan” (370).

At the March 20th 1948 meeting of the ACC, east-west tension that had been building for months came to a head. Soviet military governor Marshall Vasily Sokolovsky insisted that his western counterparts update him on the six-power talks then taking place in London. The western military governors responded that they were unable to discuss the six-power talks with the Soviets without first checking with their respective governments. Sokolovsky, infuriated, read off a brief statement and adjourned the meeting. In his statement, he declared that the comportment and actions of the Western Allies had made clear that the “Control Council, in reality, no longer exists as an organ of ultimate authority in Germany” (quoted in Steege 438).

In the three months following the March 20th meeting, Berlin became the site of mutual harassment and provocation between the Soviets and Western Allies. For example, on March 31, the Soviet Military Authority (SMA) decreed that all western military trains into and out of Berlin must be inspected by the Soviets. When western authorities refused, the trains stopped, effectively creating a “mini-blockade.” The Western Allies countered with an airlift of military supplies for their Berlin garrisons. This situation lasted until Sokolovsky lifted the decree on April 10. Even after it was lifted, however, the Soviets continued to obstruct Allied rail and road traffic intermittently. The Soviets, for their part, also had plenty to complain about. In addition
to the inherent provocation of the London six-power talks, the American authorities in Berlin had done their best to impede various initiatives of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in Berlin and efforts to form a nationally unified trade union (Eisenberg 384-86, 408). American occupation officials had also been gradually taking the teeth out of efforts at denazification and decartelization within their occupation zone, feeding Soviet fears of a resurgent and hostile Germany (372-79). These are just a few of the many examples of reciprocal provocation that occurred in the first half of 1948.

The second session of the London conference concluded its proceedings on June 2, 1948. The six powers had formalized plans for a West German state organized along federal lines, and had agreed to West German participation in the Marshall Plan. Meanwhile, quadripartite negotiations on currency reform had gone nowhere, and the Americans and British were ready to fill the gap with their own currency, for, “[i]n their judgement, a new currency had become essential to West German recovery” (Eisenberg 409). On June 18, Clay informed Sokolovsky that the new currency would be circulated in the western zones within two days. Initially, Berlin was not included in this plan, but once western officials realized that the Soviets would be forced to counter with their own currency in their zone and in Berlin, the State Department insisted that the western sectors of Berlin also receive the new currency (410). The unilateral introduction by the western powers of their own currency in Germany’s western zones and the western sectors of Berlin on June 20, 1948 represented the final straw for the Soviets. On June 24, the Soviets cut off all land traffic to and from Berlin. The Berlin Blockade had begun.

The Western Allies had anticipated such a move, but they nevertheless had no agreed-upon strategy to deal with it. Several options were discussed, including a retreat
from Berlin, and British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin suggested expanding the airlift they had used during the mini-blockade to cover civilian and military needs until a longer-term solution to the crisis could be decided (Eisenberg 413). When western officials soon resolved to stay in Berlin, the airlift was greatly expanded. By late August, British and American planes were delivering more than 2000 tons of supplies a day to the western sectors of Berlin, and the tonnage grew from then on as more and larger planes were committed to the effort (Smyser 82). By April 1949, they were able to deliver 12,941 tons of supplies in a single day over Easter weekend, landing a plane on average nearly once a minute (Smyser 85). The airlift put the Western Allies in a much stronger negotiating position vis-à-vis Soviet demands, and played the decisive role in the eventual lifting of the blockade. Interestingly, however, recent scholarship has shown that the notion of the “total” blockade is not entirely accurate, and that the airlift was not the only factor in the survival of West Berlin. Many goods required by the western sector population were still obtained from the Soviet zone, either officially supplied by the SMA or obtained by Berliners through foraging and the black market.12

The Western Allies had also imposed a counter-blockade against the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, preventing much-needed raw materials from the West from reaching industry in the Soviet zone. The enormous success of the airlift, and the added measure of the counter-blockade, forced Stalin to reconsider his strategy. In March 1949, he dropped his demand for the reversal of the western currency reform, and an agreement was finally reached on May 5 to end the blockade and convene a meeting of the Council

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of Foreign Ministers later that month. On May 12, 1949, the blockade was officially lifted.

Cold War diplomatic historians have differed greatly in their interpretations of the Berlin Blockade. Orthodox historians argued that the Soviets meant to force the Western Allies out of Berlin, and many saw it as the first strike in a broader Soviet plan to dominate all of Germany and, from there, Western Europe. Revisionist historians, in contrast, maintained that the Soviets were merely responding to provocations by the Western Allies, in particular to Western currency reform and unilateral movement toward the formation of a separate West German state. Eisenberg is representative of the latter school of thought. The post-revisionists synthesize these two arguments, and contend that the blockade was the result of mutual misunderstandings and a breakdown in communication, part of the larger pattern of the early Cold War and not exclusive to events in Germany. ¹³ Contemporary American accounts of the airlift portrayed it in an epic light, emphasizing the heroic nature of the American defense of Berlin, as I will discuss further in chapter two. With the blockade and airlift, Berlin had become the most significant flashpoint of the new Cold War. These events, more than any other in the nascent East-West conflict, marked the end of cooperation between the Soviets and the United States.

¹³ For a good overview of these three historiographical viewpoints on the Cold War, see Mary Kaldor, The Imaginary War. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990, pp. 36-41.
The East German Uprising of 1953 and the Berlin Food Program

Berlin again became the center of world attention in 1953. Shortly after Stalin’s death in March of that year, internal problems began mounting for the East German regime of Walter Ulbricht and the SED. Since the previous summer, Ulbricht had been following a policy of Sovietization within the German Democratic Republic (GDR). For the most part, the specific measures of this policy were neither popular nor terribly effective. In the spring of 1953, the sustained focus on heavy industry and the program of agricultural collectivization began to take its toll in the form of severe food shortages, and East Germans were fleeing westward in droves. On June 11, the SED announced the “New Course,” which contained several liberal policy revisions meant to take some of the pressure off of the regime and appease the restless populace. Instead, many East Germans viewed the measures as acts of desperation and lost further confidence in the party. The workers were especially alienated, since the new policy left deeply unpopular production quotas in force.

The Eisenhower administration was far more worried about the effects of the deepening crisis on its European agenda than it was excited about the prospect of the collapse of the GDR, which it deemed unlikely. American policy-makers were particularly concerned about the Soviet “peace offensive,” which the new Soviet leadership was pushing and which could lead to renewed four-power talks on the status

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15 The political division of Germany became official with the founding of the Federal Republic of German (FRG, or West Germany) on September 7, 1949 and the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) on October 7, 1949.
16 Stalin had died on March 5, 1943.
of German reunification. This Soviet initiative, if left unchecked, would bode ill for important American concerns such as the ratification of the European Defense Community (EDC) and the rearmament of the FRG. It could also threaten the reelection chances of America’s staunch ally Konrad Adenauer, the West German chancellor.

The situation in the GDR came to a head on June 16, 1953 when construction workers in East Berlin held a demonstration against mandated work norms and called for a general strike. The following day, on June 17, they got their wish, and anti-SED protests, many of them violent, broke out all over East Germany, with East Berlin as the epicenter. The SMA declared martial law in East Berlin the same day and began to put down the insurrection with force. The use of overwhelming force on June 17 immediately quelled the unrest in East Berlin, though sporadic protests occurred throughout the GDR in the following weeks. Very quickly, the propaganda apparatus of the GDR began to blame American provocations for the uprising. The broadcasts of the Radio in the American Sector (RIAS), in particular, were viewed as contributing to the spread of the unrest. RIAS was operated by the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany (HICOG), and a majority of East Germans tuned in regularly. At the outbreak of the uprising and throughout its duration, RIAS broadcast frequent updates on the course of events. However, its staff was, for the most part, reluctant to overtly propagandize on behalf of the protesters. This policy reflected the cautious approach of the West Berlin Commandants, who confined themselves to issuing a statement denying Western Allied involvement in instigating the uprising and denouncing the Soviet military response. East German expectations of American support were high, and pressure on the Eisenhower Administration to act was growing by the day. By the end of June, American policy-
makers settled on a strategy that was meant to steal the initiative from the Soviets on the issue of reunification and peace by calling for a four-power foreign ministers’ meeting to be held that fall. In addition, several psychological warfare operations were adopted to undermine Soviet influence in the GDR and foster small-scale resistance to the Ulbricht regime. The most important of these operations was a program to deliver food aid to East Germans through West Berlin. In order to maximize the propaganda effect of the Berlin food program, Eisenhower wrote a note to the Soviets, which was also given to the press, offering $15 million in food aid for the GDR. American officials knew that the Soviets would reject the offer and planned to go through with the program in any case.

Distribution centers in West Berlin began giving out the “Eisenhower packages,” as the food parcels were known, on July 27, and the program was an immediate success. By the time the second phase ended on October 3, East Berliners, as well as GDR citizens who had taken trains in from the countryside, had collected more than 5.5 million aid packages. Ernst Reuter, the popular Lord Mayor of West Berlin, described the success of the food program as “a continuation of 17 June by other means” (quoted in Ostermann 34).

The program was eventually halted for various reasons. From the start, there had been disagreement among the Western Allies about the overall direction of policy toward the Soviets, and many feared that the program could backfire if East Germans began to perceive it as merely a propaganda tool. In addition, the Soviets had begun to seize food packages from recipients and to impede the travel of East Germans to Berlin. At the same time, Soviet aid to East Germany and shifting GDR policy were beginning to improve the economic outlook in East Germany. These factors contributed to a marked decline in
food package distribution throughout September. In the end, the American-sponsored Berlin food program was successful in stealing the Soviets’ momentum on the peace initiative and bolstering Adenauer in the west. However, as Ostermann demonstrates, it did little to affect the power of the Soviets within their sphere of influence. For this study, the most important consequence of the uprising and the food program was the refocusing of American attention on Berlin as a symbol of the Cold War.

The Berlin Crisis: 1958-1962

Berlin once again became the focus of Cold War hostilities in the fall of 1958. The Soviet Union had officially recognized the GDR as a sovereign state in 1954, and, in response, the United States affirmed that it would protect West Berlin under NATO’s nuclear umbrella (Coleman 32). However, such protection did not stop Ulbricht from employing increasingly hostile rhetoric against Western Allied presence in the city, boasting that the GDR stood ready to “neutralize” West Berlin. He was eager for a solution to the problem of refugee flight through the city, which had accounted for the loss of an estimated four million inhabitants from his territory since the end of the war (Smyser 138). Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev delivered a speech in Moscow on November 10 backing up Ulbricht’s threat in the strongest terms. He claimed that the Allies had broken the Potsdam Agreement to such an extent that the only legitimate part remaining was the occupation regime in Berlin, and it was time to do away with it. He threatened to do just that by relinquishing Soviet commitments in Berlin to the GDR, which would place the Western Allied presence in Berlin in peril. He followed up this threat with a formal diplomatic note to the West that contained an ultimatum – within six months, the four powers must sign a peace treaty recognizing the division of Germany.
and vacate Berlin, making it a “free city.” Krushchev was calling for Berlin to become demilitarized under United Nations auspices, but American officials thought that this arrangement would give far too much leverage to the GDR, leaving West Berlin “exposed to the arbitrary action of the Communist regime” (Sowden 223).

