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Crisis at Home: American Reaction to the Berlin Crisis of 1961

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Crisis at Home:

American Reaction to the Berlin Crisis of 1961

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ABSTRACT

In 1961, the Berlin Wall intensified Americans' existing fears of the Cold War. The Wall exacerbated tensions between the Superpowers and raised the possibility of armed conflict, even nuclear war. This thesis will explore the American public's reaction to the Berlin Wall, from its construction in August through November 1961, at the height of the crisis. I define the public as the media and the masses. First, I will examine President John F. Kennedy's response in public by using speeches, press conferences and interviews that brought reactions from the media and the masses. Second, I will investigate magazine and newspaper editorialists' responses concerning the Berlin Wall. Third, using the "Letters to the Editor" section of American newspapers and polling data, I will try to explain how average Americans viewed the crisis. The public response must be considered within the larger contexts of the ever-present fear of nuclear war and Soviet communism.

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Introduction

In the middle of the night on August 13, 1961, the Soviet-controlled German Democratic Republic, colloquially known as East Germany, began constructing a wall that encircled West Berlin, which the United States, Britain, and France had occupied since the end of World War II. The Berlin Wall established the physical division of East and West Berlin; it also separated the ideals of the communist Soviet Union and capitalist America and Western Europe. This tangible representation of the Iron Curtain became the cardinal symbol of the Cold War, and Berlin became the center of the superpower conflict. As a result of the Wall, Berliners experienced a radical change in their lives; many lost contact with loved ones and were unable to attend school or work on the other side of the barrier. Historian, Edith Sheffer explains the German experiences on that fateful Sunday morning: “East Berliners jumped out of buildings and ran through gunfire to escape, while anxious western crowds and politicians remained mostly non-confrontational.”¹

At the moment that the Wall enclosed Berlin, and both sides watched in horror, President Kennedy sailed on his boat, the *Marlin*, in Hyannis Port with the First Lady, Jackie.² This striking behavior, calm and recreational in the face of a disaster, invoked the distance of Berlin; yet the Wall felt much closer to the public as the crisis continued. The American public would see the Berlin Wall as another Cold War defeat.

In this Cold War battleground, Americans considered how they wanted President Kennedy and other national leaders to handle the crisis. The goal of this thesis is to explain

¹ Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 170.

² Honoré M. Catudal, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis: A Case Study in U.S. Decision Making*, (Berlin: Berlin-Verlag, 1980), 35.

how the public viewed the creation of the Berlin Wall in 1961, and the way it affected the American view of potential Soviet domination of Central Europe and the dangers of nuclear war. I argue that American opinion of the Berlin Wall varied based on geographic region and political affiliation. The thesis is divided into four sections to construct this argument. The first section emphasizes Kennedy's public messages. The next part examines how politically-motivated magazines may have influenced the public. Finally, this thesis focuses on public opinion. The third and fourth sections analyze letters in local newspapers and polling data.

Historiography

Historians agree that the Berlin Wall emerged as a result of the tensions of the Cold War, and namely from Soviet and American differences over the fate of the two Germanies. In terms of the American reaction to the Berlin War, historians focus on President Kennedy's significant role in the crisis. The academic literature reveals that Kennedy's advisors issued the first historical analyses; they praised JFK's presidency. Historians' later works criticize Kennedy's foreign policy initiatives. Throughout this historiography, the scholars present a general consensus that Kennedy was not seeking war, but their views vary regarding his actions.

Historian Campbell Craig notes that the Kennedy historiography has shifted since the President's untimely death. Kennedy's assassination "all but guaranteed an uncritical, indeed hagiographic, early literature, one written, as it turned out, largely by people closely associated with the administration."³ Specifically, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Theodore

³ Campbell Craig, "Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years On," *International Affairs* 89, no. 6 (November 2013): 1368.

Sorensen, who were both advisors and friends of Kennedy, wrote “worshipful” books about Kennedy’s life soon after his death. Sorensen admits, “This book, let it be clear at the outset, praised John Kennedy and what he has done.”⁴ Sorensen explains that while Kennedy believed the Berlin Wall was “illegal, immoral, and inhuman, [it was] not a cause for war.”⁵ By not risking a war over the Soviet’s dangerous infringement of the agreement over Berlin, Sorensen claims that Kennedy made the right decision. His memoirs compliment Kennedy’s tough decisions.

Like Sorensen, Schlesinger published his account in 1965, only two years after Kennedy’s death. Schlesinger’s positive observations of the presidency make up much of the book, which shows little criticism of Kennedy. He reveals that the Kennedy administration discussed its Berlin policy well before the crisis, going back to March 1961.⁶ Kennedy later feared that the Wall would bring the end of civilization and that there was no “victory in a nuclear war.”⁷ In terms of real policy, Schlesinger indicates that Kennedy properly responded to the Soviet action according to the country’s need. Much of the world, especially West Berlin, felt that the Kennedy administration did not react quickly enough, as it had no “contingency plan” for a Berlin problem.⁸ Schlesinger, however, reveals that Kennedy had been planning with his advisors for months for a crisis, and knew that he could risk nuclear war if he acted too militantly. Both Sorensen and Schlesinger

⁴ Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy: The Classic Biography* (New York: Harpers Perennial, 1965), 6.

⁵ Sorensen, *Kennedy: The Classic Biography*, 593.

⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 386.

⁷ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, 391.

⁸ Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering, and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crisis: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 89.

present biased memoirs of President Kennedy that nonetheless include good background to the crisis.

German historian Wilfried Loth reveals the issues that Kennedy inherited from President Eisenhower's time in office regarding Berlin. While Eisenhower held office, Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev issued the "Berlin Ultimatum" of November 27, 1958, to make Berlin a free, demilitarized city. The Soviet Union sought to hinder the East German refugee flow to West Berlin and to end the military alliances the Allies and the Soviets had with the two Germanies. Khrushchev also demanded that the West recognize the German Democratic Republic as a sovereign state; otherwise, the Soviets would render their own treaty with East Germany. In addition, the Western powers would have to receive permission from the GDR to gain access to West Berlin.⁹ Thus, the Berlin crisis did not originate with Kennedy, but it was exacerbated during his tenure.

Furthermore, foreign relations historian Thomas Schwartz attributes Kennedy's slow response to the crisis to "dual containment." This policy was "designed to keep both the Soviet Union and Germany from dominating the continent." The United States feared a resurgence of German power that had been displayed during the world wars; instead, America preferred to uphold the status quo of a divided, weak Germany. In addition, the United States continued to seek to contain the Communists. Therefore, America needed to remain in Berlin in order to restrain and limit the power of both the former Nazi Germans and the Soviet communists. Moreover, America and West Germany developed a "special relationship." A "German demand for an American presence" existed for the Germans'

⁹ Wilfried Loth, "States and the Changing Equations of Power," in *Global Interdependence*, ed. Akira Iriye (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 99.

security against a feared Soviet conquest. In contrast, due to their “continuing mistrust of the Germans,” the Americans did not seek German reunification. This relationship continued through the Berlin Wall crisis. “The gratitude of Berliners for American assistance [...] gave American leaders moral reinforcement and psychological reassurance in their struggle with the Soviet Union,” writes Schwartz. Nonetheless, when little activity to save the Berliners emanated from Washington, D.C., residents on both sides of the Wall began to lose faith in being rescued by the Americans.”¹⁰ With Kennedy’s toleration of the Berlin Wall, it appears that the United States and the Soviet Union held similar motives in containing Germans.

Scholars began to criticize Kennedy’s foreign policy in the 1980s and 1990s.¹¹ Montague Kern, Patricia Levering, and Ralph Levering, *The Kennedy Crisis: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy*, and Thomas C. Paterson, *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963* represent this period’s scholarly disapproval of Kennedy. Both narratives offer a rather critical view of Kennedy. Paterson seems to agree with Craig’s analysis: “Today scholars and sensationalists alike have forced us to acknowledge a much less flattering portrait of the President.”¹²

Kern, Levering, and Levering analyze Kennedy’s first international meeting on Berlin at the Vienna Conference in June 1961. The conference gave Khrushchev and Kennedy the opportunity to meet for the first time. At the summit, Khrushchev reissued the 1958 ultimatum concerning Berlin, demanding that the Allies sign a peace treaty with

¹⁰ Thomas Alan Schwartz, *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 299, 300, 306, 306.

¹¹ Craig, "Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years On," 1368.

¹² Paterson, *Kennedy's Quest for Victory*, 4.

East Germany within six months, or the Soviets would create their own treaty that “would establish a free city in Berlin and automatically terminate Western occupation rights.”¹³ Kern, Levering, and Levering reveal that Khrushchev treated Kennedy like a child, and Kennedy left the conference looking very weak.