The prevailing view among US policy-makers at the time was that “West Berlin was not militarily defensible in any normal way… so the freedom of the city depended on America’s ultimate willingness to escalate up to the level of general nuclear war” (Trachtenberg 257). The U.S. still enjoyed a clear nuclear advantage over the Soviets, and few thought that Krushchev was ready to go to war over Berlin, despite his fiery rhetoric. In December, the U.S., France and Great Britain issued their replies to Krushchev’s demands, later backed up by the rest of NATO. They reaffirmed that their rights in Berlin were guaranteed by the wartime EAC agreements of September 12, 1944 and May 1, 1945, and that Western occupation of Berlin would continue until a peace treaty with a reunified Germany could be signed. A four-power foreign minister conference was convened in May 1959 to iron out East-West differences on the Berlin question, but no agreement was reached. Meanwhile, Krushchev’s six-month ultimatum had expired without any action. He even came to the United States in September for talks with Eisenhower at Camp David, where he “assured Eisenhower that the Soviets would not take unilateral action and retracted any time limit associated with a German settlement” (Schake 29). The two leaders agreed to hold a four-power summit to once again take up the twin issues of Germany and Berlin, and this was held in May 1960 in

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17 An English translation of the Soviet note of November 27 can be found in *Department of State Bulletin* 40 1958, pp. 81-89.
18 For the full text of the US reply, see *Department of State Bulletin* 40 1958, pp. 79-81.
Paris. However, the summit ended before it really began when the Soviets shot down an American U-2 spy plane over Soviet territory, and Krushchev walked out of the summit in protest.

Kennedy became President in January 1961, and he took a strong interest in the Berlin question. By the end of May, his administration had developed “a negotiating policy of holding onto access rights to Berlin coupled with a willingness to acknowledge the long-term division of Germany as the basis for an agreement with the Soviet Union” (31-32). However, the Vienna summit held in June between Krushchev and Kennedy did not go as planned, and the Soviet leader gave yet another ultimatum with the same basic components as the first: the four powers must conclude a peace treaty with the two German states within six months, or the Soviet Union would make a separate peace with the GDR, rendering Western Allied presence in Berlin untenable. Kennedy answered on July 25 with a speech outlining the “three essentials” of his Berlin policy: the freedom of West Berlin; Allied rights in the city; and air and land access to the city through the Soviet zone (Smyser 157).

Meanwhile, refugee flight from the GDR through West Berlin had worsened considerably, to the tune of 30,000 in the month of July 1961 alone, and Ulbricht was clamoring for a resolution to the problem (Sowden 226). Finally, with no four-power resolution in sight, Krushchev assented to Ulbricht’s wish for a wall around West Berlin to stanch the refugee flow. East German police and military began erecting a barbed wire barrier on August 13 to test the Allied reaction, and a few days later, in the absence of Allied retaliation, they began work on a more permanent structure. Ulbricht had his wall,
and the division of Berlin, and of Germany, had a tangible symbol that would endure for thirty-eight more years.

Kennedy was not entirely displeased with this outcome. In an oft-quoted line, he told an assistant that the wall was “not a very nice solution but…a hell of a lot better than a war” (quoted in Smyser 161). American policy-makers hoped that since Ulbricht had his solution to the refugee crisis, the Berlin problem could now be put to rest. It quickly became clear, however, that the Western Allies could not sit back and do nothing, for public opinion in the U.S., in the FRG, and most importantly in West Berlin was shifting rapidly and clearly against the do-nothing approach. To reassure the West, Kennedy dispatched Vice President Lyndon Johnson for an official visit to West Berlin on August 20. Accompanying him was General Lucius Clay, an exceedingly popular figure among Berliners for his role in the Berlin Airlift. A sizable US battle group from the US occupation zone met the two American representatives in West Berlin to further emphasize the American commitment to the city.

Clay returned to West Berlin in September to act as the president’s personal representative. He immediately adopted an aggressive stance to head off what he saw as East German designs to neutralize West Berlin. A notable example of his official actions was a helicopter flight to the small town of Steinstücken, just outside of Berlin but within the American sector, to personally see to the rescue of a refugee who had been cornered by the East German border guards (Smyser 169-70).

By far the most dramatic display of Clay’s determination came in response to East German harassment of American military personnel trying to cross into East Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie, the only East-West crossing for foreigners allowed by the GDR in
the middle of Berlin at Friedrichstrasse (the others were on the outskirts of Berlin heading west). In late October, Ulbricht had begun restricting Western Allied rights by requiring identification at the checkpoints to East Berlin of anyone who was not in military uniform. Prior to this, western military personnel in civilian dress but in official vehicles were waved through. On October 25, Clay decided to test East German resolve by sending an official car with two soldiers in civilian dress to Checkpoint Charlie. When East German border guards would not allow them through, Clay ordered ten American tanks to roll up to the checkpoint, and the two American soldiers were escorted through by uniformed guards. The next day, a similar confrontation occurred, but this time the Soviets brought up tanks of their own, creating the spectacle of a head-to-head standoff at the checkpoint. However, Clay was pleased by the Soviet countermove, issuing “a press release greeting the arrival of the Soviet tanks as a sign that the Soviets had finally assumed their responsibilities and had shown that they and not the East Germans were really in charge in East Berlin” (Smyser 175). The confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie marked the beginning of a period of stabilization in the struggle over Berlin.

From the perspective of many in the Kennedy administration, the final incident in the Berlin crisis, ongoing since 1958, did not occur in Berlin at all. On October 22, 1962, Kennedy made public American intelligence showing the deployment of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. Although the Soviets insisted that the missiles were defensive in nature, meant to protect the fledgling communist regime of Fidel Castro, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and other American policy-makers saw the deployment, at least in part, as a Soviet ploy to gain leverage on the Berlin situation. They were convinced that American quiescence would almost certainly lead to Soviet aggression in Berlin (Smyser 187). By
any measure, the eventual Soviet withdrawal of the missiles from Cuba was a symbolic victory for the United States. Whatever the actual connection with Berlin had been, if any, the Soviets issued no further ultimatums to the West, and both sides seemed to accept the status quo. With Kennedy’s visit to Berlin the following June, and his famous “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech, he succeeded in cementing the American connection with and commitment to West Berlin in the eyes of the West.

This chapter has sought to summarize the major events involving Berlin, and the city’s role in the Cold War up to 1963. As an introduction to these events, it was also necessary to explain the wartime origins of the Berlin dilemma. In the next chapter, we will see how these events were depicted in official and unofficial American discourse.
CHAPTER 2
AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS OF COLD WAR BERLIN

What is at stake in the firm maintenance of Western garrisons in a free West Berlin is nothing short of the meaning and integrity of the defensive alliance of free peoples. To give up… this exposed outpost of liberty, to accept some compromise of what is already a compromise situation would destroy all faith in the West’s will and power to offer effective resistance to Communist aggression.

- William Henry Chamberlin

The above epigraph contains some of the key elements of American Cold War discourse as it applied to Berlin during the period from the Berlin airlift in 1948-49 to President Kennedy’s “Ich bin ein Berliner” in 1963: the representation of West Berlin as “free”; the notion that the prestige, and even the very survival, of the West was somehow at stake in the maintenance of West Berlin; the threat of Communist “aggression”; and the idea of West Berlin as an “outpost of liberty.” This chapter will look at various official and media representations of Berlin during the height of the Cold War. Representations of Berliners themselves, of the city as a showcase, and of the stakes of the Berlin problem will be highlighted.

I will introduce the chapter by covering three documents that in many ways defined the parameters within which the city of Berlin, its population, and events

19 Quoted in “Berlin Remains” 10.
surrounding it were articulated during the decade and a half in question. The first is George F. Kennan’s “long telegram,” as it came to be known, dated February 22, 1946. At that time, Kennan was serving as chargé d’affaires in the Moscow embassy. The State Department had requested his take on the general direction of Soviet foreign policy, and Kennan responded with a strongly worded assessment that painted the Soviet leadership as insecure, paranoid, duplicitous and “impervious to [the] logic of reason” (FRUS 1946 707). The telegram was circulated widely within the American government, and it did much to structure the debate on Soviet policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (Costigliola 1335-37). According to Kennan, the Soviet regime was analogous to past Russian despots in its pursuit of security and power. However, he argued, the Soviets could rely on Marxist ideology to provide a “fig leaf” for this pursuit, which made it “more dangerous and insidious” to the outside world (FRUS 1946 700). He again evoked tsarist Russia when speaking of the Soviet police apparatus, calling the Soviet state “a police regime par excellence, reared in the dim half world of Tsarist police intrigue, accustomed to think primarily in terms of police power.” The Soviet Union, he stated, represented a “political force committed fanatically to the belief that with [the] US there can be no permanent modus vivendi, that it is desirable and necessary that the internal harmony of our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power is to be secure.” He insisted that the Soviets would respond to force, and he therefore recommended that the U.S. make clear its readiness to use it wherever and whenever Soviet power threatened, a recommendation that would have particular relevance to the future Berlin crises.
In a 1997 article in the *Journal of American History*, Frank Costigliola offers a novel reading of the long telegram. He argues, convincingly, that Kennan utilized metaphors of pathology and gender as a “rhetorical strategy for demonizing the leadership of the Soviet Union” in an effort to influence American domestic and foreign policy, and he offers numerous examples from the long telegram (Costigliola 1310). For instance, Costigliola points out the many ways in which Kennan depicted Soviet decision-makers as mentally ill (1310). He also highlights language from the telegram that seeks to emasculate those Americans who sought cooperation with the Soviets (1331). In his view, Kennan’s language represented the Soviet regime as “monstrously masculine,” constantly threatening “penetration” of the West (1333). He accurately describes the telegram as “an emotional sermon that helped shape the meaning of the Cold War (1331).

Kennan went on to produce an even more widely read and influential article published in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947. The article was entitled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” Although he published it anonymously (it is often referred to as the “X” article, after Kennan’s published pseudonym), it quickly became known that Kennan was the author. He had recently become the head of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff20, and his authorship lent the article considerable credibility. Most famous for introducing the concept of “containment,” the article reiterated many of the themes of Kennan’s long telegram. He once again portrayed the Soviet regime as irrational and paranoid, and committed to expanding its power and influence and to destroying the capitalist West. The “pattern of Soviet power,” he explained, was “the pursuit of

20 Kennan had actually penned the article just prior to attaining this position (Etzold 84).
unlimited authority domestically, accompanied by the cultivation of the semi-myth of implacable foreign hostility” (571). Though using slightly different language, he restated the notion that the Soviet threat could be “contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points” (“Sources” 576). Kennan also employed racialized language that served to reinforce Soviet otherness. For example, he claimed that the Bolsheviks had come from a “Russian-Asiatic world,” and at one point in the text, he seemed to conflate the Russian and “oriental” minds (568, 574). Such radical otherness, together with “the secretiveness, the lack of frankness, the duplicity, the wary suspiciousness, and the basic unfriendliness of purpose” (572) that the Soviets exhibited, would make them very difficult to deal with, he argued.

An important point that Kennan stressed in both the long telegram and the “X” article was the idea that the United States, in meeting the Soviet challenge, must be completely secure in its own identity, and display unity of purpose. He insisted that “exhibitions of indecision, disunity and internal disintegration within this country have an exhilarating effect on the whole Communist movement” (581). In the long telegram, he had made the same point through metaphor, comparing communism to a “malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue” (FRUS 1946 708). He went further in the “X” article, however, depicting the nascent Cold War as “in essence a test of the over-all worth of the United States as a nation” (“Sources” 582). This idea, of the struggle with the Soviets as a “test” of the United States, became a prevalent trope in American Cold War discourse. Kennan’s sustained emphasis on internal unity suggests that, for him, the
struggle for a coherent American identity was intimately bound up with the fight against world communism.

Unlike the Kennan documents discussed above, NSC 68 was an official statement of US national security policy, submitted to President Truman on April 7, 1950 and approved by him that September (Etzold 383-84). As such, its contents were not public knowledge, but it is significant as the “definitive statement of American national security policy” during the height of the Cold War (385). A joint State and Defense department study group drafted NSC 68. Paul Nitze, who headed the group, had succeeded George Kennan as head of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department. The document’s intellectual debt to Kennan is clear; it is essentially an elaboration of the containment policy. For instance, NSC 68 echoed Kennan’s insistence that the Soviet threat must be met wherever it arises, for “a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere” (FRUS 1950 240). The report also called the Soviet regime the “inheritor of Russian imperialism,” rhetorically linking it to Russia’s tsarist past, as Kennan had done (246). However, NSC 68 portrayed the Cold War in even starker terms than Kennan’s, and its recommendations were correspondingly more extreme. According to the report, the issues at stake in the Cold War were no less than “the fulfillment or destruction not only of this Republic but of civilization itself,” for the Soviets were bent on world domination (238). In response to this threat, it called for a “substantial and rapid building up of strength,” which included a significant increase in military expenditure (283).

The key binary opposition at work in the text of NSC 68 is that between freedom and slavery. The United States, because of its system of values, stands as the primary exemplar of freedom, it stated. The report explained the antipathy of the Soviets towards
the United States in these terms, stating that the “existence and persistence of the idea of freedom is a permanent and continuous threat to the foundation of the slave society” (240). Indeed, the Soviet Union could only be truly defeated, it claimed, by “the timely and persistent demonstration of the superiority of the idea of freedom,” not by military might alone, though that too was important (243).

These themes, the enhancement and the demonstration of American values and military and economic strength, were stressed many times in both the Kennan documents and in NSC-68. In the “Objectives” section of NSC-68, the top priority was to “make ourselves strong, both in the way in which we affirm our values in the conduct of our national life, and in the development of our military and economic strength” (241). Indeed, values were as essential to the overall strategy as the material components of the fight against Communism, and NSC-68 insisted that America was strong in this regard: “The vast majority of Americans are confident that the system of values which animates our society – the principles of freedom, tolerance, the importance of the individual and the supremacy of reason over will – are valid and more vital than the ideology” that drove the Soviet system (253-54). American society, it added, was “more cohesive.” As a result of these differences, NSC-68 concluded that the American “system of values [could] perhaps become a powerful appeal to millions” in the Communist world, and that these values represented “a great potential force in our international relations” (254). “The only sure victory,” it claimed, “lies in the… steady development of the moral and material strength of the free world and its projection into the Soviet world in such a way as to bring about an internal change in the Soviet system” (291). This general strategy, of “projecting” American values along with American military and economic strength,
found a clear instantiation in discursive representations of the East-West struggle over Berlin. So, too, did other prominent themes from these foundational documents – the brutality and implacability of the Soviet regime, binary oppositions between freedom and slavery, the precariousness of freedom, and so forth. I now turn to specific examples of these representations centering on what became the “capital of the Cold War” (McCormick “Frontier” 11).

By 1948, although memories of the Second World War were still fresh in the minds of Americans, along with deeply held negative views about Germany and its citizenry, the portrayal of Germans, in particular those of the western occupation zones, had begun to change dramatically. West Germans were now often portrayed sympathetically, as allies in the new Cold War against the Soviet Union. As East-West tensions rose during the first half of 1948, such depictions became common. As one *New York Times* article in April 1948 read, “Conquered and conquerors are beginning to feel that they are on the same side in the struggle between East and West” (Daniell SM7). Berliners in particular were vaunted as a source of inspiration for the West. General Lucius Clay, in a tribute to Berliners who had taken part in an anti-communist demonstration in the British sector to mark the anniversary of the 1848 revolution in March 1948, remarked that “strong forces in Germany are ready to fight and even die for freedom and democracy… We can derive encouragement from the courage of those Germans” (“Clay” 33). Once the Soviet blockade was in place and the airlift had begun, pronouncements about the courage of West Berliners in the face of the blockade became widespread. One typical State Department release in the midst of the blockade stated that
the “Berlin population has... demonstrated a type of civic courage which has won for it the admiration of the democratic peoples of the world” (“Sunshine”). Far from being derided as Nazis, the population of West Berlin had become a symbol for Western resistance in the face of Soviet aggression. This earned West Berliners an official welcome by U.S. Berlin Commandant Colonel Frank Howley to “a place in the free world” – the people of West Berlin were now on “our” side (“Sunshine”).

Berlin once again became a site of symbolic resistance to the Soviets in 1953. This time, however, the focus was on East Berliners and their revolt of June 17, 1953. Many American news outlets portrayed the events in a very optimistic light, even though the workers’ rebellion was quickly put down by Soviet tanks. An article in Time magazine quoted an East Berliner who had been wounded that day: “When they [the Soviets] leave, we will fight again until they change the government” (“Rebellion”). The same article went on to state that until the events of June 17, “the world had come increasingly to believe that inside a modern mechanized tyranny, it is hopeless to resist... Now hope was possible.” Later, when the uprising gave way to the American-sponsored food distribution program, the participation of the East Berliners was turned into yet another act of defiance. An article in Time magazine reported that what “began as a hunger parade had grown into a pilgrimage of protest” in which “more than 10% of the whole Soviet zone population... defied or evaded their government and risked arrest for a ten-pound package of lard, dried beans, flour and canned milk” (“Pilgrimage,” “Two”). Themes of friendship, democracy, and defiance in the face of Soviet aggression were prevalent in representations of Berliners during the height of the Cold War, and they were
One of the most prominent themes in American discourse concerning Berlin during the height of the Cold War was that of the city as a showcase. Berlin was represented variously as a showcase for Western values, for American technological and military superiority, and for the success of free enterprise. Berlin was also a nexus of negative representations of Soviets and East Germans. In this section, I will discuss how Berlin became a focal point for representations of certain allegedly western values such as humanitarianism and freedom. I will also show how the airlift was depicted as a triumph of American technological superiority, and the ways in which Berlin came to represent a showcase of Western prosperity. Finally, I will look at how Berlin served as backdrop for representations of the Soviets and East Germans in American discourse.

During the airlift and the Berlin Food Program, western humanitarianism was on prominent display. News stories and official pronouncements portrayed Berliners as “helpless” and in desperate need of American assistance (“Fighter”), which allowed American officials and media to stress the humanitarian nature of the western efforts to relieve the hapless Berliners. The U.S. operation during the airlift, for example, was known as “Operation Vittles,” a name that reminded the American public that they were providing sustenance for the population of West Berlin. The cost of the operation was enormous, but Americans were constantly told that it was worth it. In the midst of the airlift, General Clay, its primary architect, admitted the high monetary cost, but told the American people that “in terms of prestige, measured in the courage which it has brought
to millions of people who desire freedom… its cost is insignificant” (“Light”). Besides, as one New York Times op-ed put it, “in an emergency this country [doesn’t] stop to ask what is the cost. We just ask, what’s the need?” (“Operation Vittles” E6). Stressing the symbolic significance of the airlift, Eisenberg notes that “the arrival and departure of the American Skymasters carrying supplies to a beleaguered citizenry offered an unbeatable display of American generosity” (427). Well after the airlift was over, Americans and Berliners continued to commemorate it. Looking back at the airlift in 1959, an article about Berlin reminded readers how “Berliners [had] acquired new drive and hope from partnership” with the U.S. (“Islanders”). Thus, Americans could be proud that, through their goodwill and generosity, they were enabling the heroism of brave but needy Berliners.

American humanitarianism was once again the focus of an American media frenzy surrounding the Berlin Food Program in 1953. This time, East Berliners were the helpless victims in need of Western aid. So desperate had the situation become in the “Communist paradise” of East Germany that “hungry, hurrying thousands, carrying empty bottles and string bags, streamed into West Berlin to buy a few cupfuls of milk and a handful of cherries” when the mayor of the West Berlin district of Kreuzberg made inexpensive food stores available to East Berliners (“Hogs and Cherries”). The first day for the free distribution of the American “Eisenhower parcels” in West Berlin made front page news in most major newspapers. “The tide of hungry humanity which flowed through the Iron Curtain” was estimated at between 100,000 and 120,000 (“East” 1). A writer for Time magazine described the ensuing rush: “Like locusts descending on a desert oasis, the hungry people of Communist Germany poured into West Berlin”
(“Eisenhower”). News stories like these left readers with a clear sense that the communist regime in East Germany had failed to provide adequately for its citizens. The American food aid, on the other hand, was said to come from “the abundant surplus stocks of the United States,” demonstrating American economic prosperity in sharp contrast to the poverty of the East (“Bid” 1). Although American planners had conceived the program as a propaganda operation21, official communiqués emphasized the sincerity of the gesture. For example, the diplomatic note offering aid to the Soviets announced that the “United States has traditionally sought to alleviate suffering, starvation and disease wherever it might be found” (quoted in “Notes” 5). Eisenhower himself stressed that the American food offer was “motivated solely by humanitarian impulses” (quoted in United 3). The American press, for its part, greeted the U.S. aid as an “undeniably brilliant and sincere maneuver” (“Will” 16). Americans were once again selflessly coming to the aid of Berliners, according to both the media and the American government.

In stark contrast to such glowing coverage, the popular press viewed the Soviet offer of aid to the East Germans in the most cynical light. One typical reaction called the Soviet offer “the latest bid for the loyalty of the Soviet zone populace” (“Soviet” 1). Because the Soviets were offering their aid in return for East German manufactured goods, the comparison with free American aid came easily. In a press conference, Eisenhower highlighted the difference, emphasizing that the U.S. “asked no remuneration, no return, no exchange of goods.” He drove home the point, adding that “[w]e just put it there for humanitarian purposes” (DDE 1953 501). American officials made even more of the Soviet ban on rail travel to Berlin, an effort to prevent residents of

21 The program was drawn up and approved by the Psychological Strategy Board (Ostermann 25).
their zone from receiving American aid. US High Commissioner for Germany James B. Conant, on a visit to Berlin, stated that he could “think of no more flagrant example of the callous disregard by the Communists of the welfare of the people of their zone than this deliberate effort to prevent hungry people from getting the food they need” (quoted in Sullivan 1). An editorialist in the *Washington Post* used even harsher terms, stating that “the Communists have been obliged to throw off their humanitarian mask and to expose themselves to the workers of Europe not as deliverers but as terroristic wardens of the ‘prisoners of starvation’” (“Prisoners” 10). Such unflattering representations of Soviet motivations made the American aid effort stand out even more as “an example of the strength and the humanity of the free world” (“Bid” 1).

Berlin also became a nexus for representations of another Western value, one that played a central role in American Cold War discourse: the Western notion of freedom. “The idea of freedom is the most contagious idea in history, more contagious than the idea of submission to authority,” according to NSC-68 (FRUS 1950 239). American policy-makers sought to exploit this perceived advantage, and Berlin offered the perfect showcase for it, since the Western and Soviet systems were in immediate juxtaposition. It is not at all difficult to find references to “freedom” in American representations of Berlin, since most official utterances concerning West Berlin, in particular, contain some form of the word, usually in abundance. The city was frequently referred to as an “outpost” or “frontier” of freedom. There is, however, one official American effort to link Berlin to the American idea of freedom that stands out. I refer here to the “Crusade for Freedom,” which took place in September and October of 1950. The Crusade grew out of the National Committee for a Free Europe. It was chaired by General Lucius Clay, the
hero of the airlift, and it was secretly funded by the CIA. The Crusade was ostensibly a
cfund-raiser for Radio Free Europe, though it had significant domestic propaganda value
in addition to the $1.3 million it eventually raised (Story 45). In a nationally broadcast
Labor Day speech in 1950, General Eisenhower introduced the Crusade for Freedom. He
told the American public that Soviet propaganda was tarnishing America’s reputation
abroad by spreading lies about America’s motivations and intentions. In his speech, as
was so often the case in American discourse, freedom was defined by depicting its
opposite. Eisenhower highlighted the worst excesses of the Soviet system such as
arbitrary arrests, convictions and executions, and “slave camps.” Radio Free Europe, he
said, would combat Soviet propaganda by “fight[ing] the big lie with the big truth,” and it
would demonstrate to those behind the Iron Curtain the value of freedom (Story 12).