The conference was Kennedy’s second unsuccessful interaction with Cold War enemies. Only a few months into his presidency, Kennedy experienced the Bay of Pigs’ debacle in Cuba, which made him look weak going into the Berlin crisis. Kennedy needed to show his strength for public approval, especially as the 1962 midterm congressional elections approached. Paterson and Kern, Levering, and Levering show where the President stood prior to the Berlin crisis. These authors obviously disapprove of Kennedy’s role in Cuba and Vienna.

Regarding Berlin, Kern, Levering, and Levering note that when the crisis struck, Kennedy was on vacation and thus only “authorized a mild statement protesting the illegality of the Wall.”¹⁴ The President took several days before he began to attempt to relieve the crisis. Despite that fact that Paterson was typically critical of Kennedy, Paterson reveals that Kennedy feared a chain reaction if America lost Berlin; thus, he had to demonstrate America’s power. Although Kennedy succeeded in avoiding war, the administration had to prove America’s “military resolve.” Paterson asserts that Kennedy did not seek war since “American and Russian leaders understood that gunfire could quickly escalate to nuclear war.”¹⁵

¹³ Kern, Levering, and Levering, *The Kennedy Crisis*, 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵ Paterson, *Kennedy's Quest for Victory*, 38.

Therefore, even as Kennedy encouraged an increase in military spending, he also pressed for negotiations. In addition, JFK told Americans to protect themselves in case of nuclear war, though Paterson does not detail the public's reaction to this sentiment. Scholars repeatedly emphasize the leaders' reactions, but give no assessment of public response.

Although Paterson and Kern, Levering, and Levering contribute a critical assessment of President Kennedy to the historiography, Craig notes, "Over the past decade or so, however, a new appreciation of Kennedy's foreign policies has emerged."¹⁶ Therefore, biases about Kennedy have shifted for the second time since his death fifty years ago. As a contemporary historian, Craig includes himself in having a "new appreciation" for Kennedy. Craig asserts that even though JFK used "hawkish" language, he successfully kept America out of war.¹⁷ Kennedy placated Americans with his tough stance, while at the same time, he explored ways to avoid war. In his article, "We Seek Peace, But We Shall Not Surrender': JFK's Use of Juxtaposition for Rhetorical Success in the Berlin Crisis," Kevin W. Dean agrees with Craig. Dean insists that it was Kennedy's rhetoric of "standing firm while seeking peace through discourse with the Soviets" that won him public approval.¹⁸

A significant amount of historians have examined the Berlin crisis, but this thesis will improve on the literature by researching the subject with a different focus. I will add to the literature by looking at the effect the Berlin Wall had on American public perception.

¹⁶ Craig, "Kennedy's International Legacy, Fifty Years On," 1369.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1374.

¹⁸ Kevin W. Dean, "'We Seek Peace, But We Shall Not Surrender': JFK's Use of Juxtaposition for Rhetorical Success in the Berlin Crisis," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 21, No. 3 (1991): 541.

By doing so, the thesis should provide more insights into the JFK mystique and decision-making in the Kennedy era.

Chapter I

President John F. Kennedy's Public Releases: "We seek peace—but we shall not surrender"

With the erection of the Berlin Wall, President Kennedy responded to the crisis publicly in speeches, press conferences, and interviews. Americans understood the significance of the Berlin crisis based on the amount Kennedy discussed the topic. The events relating to Berlin provide background to Kennedy's speeches. As previously mentioned, Khrushchev unveiled the Berlin Ultimatum declaring a free Berlin in 1958, almost three years before the Vienna Conference in June 1961, when the ultimatum was revived. By the end of July, Kennedy warned the American public of the dangers that might ensue due to the Berlin crisis, encouraging civil defense measures by the populace. On August 13, the Soviets built the Berlin Wall, to which Secretary of State Dean Rusk responded calmly, but with indignation. On August 24, JFK warned the Soviets of the severe consequences of the erection of the Wall in a speech to Americans. Six days later, he announced a call-up of reservists to active duty while he also tried to negotiate with the Soviets. On September 25, 1961, Kennedy spoke before the United Nations about the violations the Soviets had committed in Berlin.

Moreover, at an October 11 press conference, Kennedy noted a defense budget increase, as well as the need for private fallout shelters. A few weeks later, on October 27, a climatic standoff occurred at the Wall. Both the Soviet and American armies stood ready for battle at Checkpoint Charlie over the Allies' right of access to East Berlin.¹⁹ Luckily, the event ended peacefully. November saw renewed worries over civil defense in his monthly

¹⁹ Ingo Wolfgang Trauschweizer, "Tanks at Checkpoint Charlie: Lucius Clay and the Berlin Crisis, 1961–62," *Cold War History* 6, no. 2 (May 2006): *America: History and Life with Full Text*, EBSCOhost, 205.

press conferences. Kennedy gave a speech about diplomacy, followed by another speech regarding his fears of American extremism in the face of Berlin. At the end of November, a Soviet journalist interviewed the President about the crisis. November marks the end of the height of the Berlin Wall crisis—little information exists about Americans' opinions on Berlin in 1962. Kennedy stopped discussing the matter in his speeches and press conferences. Also, pollsters ceased asking Americans about Berlin, and there was little material directly related to Berlin in newspapers.

President Kennedy first addressed the public regarding the possibility of war with the Soviets over Berlin less than a month prior to the Berlin Wall. His fears stemmed from the Vienna Conference, when Khrushchev had threatened to disturb the peace in Berlin. Unlike in the June Vienna meeting, in July, Kennedy firmly responded to the Soviets regarding Berlin. He absolved America from any future blame of a war over Berlin; Moscow had initiated the crisis. JFK insisted, "We do not want to fight—but we have fought before."²⁰ Here, Kennedy's remark showed that the United States had unwillingly fought in wars before because of Germany, but both times, America emerged victorious. His comment—that America had not chosen to fight previously—may have served as a warning to Khrushchev that the United States was a powerful foe of the Soviets. Kennedy also stated, "Berlin is not part of East Germany, but a separate territory under the control of the allied powers." Thus, America would not allow the Soviets to threaten its legal right to access in the city. Therefore, JFK promised, "An attack in that city will be regarded as an

²⁰ John F. Kennedy, "Radio and television report to the American people on the Berlin crisis," *John F. Kennedy Library and Museum*, July 25, 1961, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-035-031.aspx>, 2.

attack upon us all.”²¹ Kennedy’s fierce language towards to the Soviets, along with the speech’s powerful passages, showed his intensity and his willingness to act militarily if the crisis deepened.

Furthermore, Kennedy forced the Kremlin to acknowledge that the United States was strengthening its military. The second half of the speech not only addressed America’s upcoming military preparations for the Soviet’s benefit, but it also readied Americans for the looming sacrifices that may arise from this crisis. JFK maintained that he would not hesitate to do anything in his power to keep the peace, including using “more men, more taxes, control or other new powers” to prosecute the Cold War and deal with the crisis.²² He contended that with the six billion dollar increase in budget spending since his inauguration in January, the American public might have to pay new taxes. Few presidents in history have admitted to a tax increase and could make it sound as patriotic as Kennedy did! He also illuminated the country’s need for civil defense, including public fallout shelters and available resources in case of a nuclear attack. This speech is impressive in that it discussed the possible upcoming dangers, although some may say to the point of fear-mongering. At the same time, Kennedy showed his, and America’s, strong-will. He dedicated this lengthy address solely to the topic of Berlin before it became a primary concern for Americans. He concluded the speech with this potent sentence: “We seek peace—but we shall not surrender.”²³

Once the Soviets created the barrier, Kennedy remained silent on the subject until August 24, thirteen days after the Wall went up. Instead, Secretary of State Dean Rusk

²¹ Kennedy, “Report to the American people on the Berlin crisis,” 1, 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

released a statement the day the GDR constructed the Wall: “These violations of existing agreements will be the subject of vigorous protest through appropriate channels.” Although this language was strong diplomatically, the Kennedy administration’s comment may have been seen as politically weak as Americans likely noted little action from the White House but “protest.”²⁴ JFK finally offered a statement on Berlin, a single paragraph that gave the Soviets a simple “warning.” He vaguely informed the public of the “consequences” that would befall the Soviet Union if it breached access to West Berlin.²⁵ This militaristically feeble statement was reiterated in his July speech, but to a less intimidating extent.

President Kennedy’s next scheduled speech on Berlin occurred on September 25, 1961 in New York City, before the United Nations. This speech included calls for world arms reduction and maintained that the West should not abandon Berlin. Kennedy vilified the Russian blockade in Berlin. He appealed to world public opinion by discussing the Soviet Union’s illegal wall, which violated World War II treaties. The American President implored the Soviets to accept a “peaceful agreement,” but the United States “resolved to defend, whatever means are forced upon.”²⁶ Kennedy wanted the world to know: “We cannot surrender the freedom of these people for whom we are responsible.”²⁷ He repeated the determination that Americans heard in the July speech—the United States would defend Berlin, even if it meant war, over Russian threats.

²⁴ Dean Rusk, *United States-Department of State*, August 13, 1961, 776.