The official Crusade began in New York, where the Freedom Bell arrived on
September 6, 1950 and was paraded in front of City Hall two days later. The bell
subsequently passed through the Midwest and the plains states to San Francisco, then
through the Southwest and South and up the eastern seaboard, stopping in twenty-six
cities along the way before being shipped off to West Berlin. The Crusade garnered a
great deal of media attention and had high profile endorsements. In fact, in an article
examining the rhetorical origins of the Crusade, Martin Medhurst notes that the “list of
those publicly endorsing and participating in the 1950 Crusade… reads like a Who's Who
of business, industry, religion, education, science, entertainment, law, and government”
(660).

The stated purposes of the Crusade were: “1) To reaffirm, strengthen, and re-
invigorate the concept of freedom throughout the democratic world;” and “2) To enlist
and carry the support and sympathy of millions of Americans to European peoples languishing under the heels of Communism” (Story 7). The first goal speaks directly to the importance of shoring up American values, a notion found in the Kennan documents and NSC-68. To this end, Americans were invited to sign “Freedom Scrolls” as part of the crusade. These scrolls carried a “Declaration of Freedom,” which referred to the “sacredness and dignity of the individual,” and declared that the right to freedom was derived from God (Story 45). In the end, over sixteen million Americans signed these scrolls, thereby linking themselves symbolically to Berlin, where their names rested in the “Freedom Shrine” along with the bell. The bell itself was said to represent “American Freedom versus Iron Curtain Fear and Oppression” (Story 42).

When the Freedom Bell was finally transferred to Berlin, a flurry of media coverage followed. The Washington Post described the crossing of the East German border in strongly sexualized language: “The world freedom bell penetrated the Iron Curtain tonight under the tightest security blackout since the Russian blockade of Berlin” (“Freedom” 3). The radio waves of Radio Free Europe, of course, also “penetrated” the Soviet sphere. General Clay, in his dedication speech at the installation of the Freedom Bell in West Berlin’s City Hall in Schöneberg, explained that Berlin had been chosen as the site for the bell “because this is the only free place behind the Iron Curtain” (Williams 1). He called the bell’s transfer to Berlin a “spiritual Air Lift,” and claimed that the bell would “stand with its millions of signatures as a challenge to antidemocratic forces throughout the East” (Story 36, “Freedom Airlift” 1). An editorialist in the Christian Science Monitor described the link between the Crusade and Berlin metaphorically: “The concept of freedom – of individual dignity and responsibility under God – may be
attacked from any of numerous directions, just as, conversely, the sound of the Freedom Bell floats east, west, south, and north from embattled Berlin” (“To Ring” 20). A front page article in the New York Times claimed that the bell “echoed the vigorous sounds of Western democracy” (Middleton 1). Another article from the Washington Post described the ceremony in almost religious terms: “When he [Clay] touched the electric switch that set the bell ringing for the first time, women wept and men bared their heads in awed silence” (“Berlin” 15). Indeed, Clay had called the crowd to a silent prayer, “that this world, under God, shall be free” (Story 36). The numerous religious references not only served as familiar and comforting referents for American readers, but also underscored the distinction between American beliefs and values and “Godless” Communism.

The Freedom Bell was not forgotten after its installation in West Berlin. It continued to crop up in American official discourse. For instance, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, on his visit to Berlin during the Berlin Wall crisis eleven years after the Crusade, again emphasized the bell’s symbolism, claiming that it “tie[d] the people of Berlin and the American people together just as the history of the last 16 years” (quoted in U.S. Dept. 1961 393). Indeed, the Freedom Bell transformed the Schöneberg City Hall into a “transnational commemorative site” (Daum 45). Through the Crusade for Freedom and its symbolic offspring, the Freedom Bell, the organizers of the Crusade sought to explicitly link West Berlin with the Western value of freedom in the public’s imagination. In this way, the Crusade reinforced representations of West Berlin as a showcase for Western values, and as a rallying point in the worldwide fight against Communism.
Berlin also became a showcase for America’s alleged technological and military superiority over the Soviet Union, particularly during the airlift. Even though the Soviets had closed off all the land routes into Berlin, this was not enough to foil the Americans, or so the prevailing media narrative went. One article depicted it as “a kind of twentieth century miracle play representing both the West’s humanitarian purposes and its military strength (“Word”). Indeed, the tone of much of the coverage of the airlift was one of awe. An article tellingly entitled “Strength of the West” offers one example: “Few would have believed, a month ago, that 2.5 million people could be fed by air. If the U.S. and Britain, now at a low peacetime level, could turn that trick with a scratch force, what could they do if mobilized for war?” This article also stressed the military implications of the airlift, suggesting that airborne troops supplied by air would be particularly important in any future conflict, and that the successful demonstration of air supply tactics in the airlift “perceptibly shortened the shadow of the Red Army” (“Strength”). In general, the American media praised the airlift as a “triumph of organization and improvisation,” a “well organized, efficient and precisely timed operation” that made clear the superiority of America’s military know-how (“Precision,” “Light”). In this way, American Cold War discourse included Berlin as a showcase for the technological and military prowess of the United States.

West Berlin also became a showcase for the fruits of free enterprise. The communists had been losing ground in Germany, Americans were told, in large part due to the success of the western sectors of Germany and Berlin at rebuilding their economy, which supposedly demonstrated the superiority of capitalism and undermined the appeal of communism. West Germany, as a whole, was often hailed as a “triumph for… free
enterprise.” The architect of this triumph, according to one *Time* magazine article, was Ludwig Erhard, a committed free marketeer who believed that “whatever troubles lie ahead can be straightened out by hard work under the incentive of freedom” (“Success”). Indeed, the link between political freedom and free enterprise remains a familiar trope in American discourse, and this was especially the case when it came to Berlin during the Cold War. By the time of the second Berlin crisis in 1958, the West German economy, and West Berlin along with it, had pulled far ahead of the East, and American officials and news outlets stressed the point again and again. One article noted the change that had occurred since the airlift: “West Berlin is a far more prosperous and populous community than the naked city that so desperately withstood Stalin’s 1948-49 blockade. Business is booming, the hammering sounds of construction fill the air, [and] the shell of a new Hilton Hotel is rising near the sleek shops of the Kurfürstendamm” (“Pressure”). Such representations of West Berlin’s bustling economic activity were widespread. In Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’s words, West Berlin had become “an inspiring demonstration… of what free men can do” (quoted in “Dulles”). It was a “showcase of prosperous freedom” and a “glowing symbol” of “capitalist prosperity,” a “visible example of freedom in action” (“Position,” “What,” “Islanders”). American policymakers were well aware of West Berlin’s propaganda value as a showcase of capitalism. The city itself was not economically self-sustaining, and its material viability was heavily dependent on aid from both the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States. This fact was usually downplayed, however, in favor of representations of West Berlin as a

22 Erhard served as the FRG’s first Minister of Economics under Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. He later served as chancellor himself from 1963-66. His economic policies are usually credited for West Germany’s *Wirtschaftswunder.*
showcase for West Germany’s *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). Indeed, West Berlin was productive, not in a strictly material sense, but as a nexus for discursive representations, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

Berlin also became a focal point for representations of the Soviets and East German communists. The former could be relied upon to supply the American media with stories of arbitrary brutality. The latter were more often than not portrayed as reluctant and half-hearted fellow travelers. Two stories from *Time* magazine offer examples of the way in which news outlets depicted Soviet methods and their consequences, with Berlin as backdrop. The first story, cheekily entitled “Red-Star-Cross’d Lovers,” tells the real-life Romeo-and-Juliet tale of Günther and Luise, two Berlin lovers who committed suicide because Günther was wanted by the Soviets for being anti-communist. The story implies that they chose a poetic death, rather than allow Günther to submit to the arbitrary will of the Soviets. “[T]he real tragedy in the story of Günther and Luise,” the article tells us, “is that the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen and Fünfeichen are operating again.” The article leads the reader to assume that the protagonist would have been sent to one of these camps had the Soviets caught him. The reader was left to imagine what horrors would have awaited Günther there. The second story involves a typical defection narrative, but with a Hollywood twist. Called “Boy Meets Freedom,” it tells the story of a Soviet soldier in Berlin posted as a sentry at the Soviet War Memorial, just inside the British sector. Although visitors to the memorial are forbidden after dark, he lets an elderly German couple pass. For this infraction, a Red Army lieutenant threatens him with execution. This threat is apparently
enough to convince the soldier to abandon his post and flee to the West. The twist comes when he stumbles onto the set of a movie being filmed in the nearby Tiergarten. The plot of the movie in question, *No Way Back*, concerns a young Soviet soldier in Berlin who flees to the West. The story is not just a humorous anecdote about life imitating art. It is also meant to reflect the arbitrary and ruthless nature of Soviet rule, from which so many were desperate to escape.

The American press derided East German communists, by and large, as “Communist lackeys of Russia” (“Opera”) whose enthusiasm for Communism was either forced or, quite often, entirely lacking. A *Time* magazine article covering the Berlin city government split during the blockade is tellingly entitled “Red Bankruptcy.” It describes a communist demonstration outside the city hall. According to the report, the “red mob,” far from being threatening, “resembled nothing bolder than a crowd at a railroad station waiting for a late train” (“Red”). Their leaders were also portrayed in a less than glowing light. For example, “Red” Mayor Friedrich Ebert, mayor in the Soviet sector of Berlin after the split in the city government, was described in one article as “a drunkard, a weakling and a turncoat,” as well as “plump” and “balding” (“Opera”). By way of comparison, the mayor of the western sectors, Ernst Reuter, was almost always shown in a positively heroic light. The press mocked the so-called “people’s government” in the Soviet sector relentlessly, as they would do with the GDR after its formation. The fact that Berlin served as an “escape hatch” for an ever-growing number of refugees from the East was also covered frequently by the American media, and was exploited for

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23 The film was released in Germany in 1953 as *Weg ohne Umkehr*. It won the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film in 1955.

24 Ebert’s father, also named Friedrich, was the first president of the Weimar Republic.
propaganda purposes by American officials. For example, numerous references can be found to East Germans “voting with their feet,” as Kennedy put it in his 1961 speech on the Berlin Crisis (JFK 1961).

The association of the Soviets and East Germans with the excesses of the Nazis was also a favorite trope in American Cold War discourse. The mention of the names of Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen in the story above about Günther and Luise is just one example of this analogy, since these Soviet prison camps had also been infamous Nazi concentration camps. More generally, whenever the Soviets or East Germans publicly exerted police power in Berlin, as they often did, American news coverage usually drew an analogy with Nazi tactics. Epithets such as “red Nazis” were common in media representations of these events. In an article-length study of the American conflation of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, Les Adler and Thomas Paterson write that “[t]his popular analogy was a potent and pervasive notion that significantly shaped American perception of world events in the cold war” (1046). Less frequently, comparisons were made to Tsarist Russia. For instance, one article, in describing the 1953 uprising in East Berlin, compared the use of Soviet power to put down the revolt to Tsar Nicholas II’s brutal quelling of the “Bloody Sunday” uprising in Petersburg in 190525 (“Rebellion”). Such historical associations had the effect of bolstering negative perceptions of the Soviets among Americans.