²⁵ John F. Kennedy, “Statement on Berlin Wall,” August 24, 1961. Quoted in Theodore C. Sorensen, *Let the word go forth: the speeches, statements, and writings of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 263.

²⁶ John F. Kennedy, “General Assembly of the United Nations,” September 25, 1961, Public Papers, 1961. Quoted in Theodore C. Sorensen, *Let the word go forth: the speeches, statements, and writings of John F. Kennedy*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 383.

²⁷ Kennedy, “General Assembly of the United Nations.” Quoted in Sorensen, *Let the word go forth*, 382.

Although Kennedy spoke about Berlin in his October press conference, he did not publically acknowledge Berlin throughout that month. He returned to the subject with vigor, however, on November 16, when he spoke of America's need for "diplomacy and defense."²⁸ This speech had a more discouraged feel; Kennedy pleaded with Americans to understand the United States' position. He reminded the public: "There cannot be an American solution to every world problem." In the 1960s, America could not claim to be the world's sole superpower as it no longer was the only nation that had nuclear weapons or benefited from a successful economy. JFK critiqued the public's cries either to surrender or to disavow negotiations. If he listened to the former's criticism, the United States would be appeasing its enemy, and if he listened to the latter's, America "would be at war today." Both extremes would "lead to disaster." Kennedy asked the public for a middle ground and told his audience that he would "negotiate freely, but we shall not negotiate freedom."²⁹ He promised that the United States would not start a war, but it would react aggressively if the Soviets attacked. Nonetheless, by telling the public that the United States would increase arms to "maintain peace," he disregarded his pleas to the United Nations about arms reduction.³⁰ This speech revealed the impact of the harsh criticism that Kennedy received at home. Kennedy needed public support to continue negotiating and remain in the fight over Berlin, especially after the disaster of the Bay of Pigs. The importance of public approval was paramount.

²⁸ John F. Kennedy, "The Role of Negotiations," November 16, 1961. Quoted in Theodore C. Sorensen, *Let the word go forth: the speeches, statements, and writings of John F. Kennedy*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 395.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 394, 395, 396.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 393.

Furthermore, only two days after Kennedy spoke on “The Role of Negotiations,” he again addressed “The Voices of Extremism,” regarding the public’s uncompromising views. He showed frustration with the American cynicism and spoke of the risks of fanaticism. He shared his beliefs that “patriotic” national “confidence,” not “suspicion” made America “great.” Kennedy attempted to encourage Americans to consider the fact that they were all on the side of liberty, and thus on the same side of the issues. He contended that most Americans do not “lack the will of wisdom,” so he questioned why various people leaned towards an extremist agenda.³¹ This speech seems similar to the one just days prior; he asked the American public to trust his judgments regarding negotiations over Berlin.

By the end of November, Kennedy stopped focusing on Berlin in his speeches. On November 25, he did, however, grant an interview with a Soviet newspaper, which was then disseminated throughout America and the Soviet Union. Russian journalist Aleksei Adzhubei, who was also Khrushchev’s son-in-law, interviewed Kennedy for the newspaper, *Izvestia*, “in the first presidential interview ever granted [to] a Russian newsman.”³² Kennedy told Adzhubei that he accepted when a country chose communism, but he would not consent to forced communism, in a veiled reference to Berlin.³³ Kennedy’s insistence revealed the importance of free elections. Kennedy told of his motivation to “prevent another war arising out of Germany.” When Adzhubei spoke of the Soviet fear of a resurgent powerful Germany, Kennedy reminded the Soviets: “No one is ever going to

³¹ John F. Kennedy, “The Voices of Extremism,” November 18, 1961, Public Papers, 1961. Quoted in Theodore C. Sorensen, *Let the word go forth: the speeches, statements, and writings of John F. Kennedy*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 395, 397.

³² “Long Story,” *Time* 78, no. 22 (December 1961): 14. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

³³ This point may be debatable; history shows that the American government vehemently inhibited the spread of voluntary communism.

invade the Soviet Union again. There is no military power that can do that.”³⁴ Americans may have seen this admission as submissive to the Soviets by promising that they would not attack, regardless of the Wall.

News Conferences

Press conferences were especially significant during JFK’s presidency because of their popularity. He was the first president to conduct live press conferences, and the public loved them. The Kennedy Presidential Library notes that “A poll taken in 1961 indicated that 90 percent of those interviewed had watched at least one of JFK’s first three press conferences. The average audience for all the broadcast conferences was 18 million viewers.”³⁵ With such a wide viewership, his conferences likely influenced public opinion.

On August 30, 1961, Kennedy participated in his first conference in response to the Berlin Wall crisis. Reporters were particularly interested in whether negotiations would take place as the American president had suggested, or if conflict would result, as the Soviet Premier threatened. Kennedy presumed that force would be a “disaster” and that negotiations were necessary for the “human race.”³⁶ Although he talked of the importance of negotiations, he told reporters that he encouraged NATO to increase forces in Berlin since the United States had already increased reserves, aircrafts, ships, and military equipment in anticipation of a Soviet attack.³⁷ Kennedy was preparing for war in the event

³⁴ John F. Kennedy, “Continuing Dialogue,” November 25, 1961, Public Papers, 1961. Quoted in Theodore C. Sorensen, *Let the word go forth”: the speeches, statements, and writings of John F. Kennedy*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 266, 268.

³⁵ “John F. Kennedy and the Press,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/John-F-Kennedy-and-the-Press.aspx>.

³⁶ John F. Kennedy, “334 - The President's News Conference,” *The American Presidency Project*, August 30 1961, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8294>.

³⁷ Ibid.

negotiations failed. In this press conference, one out of five questions related to Berlin, showing that the reporters, and thus the public, were disturbed by the crisis.

President Kennedy's next general press conference did not take place for over a month, on October 11. Throughout his presidency, JFK held a conference on "an average of one every sixteen days."³⁸ Considering that he had no press conference in September may make one question the delay; was it his preoccupation with the Berlin crisis? A reporter immediately asked for an update on Berlin. Although he had said in the previous conference that he would seek negotiations, Kennedy responded that only "exploratory talks" with Moscow had occurred. He informed the public that with the "constant tension," fallout shelters functioned as the best option for protecting families. He admitted that because of the USSR, and its control over Berlin, Americans "live in the most dangerous time in the history of the human race."³⁹ This comment may have caused fear and may explain the public's general apprehension concerning the possibility of war. He further emphasized the government's preparation for war by announcing that an additional six billion dollars had been added to the defense budget since January.⁴⁰ In short, he desired peace, but his actions pointed toward imminent war.

In Kennedy's next press conference, in the first week of November, home defense took precedence over a specific concern with Berlin. One journalist noted that it "seems to have quieted down" in Berlin.⁴¹ When a reporter asked about the fallout shelter confusion

³⁸ "John F. Kennedy and the Press," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*.

³⁹ "News Conference 17, October 11, 1961," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*.

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/Press-Conferences/News-Conference-17.aspx>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ "News Conference 18, November 08, 1961," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*,

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/Press-Conferences/News-Conference-18.aspx>.

among the public, Kennedy explained the continuing trepidation over Berlin, admitting that it was not “until August that [shelters] became a matter of great public urgency.”⁴² The Berlin crisis prompted the need for civil defense due to the risk of nuclear war with the Soviets.

Kennedy’s November 29 press conference was the last one of the year. He referenced Berlin but emphasized it less than in previous conferences. The journalists reported that low morale existed among the reservists, and Kennedy ardently responded that they had been called up due to the clashes in Berlin. The reserves gave the United States the “choice between humiliation and a holocaust.”⁴³ Kennedy’s comment referenced that America would not have to use nuclear weapons, nor would they have to surrender if fighting broke out because reserved soldiers served on standby. Thus, Kennedy bolstered the military to avoid nuclear war, which is ironic because he attempted to achieve peace by increasing America’s power (though in this case, conventional not nuclear)—the very idea of the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, or MAD.⁴⁴

Kennedy also expressed his desire to improve NATO/Warsaw Pact relations “to increase harmony” at the negotiations over Berlin. He claimed to feel “anxious” to ensure access for West Berliners “without constant pressures, and without harassments which endanger their freedom.”⁴⁵ This statement was the first in which JFK acknowledged his worries over Berliners. General Lucius Clay asserted, “If West Germany lost faith in the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “News Conference 19, November 29, 1961,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum*, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/Press-Conferences/News-Conference-19.aspx>

⁴⁴ MAD was the doctrine followed during the Cold War. The United States and Soviet Union felt that their military strength would deter the other from war, leading to peace.

⁴⁵ “News Conference 19, November 29, 1961.”

United States, the country might change course and turn to neutralism and nationalism."⁴⁶

Kennedy sent Clay, a retired military governor, to Berlin as an ambassador because he was a popular figure in the city due to his leadership during the Berlin Airlift in 1948.⁴⁷ Clay's statement revealed Kennedy's dilemma: America needed to contain the Berliners, out of fear of their past nationalism, while keeping the West Germans allied with NATO. A neutral West Germany, not affiliated with NATO, might destabilize the balance of power in Europe. Therefore, Kennedy needed to appear committed to the city's cause, which was the reason he spoke passionately about Berliners' freedoms.