News coverage of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth) rally in Berlin in May 1950 exemplifies both the tendency to evoke Germany’s Nazi past in connection

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25 The reference to “Bloody Sunday” further suggests a hope on behalf of the writer that the East German revolt marked the beginning of a full-scale uprising, as “Bloody Sunday” had done for the 1905 revolution in Russia.
with the communists, and the American media’s penchant for downplaying communist zeal. The FDJ was a communist youth organization, “a near-perfect reincarnation of the Hitler Youth,” according to one reporter (“Kids”). The “Bereitschaften” (emergency units), a new element of the East German police force, were also on display during the rally. “Tough, disciplined, and far more menacing than the parading kids themselves, they were darkly reminiscent of Hitler's SS” claimed another article (“Police”). At the same time, other news stories portrayed the marching youngsters as hapless pawns under the thumb of their Soviet masters, who ran to West Berlin as soon as they could to “stare longingly” at the consumer paradise of the West26 (“Visitors”).

The above examples demonstrate the important role played by Berlin in American discourse during the height of the Cold War as a showcase for Western values, for American technological and military superiority, and for the success of free enterprise. In addition, it served as a lens that focused American attention on the Soviets and East Germans, and on their excesses and shortcomings. These representations were meaningful in shaping American Cold War discourse, as I will argue in the next chapter.

In order for the American investment in Berlin to be complete, the public had to understand the importance of the city in the larger Cold War struggle. To this end, the stakes of the Berlin problem were articulated again and again from the airlift to Kennedy’s Berlin speech. By far the most prominent theme concerning Berlin during this

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26 An international automobile show was held in West Berlin on the same weekend as the FDJ’s “March on Berlin.” Some news stories covering the march also included mention of the show, and told of youth from the FDJ ogling the cars, in disbelief that such things could actually be purchased in the West and weren’t just made “for export.” Notably, the show had been hastily organized to coincide with the communist youth demonstration (McCormick, “Frontier” 11).
period was the Munich analogy. It was active in both official discourse and popular media. For instance, in the first weeks of the blockade, Winston Churchill gave a widely reported speech, stating that “we should by now have learned that there is no safety in yielding to dictators, whether Nazi or Communist” (quoted in “Long”). With the memory of the Second World War still fresh, there could have been little doubt what he meant, though the article made it explicit: “Churchill, who had been right about one Munich, did not want another” (“Long”). Another article, a few months into the blockade, offers another example: “Berlin would not bring immediate war, but it would invite a further Russian advance in Germany … At some point along this road, the West would probably turn and stand its ground, as Neville Chamberlain turned and stood on the issue of the invasion of Poland” (“How”). This argument seemed to resonate with Americans. A Gallup poll respondent, when asked why he was in support of staying in Berlin during the blockade, called on the logic of the Munich analogy for his explanation, claiming that “[i]f we give in, then Russia will increase her demands” (Gallup, “Firm” 21). That this sentiment was widespread among the public during the blockade is hardly surprising. Carolyn Eisenberg, in describing American media coverage of the blockade, writes that “[i]n the newsreels and radio broadcasts, and across thousands of front pages around the United States, the West was redoing Munich, demonstrating that appeasement was obsolete and that the ambition of tyrants would no longer be whetted by the weakness of their adversaries” (436). Another scholar, writing on Eisenhower’s Berlin policy in 1953-54, also notes the importance of the so-called “salami” analogy for the American foreign policy elite: “It had long been recognized that the challenge was likely to come in the form of incremental political encroachments on Western rights and interests, or what
were otherwise known as ‘salami tactics’” (Coleman 27). This “salami” analogy worked alongside the Munich analogy to convince American policy-makers and the public that Berlin must be the line in the sand.

The “real issue,” as one *Time* article during the blockade reported, was “the long-range Russian effort to win control of Europe” (“Gentlemen”). This theme became widespread again during the second Berlin crisis, but with even more force since Cold War tensions had risen. The NATO Secretary General, for example, made headlines in December 1958 when he issued a statement that the West “cannot abandon the 2,500,000 people of West Berlin without preparing the way for surrender in Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, Belgium and all the way across Europe” (quoted in “When”). There is little doubt that policy-makers at the time believed such rhetoric. National Security Council minutes from May 1958, before the second Berlin Crisis, show Eisenhower stating that “if we did not respond… to a Soviet attack on Berlin, we would first lose the city itself and, shortly after, all of Western Europe” (quoted in Ninkovich 237).

Geostrategic considerations were only part of the story, however. American prestige was also involved. Contemporary discourse emphasized that the West, and the United States in particular, stood to lose credibility if they backed down over Berlin. Countless news articles leading up to and during the blockade stated clearly that the U.S. would lose face if they did not stand up to the Soviets. Even before the blockade began, New York Times editorialist Anne O’Hare McCormick stressed that “withdrawal from Berlin would now be regarded throughout Europe as a major defeat in the political war” (“Compass” 14). In 1958, after Krushchev’s threat to hand over Soviet rights in Germany to the East Germans, an article in the Christian Science Monitor echoed the same theme,
that the “loss of the Western-held portions of Berlin would be a hammer blow to the prestige of the pro-Western government of West Germany and to the West as a whole” (Sheldon 3).

After the blockade began, McCormick again wrote of Berlin, stating that the crisis was “a test of our [U.S.] strength and stamina” (“Line” 18). The idea of Berlin as a testing ground for U.S. resolve appeared often in American discourse over the next fifteen years, and it was directly linked to the perceived stakes of the Berlin problem. The airlift itself, for example, was depicted as a “dramatic demonstration of U.S. determination.” In the feature article in Time magazine’s first issue of 1949, naming President Truman “Man of the Year,” the Berlin airlift was called the “symbol of the year,” indicating for all the world that “the U.S. meant business” (“Fighter”). The stakes involved were summed up by President Kennedy in his speech on the Berlin crisis, broadcast nationally on July 25, 1961. He called West Berlin “the great testing place of Western courage and will, a focal point where our solemn commitments, stretching back over the years since 1945, and Soviet ambitions now meet in basic confrontation.” He further explained that “the fulfillment of our pledge to that city is essential to the morale and security of Western Germany, to the unity of Western Europe, and to the faith of the entire free world” (JFK 1961 534). Kennedy reinforced what had been clear throughout American foreign policy discourse since the Airlift - that West Berlin’s “freedom” was “not negotiable,” and that Berlin was the central front in the Cold War (537).

Berlin became more than just a testing ground for American resolve, however. As Kennedy stated to the American public, “The immediate threat is to West Berlin… But that isolated outpost is not an isolated problem.” He then proceeded to link the Berlin
crisis with events in Southeast Asia, and “wherever else the freedom of human beings is at stake” (533). Both official and popular discourse went a step further, linking the fate of Berlin specifically with that of the United States. A Time magazine article during the Berlin crisis of 1958 proclaimed that America “would defend West Berlin as if it were U.S. soil” (“Time”). Three years later, President Kennedy explained that “we cannot separate its [West Berlin’s] safety from our own” (JFK 1961 534). Upon his arrival in West Berlin on August 19, 1961, shortly after the initial construction of the wall, Vice President Johnson reiterated the American commitment to the city and, at the same time, rhetorically linked West Berlin with the U.S. by evoking the American national anthem. He stated that West Berlin would “continue to be the fortress of the free because it is the home of the brave” (U.S. Dept. 392). No clearer example of this tendency in American discourse exists than Kennedy’s statement of solidarity with West Berlin in his 1963 speech at the West Berlin City Hall. By proclaiming “Ich bin ein Berliner,” he sought to identify himself, and the American people whom he represented, with the fate of West Berlin and its residents.

Public opinion polls from the time show that the majority of the American public was convinced of the importance of Berlin. A Gallup poll taken during the Berlin blockade revealed 80% of voters in favor of staying in Berlin, even at the risk of war (Gallup “Firm” 21). Numbers were similarly high in December 1958, with 60% willing to risk war over Berlin. Only 8% of respondents felt the U.S. should withdraw (“Seven to One”). By late August 1961, after East Germans had sealed off West Berlin with the wall, 64% of American voters believed that West Berlin was worth fighting for. One month later, the number had grown to 70% (Gallup “Voters” E1). The Munich analogy, the
threat to American prestige, and the challenge to American resolve had all helped to convince the American public of the need to defend West Berlin at all costs.

News coverage and official speeches are not the only places where references to Berlin can be found. Two popular films of the period contain many of the same themes discussed above. *The Big Lift* (1950), for example, also used Berlin as a backdrop to feature American values. The film was directed by George Seaton, of *Miracle on 34th Street* fame, and starred Montgomery Clift as Sgt. Jimmy MacCullough and Paul Douglas as Sgt. Hank Kowalski, two American airmen taking part in the Berlin Airlift in 1948. Kowalski’s antipathy toward the Germans is evident from the beginning of the film, when he expresses disdain for the mission of “feed[ing] the krauts.” Kowalski is the less sympathetic of the two main characters, and he serves as a foil to the film’s true protagonist, MacCullough, in the latter’s attempts to understand and help the Berliners. Kowalski strikes up a relationship with Gerda, a resident of Berlin, whom he instructs throughout the film on the meaning of freedom and democracy, reflecting the pedagogical role that Americans assumed vis-à-vis the Germans after the war. As Gerda earnestly states, “We found out in Germany what was wrong, but to find out what is right is not so easy.” Kowalski is not at all articulate when it comes to this topic. His answers to Gerda’s repeated inquiries are often tortured or evasive. Tellingly, he is at his most coherent when he defines American values in opposition to those of the Soviet system. For example, Gerda’s question “What is democracy?” elicits a pained expression from Kowalski. He answers dismissively: “That’s such a stupid question ‘What is Democracy?’” As their conversation continues, Gerda admits
to confusion because both the Americans and the Soviets describe their systems as “people’s governments.” Here Kowalski explains that in the Soviet Union, “the leaders decide what’s best for the people. With us, the people decide what’s best for the people.” Through their conversations, the viewer is educated along with Gerda on the differences between the American and Soviet systems. The film articulates the ideas of “freedom” and “democracy” in large part through the interaction between these two characters.

*The Big Lift* also offers examples of Soviet excesses. It “locates the Soviets on the… periphery, depicting them as either foolish or arbitrary and their danger residing in their incalculability” (Stern 71) In one notable scene, MacCullough and his German girlfriend, Frederica, are on the subway as it passes briefly through the Russian sector of Berlin. Upon crossing the sector border, the occupants of the wagon begin hurriedly stashing their groceries. When Red Army soldiers board the wagon, the reasons for this become apparent: the soldiers demand coffee, or they will search all the passengers. In the only other scene in the film that involves the Soviet sector, arbitrary Soviet power is once again emphasized. As soon as Frederica and MacCullough pass through the Brandenburg Gate to the Soviet sector, they come under surveillance by a postcard salesman, who begins to follow them. When they reach Potsdamer Platz, where the British, American and Soviet sectors come together, they think they have lost him. Instead, a car pulls up and Soviet soldiers jump out and seize them. The postcard salesman has presumably slinked off and denounced the pair. These scenes are meant to exemplify the arbitrary and precarious nature of life in the Soviet sector. The latter scene also offers an interesting and humorous representation of the East-West border itself, for as soon as the Soviets seize Frederica and MacCullough, a jurisdictional dispute breaks
out between the Soviets on the one side and the Americans and British on the other. No one is quite sure where the border between the sectors actually is, since it is not clearly demarcated. Interestingly, the viewer does not see the resolution to this dispute, since the two captives are able to slip away amidst the confusion.