Moreover, in November, three months after the construction of the Wall, and with no new developments on the diplomatic front, Kennedy talked often about Berlin. He gave two speeches, two press conferences, and one international interview, all of which dealt with Berlin. The fact that he spoke so much about the crisis months after its start shows how concerned Americans felt about Berlin, especially after the tense standoff at Checkpoint Charlie that could have led to a nuclear holocaust in late October.

Finally, through speeches and press conferences, Kennedy told the public that America would negotiate to prevent war, but if the Soviets were imprudent and attacked, he would certainly engage in war, either conventional or nuclear. He warned Americans repeatedly to ready themselves for nuclear war by building fallout shelters. As historian Thomas Paterson asserts, Kennedy called for a significant military build-up, while also

⁴⁶ Trauschweizer, "Tanks at Checkpoint Charlie," 213.

⁴⁷ The Berlin Airlift occurred in 1948 when the Soviets first blockaded Berlin from the Western powers. In this original Berlin crisis, America reacted strongly to the Soviet offensive and came out of the conflict victoriously by airlifting food and supplies to the people of Berlin.

calling for negotiations.⁴⁸ Such a contradictory policy caused confusion among Americans; thus, the reporter's constant questioning of Kennedy's actions makes sense.

⁴⁸ Paterson, *Kennedy's Quest for Victory*, 45.

Chapter II

Editorials in Newspapers and Magazines:

“What is there to negotiate?”

This chapter examines the effect of magazines on public opinion as each periodical had a political bias. Thus, magazines’ political affiliations may have swayed Americans’ beliefs. For example, the *National Review* took a conservative line; G.H. Nash attributed the “cohesive intellectual force on the Right in the 1960s and 1970s” to this magazine.⁴⁹ Distributed every week, the *National Review* influenced conservative thought, and thus public opinion, since it ran many editorials on the news. During the Berlin crisis, most of the articles focused on editorials’ disapproval of Kennedy’s “appeasement” policies and America’s lack of action in West Germany.

In the August 19, 1961 issue, the *National Review* released three separate articles on Berlin. The amount of statements on Berlin shows the importance of the issue in the days that followed the construction of the Wall. Two of its regular columns reveal the editorialists’ opinions on Kennedy’s management of Berlin.⁵⁰ “This Week” suggested that while JFK spoke with “resolute firmness,” he “evad[ed] firm decisions.”⁵¹ “At Home” also acknowledged that the President “talk[ed] big,” however, he seemed ready to “barter away rights” of the Allies. The columnist worried that compromise would mean surrender in another area, concluding that “American prestige will slump.”⁵² The last article addressed Khrushchev’s role in the crisis. The journalist believed that the Soviet Premier would not

⁴⁹ G.H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 153. Quoted in Susan Currie Sivek, “Editing Conservatism: How *National Review* Magazine Framed and Mobilized a Political Movement,” *Taylor & Francis Group* 11, issue 3, (July 21, 2008): 248, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15205430701791030#tabModule>.

⁵⁰ Each issue had regular columns, but the magazine did not provide the authors’ identities.

⁵¹ *The National Review*, This Week, August 19, 1961, 1.

⁵² *The National Review*, At Home, August 19, 1961, 4, 5.

go to war over Berlin; only if America abandoned the city would Khrushchev be able to take Berlin.⁵³ Within a week of the crisis, the *National Review* harshly criticized Kennedy's actions (or lack of), even though the short time period provided him little opportunity to "do something."⁵⁴

The next week's issue, the article, "Bankruptcy in Berlin," examined America's "unrealistic" policy concerning Berlin, a policy the author referred to as "Containment—coexistence—appeasement." The editorialist suggested that this policy, which had been in effect for the last fifteen years, led to the Berlin crisis. At this point, the United States was simply "waiting for the dust to settle," per usual.⁵⁵ The author concluded by asserting that America should encourage revolts under the East German regime to tear it apart from the inside. The editorialist of "Closer and Closer" agreed; Kennedy had dawdled over the crisis. According to the columnist, Khrushchev believed that if he closed the western frontier, "Kennedy would do nothing." By allowing Khrushchev to build the wall, Kennedy supposedly handed the Soviets a victory. The editorialist believed a new policy was in order to "change our ways" even it meant failure.⁵⁶ The author believed that America should use force for retaliation purposes.

Like the other editorialists, the author of "At the Ramparts We Fall" wanted Kennedy to "do something." For example, the West could have refused "to respect the boundary blockades."⁵⁷ The writer offered several directives for the United States,

⁵³ *The National Review*, Editorials, "Khrushchev Bores," August 19, 1961, 3.

⁵⁴ I use "do something," "do nothing," and "stay tough" colloquially, as this language is that of the editorials and letters to the editors.

⁵⁵ *The National Review*, Editorials, "Bankruptcy in Berlin," August 26, 1961, 112.

⁵⁶ *The National Review*, Editorials, "Closer and Closer," September 09, 1961, 149.

⁵⁷ *The National Review*, Editorials, "At the Ramparts We Fall," September 02, 1961, 2.

including an embargo and sending journalists to Berlin for a “truth airlift.”⁵⁸ But the author disappointedly assumed that Kennedy would “do nothing” in Berlin.⁵⁹

On October 7, a few weeks after Kennedy’s U.N. speech, the *National Review’s* “In Vino Veritas” charged that Kennedy would give “maximum concessions” in negotiations by merely seeking access to West Berlin. The writer insisted that these compromises seemed to lead to the Soviets receiving 90% of what they had asked. The columnist felt assured of the outcome of the crisis if Kennedy took no action.⁶⁰ Actually, in Kennedy’s UN address, little evidence existed that he would give “maximum concessions,” although he did repeat the importance of free access by the Allies to Berlin. His primary concern regarding the speech was establishing the illegality of the Soviet’s actions in Berlin in order to receive world support. If the Soviets restricted access, Kennedy repeated that this action would lead to war. Thus, because JFK’s strongest point embraced this notion of unobstructed access, this editorialist assumed that Kennedy did not care about other freedoms in Berlin.

In contrast to the conservative *National Review*, *The Progressive* had a liberal bias. The magazine only issued editions once a month, thus yielding less material on Berlin than other magazines. The articles pertaining to Berlin represented an extremely pro-Kennedy stance. The magazine desired disarmament and negotiation in regard to the crisis; issues that the President also supported.

The articles repeatedly dismissed the claim that negotiating or compromising led to appeasement. For example, in the August edition, the author declared that being reasonable was “interpreted as surrender and appeasement.” Unfortunately for the United

⁵⁸ The “truth airlift” refers to the Berlin Airlift in 1948.

⁵⁹ *The National Review*, “At the Ramparts We Fall,” 3.

⁶⁰ *The National Review*, Editorials, “In Vino Veritas,” October 07, 1961, 221.

States, some of its politicians were “trigger-happy.”⁶¹ The commentator advocated for Democratic Senator Mike Mansfield’s idea of freedom for the whole city to create alternatives to nuclear war. Furthermore, the September article, by James P. Warburg, repeated Mansfield’s policies for both Germanies to be “militarily neutralized.”⁶² Again, Warburg scoffed at the idea that this policy steered towards appeasement. Both authors believed in the need for negotiations to solve the crisis, using new solutions.

The November edition of *The Progressive* responded to Kennedy’s complaints to the public about the accusation of appeasement. In “Flight from Reality,” the author echoed Kennedy’s frustration with the “know-nothing cries of ‘appeasement.’” The editorialist encouraged JFK to “talk sense” into the “trigger-happy press” to achieve a negotiated settlement.⁶³ This liberal magazine feared the American warmongers, making reference numerous times to such phrases as “trigger-happy” politicians and media. The author also scrutinized “Kennedy’s vigorous endorsement” for shelters in case of fallout, which the article describes as only “delaying death.”⁶⁴ Interestingly, however, the writer blames the press, not JFK, for exaggerating the need of these bunkers, especially when they would serve little purpose. *The Progressive* found no fault with President Kennedy on the Berlin matter.

While Karl E. Meyer’s “Waiting for Kennedy” also felt that the shelter program “had a chilling effect” on the populace, and criticized Kennedy’s U.N. speech as “poorly

⁶¹ *The Progressive*, Editorials, “Standing Firm in Berlin,” August 1961, 3. *The Progressive* only listed the names of some of the authors; I presume the magazine only provided the names of the non-regular columnists. I supply the names when *The Progressive* provides them.

⁶² James P. Warburg, *The Progressive*, Editorials, “Opportunity in Berlin,” September 1961, 11.