At the end of the film, we learn that Frederica is not what she seems, and is actually using MacCullough to get to America where she plans to desert him for her German husband, a former SS man who is living in St. Louis. In their parting conversation, well-meaning Gerda tells MacCullough that she will stay in Berlin because she wants to see “the right kind of Germany.” She is responding directly to her friend Frederica’s betrayal, which for her represents the “wrong” kind of Germany. Gerda, the eager student of freedom and democracy, is obviously meant to represent the “right” kind of Germany. It is clear throughout the film, moreover, that the Soviet sector of Berlin also stands for the “wrong” kind of Germany, in contrast to the Western sectors under the benevolent guidance and humanitarian assistance offered by America. Thus the film reinforces American values at the same time as it rehabilitates the Germans, “shift[ing] the ‘German’ from the arena of a powerful fascist adversary to that of a weak Cold War ally in urgent need of assistance” (Stern 67).

*One, Two, Three* (1961), directed by Billy Wilder, is another American film, set in the divided city of Berlin, that contains many typical elements of American Cold War discourse. In contrast to *The Big Lift*, *One, Two Three* was released amidst serious East-West tension over Berlin, just four months after the wall was constructed, though it was filmed before the wall went up. It stars James Cagney as C. R. MacNamara, an American executive in charge of Coca-Cola’s German operations and stationed in West Berlin. At
the beginning of the film, MacNamara is in negotiations with the Russians to sell Coca-Cola behind the Iron Curtain. He is soon side-tracked, though, by a more pressing responsibility to look after his boss’s young daughter, Scarlett, who is coming to Berlin on a visit and who proves to be a handful. She ends up falling in love with an East Berlin boy, Otto Piffl, a committed communist, and MacNamara has to sort out the mess before his boss arrives on the scene. His initial plan is to do away with Otto by convincing the East Germans that he is an American spy. “Over there [in East Berlin],” he says, “they toss people in jail like we throw away kleenex.” This plan succeeds all too well, and he is forced to extricate Otto from East German police custody when he finds out that Scarlett is pregnant. The trick then becomes to quickly turn Otto into a capitalist, someone acceptable to Scarlett’s father.

A prominent theme of the film is the difference in living standards between East and West. At one point, Otto describes the life he and Scarlett will lead when they move to Moscow. “They’ll assign us a magnificent apartment,” he says, “just a short walk from the bathroom.” He also tells her that they will have “breakfast in bed… also lunch, also dinner,” for the bed will be their only furniture. Though he describes it in a romantic and eager tone, the implication of privation in the “worker’s paradise” is clear. The theme of communist material poverty crops up again during a car chase through East Berlin, as MacNamara is trying to escape from the Soviets with Otto in tow. The Soviets’ car (of 1937 vintage, according to MacNamara’s chauffeur), keeps backfiring throughout the chase, and at one point the front fender falls off. The car is so small it barely fits the three Soviet commissars, who are filmed from behind, hunched over in the cramped quarters. The close-up camera work further enhances the feeling of claustrophobia within the car.
MacNamara’s car, on the other hand, is a new-looking sedan and provides ample room for three in the backseat. Finally, the Soviets’ car overheats and literally falls apart, allowing MacNamara and Otto to escape through the Brandenburg Gate to West Berlin. Wilder thus uses humor to represent the perceived failure of Communism and its command economy to materially provide for its citizens, in stark contrast to the material wealth of the West. It only cost MacNamara a six-pack of Coca-Cola to bribe the East German guards at the Brandenburg Gate, after all, so desperate were they for consumer goods.

Not surprisingly, communists in the film are portrayed in a very unflattering light. For instance, MacNamara refers to the Russian commissars with whom he is dealing as “Siberian wolves” for ogling his secretary. In addition, the representation of Otto in the film is in many ways a typical caricature of the committed communist. He is rigidly ideological, and parrots communist talking points whenever he has the chance. He is also ill-mannered, at one point eating with his hands and drinking wine from the bottle. The film also seeks to undermine the notion of the “worker’s paradise” in the East. A notable instance of this occurs when Otto rides back into East Berlin through the Brandenburg Gate and is immediately arrested. The motorcycle he was riding on has a balloon on the tailpipe (planted by MacNamara’s lackey), that says “Russkie go home.” As the police car pulls away with Otto in the backseat, one of the arresting officers shoots the balloon. As he does so, we see a close-up of the motorcycle and balloon. In the distance, at the edge of the frame but clearly visible, a billboard reads “Marxismus heißt Frieden”

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27 The Brandenburg Gate is used repeatedly throughout the two films discussed here to mark the border between East and West Berlin. After the construction of the wall, it would become even more recognizable as the symbol for the divided city.
(“Marxism means peace”) as the balloon explodes. The violence of the gunshot, along with the arbitrary arrest, contradicts the peaceful message of the billboard. The scene is clearly meant to call into question the supposedly peaceful intentions of the Soviet bloc.

The importance of Berlin in American discourse at the height of the Cold War is clear. No less obvious is Berlin’s remarkable discursive transformation during this time. In eighteen years, from the time of the fall of the Third Reich to Kennedy’s “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech, the city had gone from being the crumbling capital of a defeated enemy to America’s “frontier of freedom,” a veritable extension of the nation itself, to be defended at all costs. Representations of Berliners themselves, of the city as a showcase, and of the dire stakes of the Berlin problem had contributed in no small part to this transformation. The next chapter will construct a theoretical framework to analyze the role of Berlin in American Cold War discourse, building on the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and drawing on many of the representations from this chapter.
CHAPTER 3
BERLIN IN AMERICAN COLD WAR DISCOURSE: A DISCOURSE-THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

For Americans, the Cold War always had Berlin at its center.
- Ernest R. May

Lynn Boyd Hinds, in his book *The Cold War as Rhetoric*, asserts that American rhetorical representations of the world and America’s role in it in the early years of the Cold War created a new and universal political reality in the United States. He explains how this new reality was constructed, and with what consequences:

[T]he cold war was a rhetorical war. Originally, this rhetoric had been created out of a stockpile of images and paradigms to explain certain Soviet actions and motives or to gain support from certain audiences for particular policies... But language has a life of its own, especially when it is used to create an architectonic reality. Soon the rhetoric became an a priori explanation to which events, people, and motives were adjusted to fit the rhetoric. (Hinds 249)

For Hinds, this self-reinforcing and all-pervasive reality was constructed through rhetorical representations of anti-communism, and he analyzes examples of various “language-events” that were key in this construction, such as Kennan’s long telegram and *Foreign Affairs* article, the Truman Doctrine, and NSC-68.

In this chapter, I will show that discourse theory, as elaborated in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, offers a constructive way to expand on Hinds’
assertion about the role of language during the early years of the Cold War. Discourse theory goes well beyond language, combining theoretical insights from Marxist thought, psychoanalytic theory and linguistic theory to develop a useful framework for understanding how social relations and subject positions are constructed through concrete discourses, and how meaning and identity, though always incomplete, are partially fixed by hegemonic articulations within those discourses. For my understanding of discourse theory, I am indebted to Jacob Torfing, whose book *New Theories of Discourse* offers an excellent synopsis of its key terms and theoretical underpinnings. In this chapter, I will use the representations surrounding Berlin discussed in chapter two to demonstrate how the theoretical terms of discourse theory apply to American Cold War discourse. I will also argue that Berlin, because it was a focal point of ideological representations of the Cold War world, played a special role within that discourse.

Discourse theory began as an attempt by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to “elaborate an alternative approach to the understanding of the structuration of socio-political spaces by articulating a novel conception of *discourse*” (Laclau “Foreword” x, italics in the original). More specifically, discourse analysis theorizes social relations without relying on certain concepts which in the past have dominated Marxist and neo-Marxist theory, particularly the idea that all social relations are, in the last instance, determined by the economic base, or mode of production. They argue, instead, that social relations and identities are shaped through discourse. In their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, published in 1985, Laclau and Mouffe construct the theoretical framework of discourse theory. They reject Marxist determinism as a basis for theorizing social relations, a basis that persists in the work of Louis Althusser and his successors.
Instead, they focus on discourse, “a social and political construction that establishes a system of relations between different objects and practices, while providing (subject) positions with which social agents can identify.”\(^2\) (Howarth and Stavrakakis 3).

Discourse offers a concrete object of analysis, rooted in but not reducible to language. More importantly for Laclau and Mouffe, because it does away with determinism and necessity in favor of contingency, discourse foregrounds, and indeed makes possible, a theorizing of the political. The central claim of discourse theory is that “our cognition and speech-acts only become meaningful within certain pre-established discourses, which have different structurations that change over time” (Torfing 84-5). In short, discourse theory provides a valuable way of thinking about meaning and the construction of meaning within concrete discourses. This chapter focuses on the discursive construction of what I am calling American Cold War discourse over a specific period, the height of the Cold War, for which the Berlin Airlift (1948-49) and Kennedy’s visit to Berlin (1963) serve as rough bookends. It attempts to offer a fresh and important way of looking at the “architectonic reality” constructed by American Cold War discourse, for “[w]e do not have any access to the real world except through its construction as a discursive form within more or less ideological systems of representation” (113).

Laclau and Mouffe define and elaborate on several key concepts central to their theoretical model. One of these terms is *articulation*, which they define as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of

\^2\ It should be noted that, for Laclau and Mouffe, the term “discourse” is used in this strict sense, and is distinct from its application in the work of Michel Foucault and elsewhere.
the articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe 105). In other words, identities, far from being fixed essences, are shaped and differentiated by the way in which they are articulated within discourse. For example, Soviet motivations for imposing the Berlin blockade in June 1948 could have been interpreted in a number of different ways, as they later were by diplomatic historians. At the time, however, Americans were told by their government and the media that the blockade was an act of Soviet aggression, the first step in the Soviet plan to dominate all of Europe. This articulation served to shape and solidify the identity of the Soviet Union as an aggressor nation within American discourse.

*Articulation* is a central term within discourse theory because it is from this practice that the “structured totality” they call discourse emerges. A discourse is the resultant ensemble, or configuration, of differential positions created by the articulatory practice that appears to present, or signify, a totality. Laclau and Mouffe refer to these differential positions, which are internal to the articulated discursive totality, as moments, whereas an *element*, in their usage, is “any difference that is not discursively articulated” (105). When an element, which they also call a *floating signifier*, is articulated within a given discourse, it becomes a moment, and its meaning becomes partially fixed. This is, one could say, the point of the articulatory practice: to imbue the articulated element with meaning. The emphasis, however, is on the *partial* fixation of meaning; they are quick to point out that the articulatory practice is never complete, for that would construct a totality that would render further articulation impossible. They claim that “if contingency and articulation are possible, this is because no discursive formation is a sutured totality and the transformation of elements into moments is never complete” (106). Thus, the “structured totality” of discourse, referred to above, is no such thing; meaning is always
only partially fixed, identities are never fully constituted, and ultimate closure is impossible. In any concrete discourse, articulation is a continuous process in search of an unrealizable closure. In American Cold War discourse, Berlin offered a discursive terrain within which the various discursive moments detailed in chapter two (the Soviet threat, American resolve, and so forth) were constantly articulated and rearticulated.