⁶³ *The Progressive*, Editorials, “Flight from Reality,” November 1961, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

organized,” he did contend that the address allowed a welcome “opening for negotiation.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, Meyer characterized the President’s Cold War problems in Cuba and Berlin as “bad luck.”⁶⁶ These articles, although few in number, signify Kennedy’s influence on those who were only able to see him as a noble liberal leader.

Another liberal magazine, *The Nation*, possessed an unexplained sentiment of discouragement. The general content indicated that the magazine supported negotiations and general disarmament. The editorialists, however, did not think these options would be viable because the situation had already escalated due to the Berlin crisis. The editorialist fearfully predicted an international holocaust “by one trigger-happy finger.”⁶⁷ From August to October the mood perceptibly shifted from moderate to absolute hopelessness on the subject of disarmament, due to the Berlin Wall crisis. A September article, “Now What,” asked “What is there to negotiate?”⁶⁸ The author questioned negotiations because America was already losing; the USSR had more bargaining chips since the Wall already divided the city. The United States would need to relinquish something simply to return to the status quo. The editorialist despairingly insisted that it was too late for success in Berlin; only President Eisenhower could have done something years ago. This bleak interpretation of the crisis reinforced the magazine’s hopeless tone.

Furthermore, the articles in *The Nation* explored ways to solve the crisis using what the *National Review* deemed “maximum concessions.”⁶⁹ “Statesmen in Strait Jackets” contended that Kennedy needed to be “frank” with West Germans—that the East would be

⁶⁵ His timing as president in these uncertain ages may indeed be “bad luck,” but I argue that Kennedy created his luck in Cuba and had already been warned about Berlin.

⁶⁶ Karl E. Meyer, *The Progressive*, Editorials, “Waiting for Kennedy,” September 1961, 12, 14.

⁶⁷ *The Nation*, Editorials, “No Disarmament for US,” October 28, 1961, 308.

⁶⁸ *The Nation*, Editorials, “Now What” September 16, 1961, 150.

⁶⁹ *The National Review*, “In Vino Veritas,” 221.

legitimately recognized — ending faith in reunification.⁷⁰ If Kennedy wanted to maintain the West's right to access, he would need the courage to defy public opinion, especially since JFK had very high approval ratings at this time. Three weeks after the magazine's staff suggested more frankness on behalf of Kennedy, the article, "The President and the People," explained that the President's popularity stemmed from "sentimental reasons" because he had produced no obvious successes. Nonetheless, the author agreed with the previous article that Kennedy had to publically convey the realities of compromise so Americans would not have to "die for Berlin," or "be pushed around."⁷¹ In addition, the magazine again insisted on East German recognition with negotiations. These October articles indicated that if Kennedy had explained the harsh realities of the Wall to Americans, then JFK would be able to submit to some Soviet demands, and ease the crisis.

Moreover, the magazine seemed bitter against the citizens of Berlin. In "We Talk Too Much," the author declared that the United States owed West Germany nothing, especially because of its belligerent past. *The Nation* published the article in September, after Vice President Lyndon Johnson and General Lucius Clay travelled to Berlin with American promises to protect the city. The commentator angrily asserted that LBJ should not be treating Berliners as Americans, who he was "duty bound to serve."⁷² In addition, the article, "The Lame Duck Comest," does not offer a positive view of the West German government. The critique questioned the rumors of Konrad Adenauer, the West German chancellor, coming to the United States to "lay down the law to Kennedy."⁷³ The author

⁷⁰ *The Nation*, Editorials, "Statesmen in Strait Jackets," October 07, 1961, 218.

⁷¹ *The Nation*, Editorials, "The President and the People," October 21, 1961, 257.

⁷² *The Nation*, Editorials, "We Talk Too Much," September 21, 1961, 110.

⁷³ *The Nation*, Editorials, "The President and the People," October 21, 1961, 413.

argued that Kennedy now had to make policy in Washington, D.C., not in the West German capital of Bonn, as seemed the case throughout the crisis.

Time Magazine, which does not have an obvious bias, was owned and managed by conservatives. In 1960, in order to render the magazine more moderate, Republican owner, Henry Luce, contracted the allegedly moderate Otto Fuerbringer as managing editor. But “Fuerbringer proved far more conservative, partisan and patriotic than even [the former editor],” writes a journalism historian.⁷⁴ Although the magazine’s editorials rarely mentioned Kennedy, they leaned slightly to the right in declaring the illegality and immorality of the Soviet Union’s actions, additionally suggesting the United States needed to “stay tough” on the issue.

Several of the *Time* articles determined that the United States must be firm on the Berlin crisis. The first article on the Berlin Wall, “Fait Accompli in Berlin” came out on August 25. It described how the West was “caught flat-footed” when the Wall went up because no contingency plan existed. The United States did not react for several days, only revealing its “indecision.” Finally, the United States showed that it would “defend Berlin’s independence” by sending General Clay and Vice President Johnson to the city; but the author believed that the government needed to implement more aggressive policy.⁷⁵ A month later, the article, “Foul Winds,” deemed that “any show of weakness by the United States would be disastrous.”⁷⁶ The author believed that Russia tried to incite fear in Americans and “hoped to drive the US” out of Berlin. This Cold Warrior author agreed with

⁷⁴ Devan L. Bissonette, “Between Silence and Self-Interest,” *Journalism History* 35, no. 2 (S2009): 63. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, EBSCOhost.

⁷⁵ *Time*, Editorials, “Fait Accompli in Berlin,” August 25, 1961, 13, 14.

⁷⁶ *Time*, Editorials, “Foul Winds,” September 15, 1961, 21.

Kennedy's statement: "The US will use arms to honor its commitments."⁷⁷ Showing strength was the best option.

Time's "Response to the Power Play" declared that America must not back down to Khrushchev's demands. The writer insisted that the Soviet Union resumed nuclear testing to "intimidate the US" so that America would surrender Berlin. However, Khrushchev failed at "destroying the nerve of the US." Instead, angry Americans grew more willing "to stand up to Khrushchev and that Berlin was the place" for this showdown.⁷⁸ Like "Response to the Power Play," "The Wall" revealed the magazine's disgust with the Soviets and their East German puppet, Walter Ulbricht. The editorialist proclaimed that Moscow's illegal and immoral actions in Berlin revealed the "failure of East Germany's communist system." Ulbricht, who colleagues described as "relentless" and coldblooded," craved the leadership of a sovereign East Germany, as Khrushchev promised in 1958. The Soviets' "massive bluff" in Berlin had only succeeded because of the West's "wait and see reaction."⁷⁹ Like the other editorialists in *Time*, this author wanted American action.

In contrast, the September 1 articles, "The Tense Hours" and "Guns at the Wall," complimented the U.S. government for its rapid response when Khrushchev threatened to cut off air access to West Berlin. These editorials determined that the Kennedy administration had "acted swiftly" and issued a statement that was the "toughest of the cold war." The statement included a proclamation that if the USSR blocked access, it would lead to "aggression for which the Soviet government would bear full responsibility."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Time*, Editorials, "Response to the Power Play," September 08, 1961, 19.

⁷⁹ *Time*, Editorials, "The Wall," August 25, 1961, 20, 22, 21.

⁸⁰ *Time*, Editorials, "The Tense Hours," September 01, 1961, 9.

“Guns at the Wall” revealed the Allies’ tough reply to the threat when “within hours a thousand heavily armed Allied troops [...] were taking positions” at the border. The editorialist reported that while the situation ended peacefully with both Soviet and American leaders sending strong notes of protest to one another, the “risk of serious accident” was present. These articles commended America’s response, as the government finally did “something.”⁸¹

These magazines may have directly influenced public opinion, especially when considering that about a half of a million Americans read each magazine.⁸² Looking at these magazines’ political affiliations, I argue that the editorialists used the Berlin crisis for political reasons, as we still see today. In considering the articles, one could assume that if the writer generally supported the President, he/she would support him throughout the crisis. The same holds true for Kennedy’s opposition. While figures (or letters to the editor) are not available to gauge the public’s response to these articles, we can nevertheless presume that those who subscribed to these magazines were in general accord with the opinions expressed in them. In any case, the viewpoints in the magazines reveal journalistic public opinion on the Berlin Wall crisis.

⁸¹ *Time*, Editorials, “Guns at the Wall,” September 01, 1961, 18, 19.

⁸² Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1956), 97.

Chapter III

American Public Reaction through Letters in Newspapers:

“If Americans don’t care about the freedom of others then they don’t really care about their own freedom.”