In asserting the impossibility of closure within discourse, Laclau and Mouffe are relying on a particular insight about the nature of language offered by Jacques Derrida. Derrida argues that the very concept of structure contains within itself a logical impossibility; in order for a structure, in the accepted sense, to exist, it must be a closed formation with its own internal logic and with a privileged center that holds it together from within but is, itself, outside the play of difference. In the deconstruction of this idea of a totalized structure, one can begin with its reliance on a fixed center, or foundation, on which the structure is built. According to Derrida, the existence of a fixed center is impossible due to the inherent play of meaning within language. Meaning can not be fixed because the relation between the Saussurean signifier and signified, which together constitute the sign, is itself unstable. Rather, meaning is always differential in the absence of positive terms, as Saussure argued, and is also constantly deferred. Derrida captures this dual characteristic of language underlying the process of signification in his concept of *différance*. For Derrida, it is the free play of difference within language that renders the ultimate fixity of meaning impossible; Laclau and Mouffe extend this logic to argue that there can be no fixed center of discourse that would stop the play of substitutions within language and suture the discursive totality.
The decenteredness of discourse can also be argued through the Lacanian notion of lack, or the incompleteness of the Symbolic Order. For Jacques Lacan, the phallus is the voice or seat of authority in the Imaginary Order. It also designates for him the connection with the substantive realm of the body that must be given up in order to enter into the realm of meaning, or the Symbolic Order. However, the Imaginary subject, having lost this connection and passed through what Lacan calls the “defiles of signification” to the Symbolic register, does not relinquish his need for the phallus, and it is this unsettling lack which is the defining characteristic of the decentered and incomplete Symbolic Order. In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, this constitutive lack is a result of the relation between signifier and signified in the process of signification: the signified, or concept, is in fact the effect of the signifier. Lacan explains that the bar between the signifier and signified does not represent a referential relation between the two, but rather the limit of signification. What is, then, the condition of possibility for signification? He maintains that the Real can not provide the basis for signification because it is relegated to that which can not be represented within the Symbolic order - it is beyond the Symbolic. Instead, signification is possible because we retain the illusion that the relation between signifier and signified is stable. “Signification is articulated around the illusion of attaining the signified; but this illusion itself is a result of the signifying play,” of the metonymic sliding quality of the signifying chain (Stavrakakis 27). Thus, the signified retains its locus in the process of signification, but not as a full presence. Rather, its status is that of a constitutive lack, an absence that structures signification and determines the incompleteness of the Symbolic order. While Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of discourse is not co-extensive with the Lacanian Symbolic order,
Lacan’s broader concept of the centrality of language is of the utmost importance to discourse theory, and the incompleteness of the Symbolic order is analogous to the decenteredness of discourse.

The lack of a fixed center in discourse is thus confirmed within these two theoretical frameworks, both of which are important for discourse theory, and the definition of discourse as “a differential ensemble of signifying sequences that, in the absence of a fixed center, fails to invoke a complete closure” begins to make sense (Torfing 86). It follows, then, that discourse theory denies the possibility of fully constituted identities by affirming the ultimate unfixity of meaning. However, it should be stressed once again that discourse does partially fix meanings and identities. This partial fixity prevents the unchecked play of significations, which would give way to utter meaninglessness and the complete atomization of the social field. It is achieved in part through what Laclau and Mouffe call nodal points, a term derived from Lacan’s notion of points de capiton, or quilting points. For Laclau and Mouffe, nodal points are privileged signifiers which attempt to fix the meaning of a chain of discursive moments by serving as the imaginary center of a discourse, thereby arresting the play of difference and allowing for the partial stability of meaning and identity. Nodal points are signifiers without a fixed or stable signified. Instead, they can be thought of as political constructions that have a multiplicity of contested meanings – they are overfull of meaning. In a concrete discourse, the nodal point is filled with certain of these meanings, and it in turn “creates and sustains the identity of [that] discourse by constructing a knot
of definite meanings” (98). A good example of a nodal point that serves to structure discourse in this way is “God,” operative in monotheistic religious discourses.

Discourse theory posits a multiplicity of mutually substituting centers that can act as nodal points. In the case of American Cold War discourse, for example, the terms “Freedom” and “Democracy” both clearly performed this function, fixing the meanings of other elements in the discursive chain. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how Berlin served as a locus of representations for these two concepts – how attempts to define them, to fill them with a certain meaning or knot of definite meanings, usually in opposition to the Other of Soviet communism, often centered on Berlin. The ongoing conversation between Gerda and Kowalski in *The Big Lift*, in which the American discursive conception of “Democracy” was articulated, is just one instance. The Crusade for Freedom is perhaps an even stronger example of “Freedom” as nodal point – the Crusade attempted to rally Americans around the term, which was physically and textually instantiated in the Freedom Bell and Freedom Scrolls. These were paraded across the entire country, and were then packed off to Berlin and enshrined in the political center of “free” West Berlin. This is just one overt example of how the city of West Berlin acted as an anchor for “Freedom” within American Cold War discourse. Both “Freedom” and “Democracy” acted as nodal points, as mutually substituting centers, of that discourse by organizing a paradigmatic chain of equivalence, a “symbolic code” (99), within which the meaning of other floating signifiers could be partially fixed. Nodal points also “function as the general horizon which provides the society with a

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30 One could also argue that, by using the word “scrolls,” organizers attempted to evoke a symbolic link with the Christian bible. The first of the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered just a few years earlier.
representation of its collective identity” (Clohesy 83). The twin signifiers of “Freedom” and “Democracy” performed this function as well, constantly seeking to reinforce a more or less cohesive American Cold War identity.

“Anticommunism” was perhaps the most important and effective nodal point in American Cold War discourse. “By 1947,” Hinds claims, “anticommunist rhetoric had become the all-pervasive political reality for Americans for the postwar world” (247). 1947 was the year in which Kennan’s “X” article, discussed in the previous chapter, appeared. In March of that year, Truman also proclaimed the Truman Doctrine, in which he articulated a sharp division between the communist world and the West, and echoed many of the negative representations of the Soviet Union that had already been active in key foreign policy documents such as Kennan’s long telegram. Moreover, anticommunism drew on a long history of American representations dating back at least to 1917, as Hinds and others have pointed out. Hence, by the time of the Berlin blockade and airlift in the summer of 1948, “anticommunism” was already the organizing principle, and the key nodal point, of American Cold War discourse. Berlin again played a key role in its functioning through representations of communist ruthlessness and moral poverty, and through the lionizing of West Berliners themselves and their leaders, such as Ernst Reuter31, as brave and inspiring instantiations of anticommunism.

Another key term in the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe is the field of discursivity, or simply the discursive. It refers to the irreducible surplus of meaning created in the process of the partial fixation of meaning. The field of discursivity

31 Reuter served as mayor of West Berlin from 1948 until his death in 1953.
constitutes the condition of possibility for the partial fixation of meaning, but it also makes ultimate fixation impossible by supplying alternative articulations (Torfing 92). It contains all possible meanings that are excluded by a given discourse, and thus makes possible the articulation of other, competing discourses. The field of discursivity is not a fixed or stable object. Rather, it is a horizon of unfixity which “provides the differential trace structure that every fixation of meaning must necessarily presuppose,” but is “never completely absorbed by discourse and thus continues to constitute a field of undecidability which constantly overflows and subverts the attempt to fix a stable set of differential positions within a particular discourse” (92). The example of the representations of Berlin from the second chapter once again helps to illustrate the point. As we have seen, during the airlift and after, Berlin, particularly West Berlin, was represented as a site of defiance against Soviet aggression. By the same token, its citizens became proud partners in the struggle for “freedom.” Not long before, however, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, Trümmerstadt (lit. “rubble city”) Berlin had signified the capital of the defeated Nazi empire, and also the humbling of the German people in the face of Allied might. The latter representations were excluded in American Cold War discourse, and thus became a part of the field of discursivity. Instead, Berlin became an “outpost of freedom” and a site of resistance to Soviet tyranny. Alternative representations could not be “completely absorbed” nor excluded by the dominant discourse, however, and representations of the “bad German,” such as the character of Frederica in The Big Lift, still cropped up and threatened to subvert the identity of the heroic West Berliners constructed by American Cold War discourse.
Although discourses construct meaning, it is important at this point to address certain misconceptions about this fundamentally social constructivist view. Laclau and Mouffe argue that “every object is constituted as an object of discourse,” but this assertion does not deny the material existence of a world external to thought. On the contrary, they mean to deny that objects “could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence” (108). This is the kernel of their rejection of essentialism, their strict denial that there exist pre-discursive essences which could provide the basis for meaning. The meaning of the Berlin Wall, for example, did not derive solely from its material existence, from its inherent “wallness.” Rather, its meaning emerged within American Cold War discourse from its articulation as a symbol of communist oppression. A related misconception about discourse theory is that its analysis is confined to a purely linguistic arena within the larger region of the social, and thus has little explanatory power concerning social relations. Laclau and Mouffe reject this reductionist view by claiming that discourse is “co-extensive with the social and cannot be reduced to either its semantic or its pragmatic aspects. All actions have meaning, and to produce and disseminate meaning is to act” (94).

The concept of *hegemony* in discourse theory is an attempt to account for the internal coherence of concrete discourses. It derives from Antonio Gramsci’s attempt to provide an alternative to mechanistic applications of the base/superstructure model in Marxist theory. The elaboration of the concept of hegemony involved a movement away

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32 The government of the GDR called the wall the “anti-fascist protective wall,” an illustration of how the same discursive object can be articulated differently by a competing discourse.
from the logic of necessity toward a logic of contingency. In other words, it made possible a theorizing of contingent political interventions and their role in historical development. It was initially meant as a supplement to the less flexible historical materialist model dominant in Marxist scholarship at the time. Laclau and Mouffe, however, point out that the concept of hegemony actually served to undermine the idea of structural necessity in theories of capitalist development by foregrounding the role of articulation in constructing political identities. In other words, the last vestiges of economic determinism can be disposed of by a recognition that political identities are not bound to structural positions within the economy, but rather are constituted through the fundamentally political process of articulating what Gramsci called “collective wills.” Gramsci, himself, still clung to some form of economic determinism, but Laclau and Mouffe take his argument further in order to free Marxism from what they perceive to be a restraining logic. It is this move, more than any other, which has led to the characterization of discourse theory as a *post-Marxist* theory, a term Laclau and Mouffe self-apply.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, “any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre” (Laclau and Mouffe 112). Though this is ultimately impossible, some discourses are more successful than others in their attempt, and when a discourse expands “into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action” through the successful transformation of floating elements into partially fixed moments, it can be considered a hegemonic discourse (101). This term implies not only political and moral-intellectual leadership, such as that exhibited by hegemonic nation-states, but also the fact that hegemonic discourses, when
successful, force other discourses to rearticulate their own positions. By 1948, American Cold War discourse, through the operation of key nodal points such as “freedom,” “democracy” and “anticommunism,” had certainly become hegemonic. Over the succeeding fifteen years, this hegemony was further expanded and reinforced by official and unofficial representations of Berlin such as those discussed in the previous chapter.