The views of the somewhat educated masses can be assessed through the “Letters to the Editor” section of newspapers in various regions of the country. Articles from newspapers in the West, Midwest, South and East are represented. Letters can also tell us how newspapers with clear political biases tried to influence their readers. Historians Kern, Levering, and Levering write about the newspapers’ political ideologies during this time. Some newspapers were more conservative or liberal than others. For example, regarding the Berlin crisis “clear tilting occurred in the case of the [*Chicago Tribune*, which favored conservative sources on the issues, and the [*Washington Post*, which favored liberal sources.”⁸³

The major newspaper editorialists of this time may have influenced the contents of the letters. The regularity that Walter Lippmann, Drew Pearson, and James Reston appeared in the editorial sections, and the amount the letters referenced them, showed their influence. “One of the most respected and influential political writers of his time, Mr. Lippmann was for millions of readers the conscience of the nation,” wrote journalist James Reston upon Lippmann’s death. Regarding Berlin, Lippmann, a liberal journalist, believed America needed to negotiate with the Soviets because nuclear war was not a feasible option.⁸⁴ Another liberal journalist, Drew Pearson, interviewed Khrushchev in the Soviet Union during the crisis. Although Pearson knew the “public would react angrily”—which

⁸³ Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering, and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crisis: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 78.

⁸⁴ Walter Lippmann, Editorials, *Boston Globe*, October 17, 1961.

proved to be true—he repeatedly published columns about Khrushchev desiring peace.⁸⁵ To the disdain of American hardliners, Pearson did not believe Berlin was worth a war.⁸⁶ In addition, by the time James Reston, who was described as “hostile” to communism, wrote about Berlin, he had already won two Pulitzer Prizes for journalism. He was a highly respected reporter and columnist for the *New York Times*.⁸⁷ Concerning Berlin, he thought that Khrushchev was misguided regarding Kennedy; Kennedy would not be bullied, nor would he “be dishonored without a fight.”⁸⁸ These journalists all brought the issues of Berlin to the households of Americans.

West

The Western states, located the furthest from the crisis point and the centers of American power, reveal wide-ranging views about the erection of the Berlin Wall. Western historian Earl Pomeroy revealed the “traits of westerners [...] seemed to dispose them to take part in politics.” He attributes their higher voting rates, compared to the rest of the United States, to their high level of education.⁸⁹ Although their views were wide-ranging, most Westerners leaned toward conservatism; three of the last four “major conservative presidential candidates of the 1960s” came from the West.⁹⁰ The 1960 election held consistent with this trend; 24 Western electoral districts voted for Kennedy, while

⁸⁵ Specifically, Mississippians of the *Clarion Ledger*, harshly criticized Pearson in the letters to the editor section, even describing him as “lying leftist Drew Pearson.”

⁸⁶ Drew Pearson, Editorials, *Miami Herald*, September 2, 1961; Jack Anderson, “Drew Pearson: A Great Reporter Dies” *The Washington Post*, September 2, 1969.

⁸⁷ R. W. Apple Jr., “James Reston, a Giant of Journalism, Dies at 86,” *New York Times*, December 7, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/07/us/james-reston-a-giant-of-journalism-dies-at-86.html?src=pm&pagewanted=1>.

⁸⁸ James Reston, Editorials, *New York Times*, September 17, 1961.

⁸⁹ Earl Pomeroy, *The American Far West in the twentieth century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 301.

⁹⁰ Kurt Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement, 1945-1966* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), xxi.

Republican candidate Richard Nixon won the majority— 35 of the districts, including electoral districts in Oregon, Arizona, and Utah.⁹¹ The newspapers that represent the West include the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Phoenix Gazette*, and the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. These newspapers allow a comparison of citizens in large metropolitan cities, such as Los Angeles, to the medium-sized urban center of Phoenix, and finally to the small and remote Honolulu.

The *Los Angeles Times* highlighted Californians' various political opinions. This state was a "major zone of attraction for internal migrants," as well as for Asian and Latin American immigrants. By the mid-twentieth century, this diversity led to California becoming America's most populous and richest state.⁹² While California was relatively conservative, the right wing movement "began in earnest in 1958" when the extremist Republican majority leader of the U.S. Senate, William F. Knowland, ran for governor.⁹³ Nonetheless, Knowland lost in 1958, as did Nixon in 1960; Kennedy won in California by an incredibly close margin.⁹⁴

Furthermore, many of the *Los Angeles Times* letters stressed preparation for war, while others advocated for the United Nations to take charge in Berlin. Several letters asserted that Kennedy had not been aggressive enough in Berlin, and now, war may be necessary. California citizen W.M. Towle suggested that the United States send more troops and weapons to Berlin to show Khrushchev its seriousness. He asserted that the

⁹¹ Georgianna F. Rathburn, ed., *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1961), 1025. Nixon hailed from the West (California), which may have abetted his victory in the West.

⁹² Michael Bradshaw, *Regions and Regionalism in the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 50.

⁹³ Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right*, xvi.

⁹⁴ Rathburn, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1025.

“best way to avoid war is to be prepared for it.”⁹⁵ Mrs. J.S. Conner agreed with Towle, as she maintained that if the United States showed that “we intend to fight, we may not have to.”⁹⁶ Along the same attitude, Arthur Schifferman, a World War II army veteran, detested the idea of disarmament as “fuzzy thinking,” since disarmament would lead to America’s lack of preparation against the Soviets.⁹⁷ He admitted that the world should implement universal disarmament, but only once “the Kremlin is brought to their (sic) knees.”⁹⁸ Jim Gibson of Los Angeles angrily questioned how two-thirds of Americans thought that the Kennedy administration handled Berlin well. Gibson believed that the United States should have torn down “the first strand” of wire along the border. He claimed that negotiations would not improve America’s chance of victory, as it was now too late.⁹⁹ The letter, “Indefensible?” condescendingly argued that the administration used “Liberal catchphrases” including “strategically unimportant [or] indefensible” when describing how America surrendered to the communists.¹⁰⁰ These Californians felt dissatisfied with Kennedy’s strategy in Berlin and wanted him to apply methods of war.

Many of the more pacifist readers of the *Los Angeles Times* thought that the United Nations should settle the Berlin crisis. Margaret Simkin, a member of the Communist Party USA, argued that U.N. troops should enter Berlin due to the imminence of nuclear war. Then, American and Soviet troops should leave, an act that would safeguard the Free World

⁹⁵ W.M. Towle, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, September 04, 1961, B5.

⁹⁶ J. S. Conner, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 1961, B5.

⁹⁷ “Obituaries: Dec. 31, 2009: Grizzell, Young, Patrone, Cluney, Bender, Schifferman,” *Denver Post*, December 31, 2009, http://www.denverpost.com/rss/ci_14099263?source=rss.

⁹⁸ Arthur E. Schifferman, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1961, B5.

⁹⁹ Jim Gibson, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1961, A4.

¹⁰⁰ James G. Hodges, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1961, B5.

against communism and a militarized Germany.¹⁰¹ Other letters featured in September, “A Free City” and “U.N. is More, Much More,”¹⁰² determined that the world established the United Nations after World War II to achieve peace. Thus, the security organization should take control of Berlin until it existed as a free, democratic city. These letters demonstrated the significant faith in liberal internationalist solutions to the crisis.

Across the Pacific Ocean in Hawaii, the readers of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* felt terrified of nuclear war, and more ardently desired fallout shelters than the Los Angelenos. The majority of Hawaiians, based on the letters, certainly thought the United States would soon become involved in nuclear war. Thus, many citizens sought fallout shelter information or government help. On August 18, a woman writing under the pen name, “An Optimistic Housewife,” noted that “since President Kennedy’s speech on the Berlin crisis, most citizens have taken an increased interest in the Civil Defense Program.”¹⁰³ She worried primarily for her and her neighbors’ inability to hear the warning sirens that would notify citizens of an attack. She directly referenced Kennedy’s July speech, showing that Americans supported his views that imminent world attack would occur. John Kudar also believed in the need for civil defense; Hawaii needed “a serious study of the most effective civil defense system [for] reluctant Americans.”¹⁰⁴ Kudar feared nuclear war and wanted instruction on useful means for survival. Other Hawaiians wrote letters, providing information to help Americans survive, including “Ideal Survival Food.” This letter reminded Americans that they not only had to store food, but also that specific “survival

¹⁰¹ Margaret T. Simkin, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, September 06, 1961, B5. Simkin did not specify that she was a member of the Communist Party in this letter.

¹⁰² F.M. Schlegel, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1961, B5; Catherine Gammon, Letters to the Editor, *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1961, B4.

¹⁰³ An Optimistic Housewife, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 18, 1961.

¹⁰⁴ John C. Kudar, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 02, 1961.

foods” should be set aside. Even though nuclear war was “not pleasant to think about,” Americans needed to make the right preparations to stay alive.¹⁰⁵

Many letters begged the government for support with fallout shelters. On September 13, 1961, Herb Beyer shared his concerns regarding individual shelters—they were costly and difficult to build effectively enough to withstand nuclear disaster. He suggested that since the President and Congress had dictated that fallout shelters were a national emergency, then they “should treat [the crisis] like a National Emergency” by helping to finance and construct shelters.¹⁰⁶ A letter from “Concerned Citizen” echoed this statement, declaring that “the duty of the state [is] to protect its citizens.” The author, quite an alarmist, also noted that “the Governor warned that Hawaii may be an N-target and told the citizens to start preparing.”¹⁰⁷ This statement paralleled Kennedy’s calls for preparation, but further frightened Hawaiians because now, the state government suspected itself of being the target. Perhaps such strong sentiment “hit home” because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor twenty years before. Hawaiians were still traumatized by that event, and thus felt legitimately worried about another attack, regardless of the geographic fact that they were far from Russia.

Moreover, these Hawaiians discussed their preference for nuclear holocaust over forfeiting their freedom. A “Freedom Loving American” declared that the country needed to stand up for its principles; the United States must “make any and all sacrifices to protect our freedom [...] And if the only answer is going to be war, we are going to have to learn to

¹⁰⁵ Punchbowl, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 26, 1961.

¹⁰⁶ Herb Beyer, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 13, 1961.

¹⁰⁷ Concerned Citizen, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 19, 1961.

accept it.”¹⁰⁸ American principles were paramount. A Navy wife worried about the possibility of nuclear war but preferred that outcome to losing her freedoms. “Let’s prepare for a nuclear war with shelters and second strike capacity that would insure victory.”¹⁰⁹ Such were common views in Hawaii’s predominant military community, who were ready to mobilize to defend freedom in the Cold War.

Only a few of the Hawaiian letters regarded Berlin as the main component of the crisis. They suggested ways to solve the problem, often peacefully. On September 12, “An Adamant American” advocated for an economic blockade of the Soviets “to thwart many of their aggressive tendencies.”¹¹⁰ The blockade would consequently show Khrushchev the seriousness of America’s position. S.T.G. tendered another peaceful solution; the author offered that West Berliners move further west and out of East Germany. Thus, America would not appease, nor would it have to go to war.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Anthony Smolenski believed that “The whole Berlin crisis will be solved by negotiation and not warfare.”¹¹² Smolenski suggested that Americans cease alarming themselves over the danger of nuclear fallout. In addition, F.C.H. Davis responded to an editorial that critiqued Vice President Johnson’s actions in Berlin. “We need to present a united front, not a fearful plea for our individual welfare.”¹¹³ Interestingly, unlike the Los Angelenos, no Honolulu citizens suggested using the United Nations. Instead, their patriotic reaction showed the view that Americans needed to act as a nation to emerge from the crisis.

¹⁰⁸ Freedom Loving American, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 18, 1961.

¹⁰⁹ A 22-Year Old Mother and Wife of a Naval Officer, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, October 07, 1961.

¹¹⁰ An Adamant American, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 12, 1961.

¹¹¹ S.T.G., Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 26, 1961.

¹¹² Anthony Smolenski, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, October 06, 1961.

¹¹³ F.C.H Davis, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 03, 1961.

Finally, the people of Honolulu had varying views on Kennedy's handling of the crisis. The recent 1960 election correlated with these varying views of Kennedy; the results indicated that Hawaiians were exactly split between Kennedy and Nixon (Kennedy won by about a hundred votes).¹¹⁴ In Hawaii, Republicans controlled every legislature until 1955, but a year after the Berlin crisis, the Democrats led Hawaii.¹¹⁵ These 1960 election results and shift of party controls show the moderate political stance of Hawaiians. For example, in late August, two letters responded to an editorial that claimed that JFK was "not giving his all."¹¹⁶ But another letter, "Respite from Pressures," determined that Kennedy "concern[ed] himself with the welfare of our nation and the world every working minute."¹¹⁷ While both letters passionately believed that the President was working zealously on world issues, Colonel Upsilon of Hawaii believed that Kennedy failed to deal with the crisis effectively. He asserted, "Our President did the greatest disservice to his country when he pressed the panic button about fallout shelters."¹¹⁸ The Colonel believed that Kennedy wrongly placed fear in Americans; he should have instead warned the Soviets to build fallout shelters. In sum, the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin's* letters did not often emphasize Kennedy or the Berlin crisis, but rather more general viewpoints on principles and defense.

Another Western newspaper, *The Phoenix Gazette*, seemed to lean slightly to the conservative side of the political spectrum. In the presidential elections between 1952 and 1960, Arizonians consistently voted Republican by a wide margin.¹¹⁹ Unlike in Honolulu,

¹¹⁴ Rathburn, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1025. Hawaiians received statehood in 1960; thus, no election results exist prior to this election.

¹¹⁵ Pomeroy, *The American Far West in the twentieth century*, 304.

¹¹⁶ Peter Hidalgo, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 28, 1961.

¹¹⁷ Edward St. George, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, August 30, 1961.

¹¹⁸ Colonial Upsilon, Letters to the Editor, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, October 10, 1961.

¹¹⁹ Henrietta Poynter and Nelson Poynter, ed., *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1965), 67.

the majority of the newspapers' readers disliked the idea of fallout shelters, as they thought nuclear preparations showed signs of Kennedy appeasing the world. For example, John Grubyak wrote to explain his reasons for disapproving of JFK. The President's prestige was "hidden beneath the proposed fallout shelters." Grubyak believed that he "clearly shows bungling and weakness" with the Berlin crisis—he appeased the communists by not acting aggressively with the erection of the Wall.¹²⁰ In another October letter, William Edwards also believed that shelters showed "appeasement and surrender." He deemed, "The whole world wide panic is part of the present communist line."¹²¹ Moreover, Perry Caudill assumed that the government used fear tactics to make Americans "like a mole digging fallout shelters."¹²² Again, we see the Arizonans reject JFK's key position regarding fallout shelters. Many of the readers blamed Kennedy for the fallout issue, and did not support him on Berlin. Richard E. Neale, for instance, believed that the Soviets resumed nuclear testing "to frighten the free world into slavery through negotiations and concessions." Americans had thus already "fallen—filled with fear— for the trap of Nikky" by building cowardly fallout shelters.¹²³ Neale's letter, like many other Phoenix letters, despised the idea of fallout shelters.

Yet some of *The Phoenix Gazette* readers expressed the opposite reaction. For example, while most questioned the practicality of fallout shelters, Edward G. Koran supported shelters as a proper preparation for war. Koran believed that shelters deterred the Soviets from nuclear war because Americans felt protected by shelters, and thus they

¹²⁰ John S. Grubyak, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, October 07, 1961.

¹²¹ William H. Edwards, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, October 04, 1961.

¹²² Perry Caudill, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, October 31, 1961.

¹²³ Richard E. Neale, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, November 14, 1961. Some Americans gave Premier Khrushchev condescending nicknames to erode his power including Nikky and Mr. K, among many.

“[would] not submit.” He argued that shelters did not lead to appeasement because those who acted desperately, and who did not have shelters, were more willing to appease.¹²⁴ In addition, high school student Paul Schatt wanted state assistance with fallout shelters, believing that the government existed for the “protection of the people.”¹²⁵ Although many Americans agreed with this notion of government-built fallout shelters, especially in Hawaii, few Arizonans shared this sentiment in their letters. Running against negative opinion about JFK in the state, Louise Stewart supported the President and believed he could accomplish victory over Khrushchev. She complimented Kennedy’s “superb intelligence” and asserted, “He is doing his best to serve his country.” Now, Stewart reasoned, Kennedy simply needed to use that intelligence to “outsmart that cagey bully in the Kremlin.”¹²⁶ Thus, some Arizonans had faith that Kennedy could triumph in this Cold War crisis.

Finally, no consensus seems to exist regarding the West’s reaction to the Berlin crisis. Although many Americans did not want to help the Berliners, a few of *The Phoenix Gazette* readers opposed Berlin for a different reason: they believed Nazis ruled the West German government. “Where are the Nazis?” by Dorothy Formanack referenced a speech by Mr. William Shirer, claiming that Nazis held office in the Bonn government in West Germany. Formanack wanted the United States to immediately “abandon our efforts for a unified Germany.”¹²⁷ These letters reveal aspects of dual containment; in addition to Kennedy, Formanack also distrusted the Germans. In response, Stephen Flindt felt the

¹²⁴ Edward G. Koran, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, October 17, 1961.

¹²⁵ Paul Schatt, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, November 29, 1961. Schatt later became the editor of various Arizona newspapers, including the *Arizona Republic*.

¹²⁶ Louise Stewart, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, November 21, 1961.

¹²⁷ Dorothy M. Formanack, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, November 17, 1961. Shirer authored the famous book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in 1960.

same desire for “our disengagement from the Bonn government and an unfettered foreign policy of our own.”¹²⁸ This letter indicates that some worried over the resurgent power of Germany, and that the country had to be “contained” just as much as the communists. Thus, compared to other regions, the U.S. West cared less about Berlin, and more about fallout shelters and President Kennedy, in general. Again, this could be explained by the region’s distance from the Soviet Union and Berlin.