The construction of a hegemonic discourse depends on a certain type of articulation called hegemonic articulation, that relies, in turn, on the construction of what Laclau and Mouffe term social antagonism. This concept refers to the “precise discursive presence” of the “‘experience’ of the limit of all objectivity” (Laclau and Mouffe 122). It is this experience of the impossibility of a stable system of differences, and hence of fully constituted identities, that provides the ground for their claim that society is impossible, that it can never be fully constituted. In order to theorize social antagonism, Laclau and Mouffe begin by pointing out the inadequacies of earlier attempts to do so, specifically the explanation of antagonism by Lucio Colletti. Colletti examined the Kantian distinction between real opposition and logical contradiction: the former is a relation between objects (A – B), and the latter is a relation between concepts (A – not-A). According to Colletti, Marxists had understood antagonism as contradiction, thereby denying its importance to materialist philosophy. He wished to foreground the category of antagonism by showing that antagonisms are, in fact, real oppositions. Laclau and Mouffe argue that neither view of antagonism is correct because they both represent objective relations, whether between objects or concepts. In other words, both real opposition and logical contradiction depend on the existence of two fully present and
constituted identities. As they put it, “[i]n the case of contradiction, it is because A is fully A that being-not-A is a contradiction – and therefore an impossibility. In the case of real opposition, it is because A is also fully A that its relation with B produces an objectively determinable effect” (124-25, emphasis in the original). For Laclau and Mouffe, antagonism can not be an objective relation between two fully constituted identities simply because, as has been shown, full presence is impossible due to the ultimate unfixity of meaning. Instead, they argue that “the objective being [of the ‘Other’] is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent its being fixed as full positivity” (125). Thus, antagonism can be seen, not as a relation between A and B, nor between A and not-A, but rather as a relation between A and anti-A. Anti-A is that which subverts and prevents the full presence of A, while at the same time providing A with its condition of possibility. It does not represent a positive difference from A, but merely the negation of A, while at the same time providing the limits of the objective presence of A. This implies, then, that social antagonism makes society impossible (i.e. not able to become a fully sutured totality), because it is the “limit of the social [which] must be given within the social itself as something subverting it, destroying its ambition to constitute a full presence” (127). The use of the word “within” here can be misleading, however, for elsewhere Laclau and Mouffe make clear that “antagonisms are not internal but external to the social; or rather they constitute the limits of society, the latter’s impossibility of fully constituting itself” (125). Because discourse theory holds that discourse is co-extensive with the social, antagonism also, and importantly, constitutes the limit of a concrete discourse.
There are two types of social antagonisms identified by Laclau and Mouffe, each of which depends on a different logic for their construction and divides a society in different ways. The first type of social antagonism, and the one that will be most important in this study, is the simplistic antagonism that divides society into two antagonistic camps. This construction of this division relies on what Laclau and Mouffe call the *logic of equivalence*, which seeks to cancel out differences among terms by articulating and foregrounding something equivalent that unites them. For example, during the Cold War, there existed many different systems of government within the American and Soviet spheres of influence, respectively. However, American Cold War discourse tended to collapse these differences into “democratic” systems, on the one hand, and “communist” systems, on the other, concealing the complex differences between individual systems within the two camps. Another example mentioned in chapter two was the collapsing of difference within American Cold War discourse between “communist,” “Nazi,” and “tsarist.” Communists were thus linked in an equivalential chain with the misdeeds of these past regimes under the generic signifier of “totalitarian,” and American Cold War discourse mobilized terms such as “red fascism” in order to construct the communist Other. Laclau and Mouffe stress that the logic of equivalence does not create a system of positive differential positions because it dissolves all positivity. They argue that “if *all* the differential features of an object have become equivalent, it is impossible to express anything *positive* concerning that object; this can only imply that through equivalence something is expressed which the object is *not*” (Laclau & Mouffe 128, emphasis in the original). In the first example cited above, countries in the American camp were defined, first and foremost, as “anti-communist,”
referring not to any positive differential aspects, but to a purely negative identity which
“can only be represented indirectly, through an equivalence between its differential
moments” (128). The logic of equivalence thus creates what Laclau and Mouffe call
*popular subject positions* which serve to unify the social against the opposing camp. It
operates on the metaphoric axis, that is, through substitution. As seen in the previous
chapter, American Cold War discourse constructed a metaphoric chain of equivalence in
which communism was equated with notions of “evil,” “enslavement,” and
“totalitarianism.” At the same time, America and “the West” became equivalent with
“freedom,” “democracy” and “free enterprise.”

It is important to note that the construction of equivalence is never complete. It
never succeeds in constituting a fully sutured space, which leaves open the possibility of
the other type of antagonism, one which relies on the opposing logic of difference. This
logic operates on the metonymic axis, expanding the “number of positions that can enter
into a relation of combination and hence of continuity with one another” (130). It thus
serves to increase the number of antagonistic positions, thereby expanding the differential
space within the political and social realms. The logic of difference is clearly active in
advanced capitalist societies, for instance, where we see a number of political struggles
taking place simultaneously (feminism(s), gay and lesbian rights, ethnic minority
struggles, and so forth), but with differing social and political demands. The logic of
difference creates what Laclau and Mouffe call *democratic subject positions*.

It should be stressed that both the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference
are always active in all discourses, and they constantly seek to subvert each other, but one
will clearly assert itself as the predominant logic. It is apparent that within American
Cold War discourse, the logic of equivalence was predominant. Exclusion, not inclusion, was the norm, constructing the excluded communist bloc as the antagonistic Other of American Cold War discourse, and dampening dissent from within. Furthermore, the logic of equivalence is bound up with antagonism in such a way that “the more predominant the logic of equivalence, the stronger and the more important becomes the particular social antagonism for the structuration of the social” (Torfing 126).

In his effort to square the theory of social antagonism with Lacanian psychoanalysis, Slavoj Zizek asserts that the antagonistic force (anti-A) does not prevent A from fully constituting itself, but rather is held responsible for this blockage. The real culprit, for Zizek, is the constitutive lack of the subject, and anti-A is merely an externalization of this lack; the subject (A) is always already negated, prior to the existence of social antagonisms. It is important to note that his argument boils down to the notion that social antagonism is a projection of the self-blocking subject, a very different theoretical position to that of Laclau and Mouffe. As Linda Zerilli explains it, Zizek actually folds or collapses the Laclau-Mouffe notion of social antagonism, as the battle between two identities “presentified” as polar positions in a contingent social space, into the Lacanian notion of a constitutive Spaltung of the subject. In Zizek's view, the former is merely an illusion produced by the subject's refusal to confront the trauma of the latter, the real. The subject emerges at precisely the limit of the social, its impossibility. (Zerilli 12)

This reductive psychoanalytic reading of antagonism and its role in subjectivation is nevertheless helpful in foregrounding the role of antagonism in shaping social identities. For this reason, Laclau later adopted the term constitutive outside to refer to the discursive function of social antagonism and highlight its constitutive role in
subjectivation. This term, borrowed from Henry Staten, makes clear the role of social antagonism in both constituting the social and denying it its full presence. The constitutive outside is a “radical otherness that, at the same time, constitutes and negates the limits and identity of the discursive formation from which it is excluded” (Torfing 124). This limiting function of the constitutive outside is important, for it prevents the infinite expansion of difference within a concrete discourse, and thus constitutes its limit. The constitutive outside of American Cold War discourse was clearly Soviet communism; it ended where the radical Other of the Soviet world began. This concept also points to the significance of Berlin within American Cold War discourse; because the city itself was a physical instantiation of the division between East and West, this explains why so many important and discursively effective representations of the Cold War world accrued to it.

Above, I defined discourse as “the resultant ensemble, or configuration, of differential positions created by the articulatory practice that appears to present, or signify, a totality.” It is now necessary to return to this definition, and specifically to the word “appears.” In explaining how this appearance of closure is constructed, and why it is so important, discourse theory relies on the category of ideology. “The formation of a strong metaphorical hegemony,” according to this model, “necessarily involves the creation of an ideological closure.” Ideology, in this sense, carries neither of the traditional meanings active in Marxist discourse: it is neither a superstructural level within the base/superstructure model, nor is it simply false consciousness (113). In discourse theory, “[t]he ideological consists precisely in those discursive forms that seek
to construct society and social agency as decidable discursive forms within a totalizing horizon that projects on to a particular discursive form an impossible fullness and transparency” (114). In other words, ideology is apparent in its effect – when we ignore the lack of closure in discourse and tell ourselves that society and social agency are, in fact, fully constituted identities. Ideology is necessary because without the appearance of closure it creates, meaning itself would be impossible within the terms of this theoretical framework.

In his essay “The Death and Resurrection of Ideology,” Laclau explains the mechanics of this ideological effect of closure, and it is here that nodal points and the logics of equivalence and difference once again become important. Since a nodal point has no form of representation of its own, once incarnated in certain demands it becomes in some way imprisoned by them, and is not able to circulate freely. The remainders of particularity (of the links of the chain) limit its possible displacements. Even more: a chain of equivalences can in principle expand indefinitely, but once a set of core links has been established, this expansion is limited. Some new links would simply be incompatible with the remainders of particularity which are already part of the chain. (Laclau 320-21)

By helping to fix the nodal point, the imaginary center of a discourse, in this way, these core links also, by extension, limit the expansion of the discourse itself because their remainders of particularity keep the chain from collapsing into simple identity. At the same time, the same core links limit the possible meanings the nodal point can take on. “It is through the operation of this double and contradictory movement,” Laclau argues, “that the illusion of closure is discursively constructed” (321).

It is here, too, that the function of Berlin within American Cold War discourse becomes clear: Berlin became an important incarnation of the nodal points of “freedom,”
“democracy,” and “anti-communism,” helping to fill them with partially fixed meanings and thereby enabling them to function as successful imaginary centers of American Cold War discourse. As Ernest May writes of the effect of Berlin on broader American foreign policy, “the success of 1948-49 [the airlift] and the consequent commitment to Berlin created a straitjacket for the United States for the duration of the high Cold War” (159). In the same way, the articulation of Berlin as the “frontier of freedom” served to “imprison” American Cold War discourse insofar as discursive Berlin limited the further associations, or relations of contiguity, that could be constructed. For example, when American leaders later tried to extend the “frontier of freedom” to South Vietnam, the symbolic link never quite took, and eventually dissolved altogether. This was at least in part due to the fact that Saigon was not Berlin, where the “frontier of freedom” had been successfully constructed. It could not be held up as a shining example of democracy and free enterprise because the military government was not elected and was notoriously corrupt. Nor could it be defended bloodlessly, as Berlin had been. Representations of Berlin as the dividing line between capitalist West and communist East, and as the “showcase of the West,” contributed to the inscription of the discursive boundary of American Cold War discourse, helping American identity to cohere through the discursive construction of the constitutive outside of Soviet communism.
CONCLUSION

In his essay “America’s Berlin 1945-2000: Between Myths and Visions,” Andreas W. Daum’s central argument is that “Cold War Berlin became…an American city, i.e., in the perception and the rationale of parts of American society Berlin embodied a bundle of qualities which made the city a place that mirrored important…political visions of the United States” (50). In the foregoing study, I have attempted to expand on this idea, and to show that discourse theory provides a useful way of understanding exactly this phenomenon. It was first necessary to understand the historical background of the relationship between the United States and Berlin. From the closing years of the Second World War onward, America developed an increasing economic, political and social investment in Berlin, and the first chapter details this historical development by highlighting key events in its evolution. The second chapter delves into contemporary official and unofficial representations of these events. In the process, it uncovers a series of metaphors: Berlin as a testing ground of American resolve; Berlin as a “showcase” of American humanitarianism, American military might, and the superiority of free enterprise; and Berlin as the threatened “frontier of freedom,” to be defended, if necessary, with American lives, to name just a few. Berlin also served as a focal point during this period for representations of the communist Other, the mortal enemy of the “American way.”
Finally, in chapter three, I explain the central terms of discourse theory and attempt to apply these concepts in an analysis of American Cold War discourse. I conclude that, during the height of the Cold War, Soviet communism was constructed as the constitutive outside of American Cold War discourse, establishing the limits of a particular American Cold War identity. The partial fixation of the latter, in turn, was enabled by the discursive operation of key nodal points such as “freedom,” “democracy” and “anticommunism,” which functioned as imaginary centers of American Cold War discourse. Berlin, I argue, played a key role in establishing these terms as successful nodal points insofar as the representations surrounding Berlin helped to fix their meaning.

Berlin “worked” in a way that South Vietnam, for example, did not. The latter, in fact, had the opposite effect, contributing more than any other factor to the dissolution of American Cold War discourse and the end of a more or less cohesive American Cold War identity. That identity would not be rehabilitated until the Reagan era, and it was no coincidence that one of the most memorable and important moments in that discursive rehabilitation was President Reagan’s speech in front of the Brandenburg Gate, the enduring symbol of the Cold War.


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