Midwest

Like the West, the Midwestern states had a more conservative reputation. In an article about the 1960 election results, *The New York Times* noted that Republicans “[swept] from Kansas to the West Coast in [an almost] unbroken grandeur.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, Midwesterner historian R. Douglas Hurt claims, “Midwesterners often gave more attention to local than international affairs—that is, to the tax rate than the possibility of nuclear war.” Hurt also contends that the region was “often called the ‘heartland’—that is, the most typical or American part of America.”¹³⁰ This claim of Americanism in the Midwest contradicts with another Midwesterner’s—historian Mary Nath’s— version. She asserts that growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, the region encapsulated “narrow conservatism, homogeneity, and an accompanying intolerance.”¹³¹ In order of city size, I compared newspapers in Chicago, Denver, and Omaha to examine their views on Berlin. Like the West’s opinions, some Midwesterners wanted war to prove America’s strength, while others looked for peaceful alternatives. In the letters, fewer

¹²⁸ Stephen Flindt, Letters to the Editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, November 22, 1961.

¹²⁹ Cabell Phillips, “About the Election: A Second Look,” *New York Times*, November 20, 1960, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹³⁰ Andrew R.L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray (eds), *The American Midwest: essays on regional history* (Indiana University Press, 2001), 174, 163.

¹³¹ Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest*, 31.

Americans from these cities approved of President Kennedy, correlating with the fact that only 36 Midwestern districts, including electoral districts in Indiana and Kansas, voted for Kennedy, while 93 voted for Nixon in 1960.¹³²

The Chicago Daily Tribune readers felt passionately about Berlin and wrote about the subject more than any other newspaper's readers. The newspaper opposed the Kennedy administration. "*Tribune* Republicanism was definitely of the Midwestern conservative variety," write three historians.¹³³ Although the newspaper was conservative, Chicagoans voted earnestly for Kennedy in the 1960 election. *The New York Times* attributed the city's Catholicism to the reason 64% of Chicagoans voted for him, while only 50% of Illinoisans supported JFK.¹³⁴ Kennedy's Catholicism may have especially played a role when one considers the residents of Illinois voted for the Republican Party in the elections prior to 1960.¹³⁵ In the Chicago newspaper, the conservative letters mainly claimed that America acted weak, and its leaders allowed the Soviets to claim a victory over Berlin. The majority of the letters demanded that the United States "do something" against the Soviets. C.E. Schulte and Mrs. Kathryn F. Hirn asserted that the United States lost when it waited to take action against the USSR. They questioned why the country had accepted the Wall; they instead demanded that America act aggressively "to combat the colonialism of Russia."¹³⁶ The writers of "American Silence" and "Nothing to Negotiate" angrily determined that the communists would win if America negotiated. JFK and the

¹³² Rathburn, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1025.

¹³³ Kern, Levering, and Levering, *The Kennedy Crisis*, 20.

¹³⁴ Phillips, "About the Election" *New York Times*, November 20, 1960.

¹³⁵ Poynter, *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964*, 67.

¹³⁶ Mrs. Kathryn F. Hirn, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, October 08, 1961, 20. See also C.E. Schulte, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, August 26, 1961, 14.

“Washington appeasers” appeared inadequate against Soviet power; therefore, they should refuse to negotiate.¹³⁷

While these letters established America’s weakness, “Back Bending” by John M. Radzinski, Jr. and a letter by Peter Wheeler Reiss, claimed that the United States bowed to communism. Reiss said that the “Kennedy administration is hopelessly confused” while it watched regions “fall to communism.”¹³⁸ Finally, Milenko Aleksich questioned America’s silence while the “captive nations of the Soviet Empire” lacked freedoms. Aleksich wanted the United States to “demand free elections” in Berlin.¹³⁹ These Chicago residents, disappointed by JFK, wanted the United States to act in Berlin.

Many of the September and October letters expressed little sympathy for the German people since they blamed them for the crisis. For example, Dallas Smythe believed the United States had been “brought to the brink of war” due to the Germans, especially West Germany Chancellor Adenauer, who was supposedly pulling them into war because of the upcoming election.¹⁴⁰ Like Smythe, John Waligora did not feel that the Germans deserved sympathy after having lost the war in 1945. Waligora wrote of the importance of keeping Germany divided because the Germans could try to destroy the United States again.¹⁴¹ Many Chicagoans heatedly responded to the letter, “Our Duty in Berlin,” which claimed the United States had “morality and [an] obligation” in Berlin.¹⁴² Renny Kershbaum, whose family died in the Nazi concentration camps, declared that the United

¹³⁷ Valerie Olin, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, October 23, 1961, 18.

¹³⁸ Peter Wheeler Reiss, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, October 27, 1961, 16. See also John M. Radzinski, Jr., Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, October 03, 1961, 10.

¹³⁹ Milenko D. Aleksich, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, August 23, 1961, 16.

¹⁴⁰ Dallas W. Smythe, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, September 03, 1961, 12. Smythe later became a leading researcher on mass communications regarding the political economy.

¹⁴¹ John Waligora, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, October 17, 1961, 18.

¹⁴² Rudolph Szewczyk, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribute*, October 21, 1961, n14.

States had no duty to the Berliners.¹⁴³ These letters evoke anger toward the Germans, and show that some Americans had no desire to help them. Regarding Berlin, the consensus in Illinois seemed negative; Chicagoans either criticized President Kennedy's actions, or they condemned the Germans.

Farther to the west, in Colorado, the *Denver Post's* "Open Forum" indicated that slightly more of the letters sought a show of strength, even if doing so meant war. Radys Kupper insisted that she preferred war to the "moral paralysis" of Americans. She tried to encourage other women to stand up for America's anti-atheist beliefs.¹⁴⁴ A college student, Robert Fleming, lamented the fact that the United States had developed into a "second-rate power." "No longer can we bow down," even if it means war.¹⁴⁵ Rodger Elliott seconded this notion because if the United States "backs down anymore [...] in Berlin—we will have lost the [the world's] respect."¹⁴⁶ In "Response of Angry Men," John C. Maraldo agreed with West Berlin mayor Willy Brandt that the United States should be making "more than diplomatic moves." He deemed negotiations an unreasonable option since the Kremlin would not budge on Berlin. Maraldo noted, "We must not fear to become aggressive [...] and to take the offensive."¹⁴⁷ In addition, M. Lee's "Positive Stand" protested Drew Pearson, an influential journalist, who had opined that Berlin was not worth the effort of a fight. Lee angrily retorted, "If Americans don't care about the freedom of others then they don't really care about their own freedom."¹⁴⁸ Letters often conjured up a patriotic response of

¹⁴³ Renny Kershenbaum, Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Tribune*, October 31, 1961, 16.

¹⁴⁴ Radys Kupper, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, September 07, 1961.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Fleming, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, September 10, 1961.

¹⁴⁶ Rodger N. Elliott, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, September 11, 1961.

¹⁴⁷ John C. Maraldo, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, September 12, 1961.

¹⁴⁸ M. Lee, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, August 29, 1961.

America's freedom and strength, while expressing embarrassment because of America's lack of action.

Letters on the other side of the crisis looked for ways to avoid war. As with many other newspapers, the pacifist letters of the *Denver Post* turned to the United Nations for help. "Innocent Victims," by M.G Frankel, worried about the children if the crisis turned to war, and thus, she begged her leaders to find a solution for peace. Citing the weakness of the U.N., Frankel nonetheless acknowledged that the United Nations needed to be "used and strengthened" in this crisis.¹⁴⁹ The letter-writer "M.E.G." agreed, believing that the world powers should use the U.N. if negotiations cannot be "reached satisfactorily." Conceding that if the United States could not "get absolute political freedom for the West Berliners [then America should] offer them economic help in rebuilding their city in West Germany territory." M.E.G., however, was not concerned with which viable solution emerged out of negotiations, as long as the United States did not "decimate the world on their behalf."¹⁵⁰ C.E. Lee added that the United Nations should supervise the complete demilitarization of Germany. That way, no "threat to either East or West" would exist, solving the crisis.¹⁵¹ Coloradans seemed divided about going to war or summoning the United Nations.

In another Midwestern town, Omaha, Nebraska, the *Omaha World Herald* may have been more representative of the region when compared to Chicago and Denver, as it characterized the majority of small cities and towns. Omaha produced a small newspaper; only the Sunday editions included the Letter to the Editor section. Nebraskans seemed to

¹⁴⁹ M.G Frankel, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, September 22, 1961.

¹⁵⁰ M.E.G., Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, September 04, 1961.

¹⁵¹ C.E. Lee, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, August 28, 1961.

desire war over surrendering Berlin, while others wanted their fellow Americans to support President Kennedy regarding his foreign policy decisions.

Many of the Nebraskans supported Berlin freedom, pledged to fight for it, and thought JFK unwilling to do so. R.O. Heister hoped that “negotiations will be successful [...] But we must not flinch” to fight if they fail. Heister believed that the United States could not hesitate to act because the “Berlin crisis is a trial of strength.” The author of this letter felt that the city should be free, even at the cost of America’s livelihood.¹⁵² Similarly, Leroy Miles supported the Berliners—their freedom was “worth a war.” Miles quoted a Bible passage that called for one to die for his/her friends.¹⁵³ His use of the Bible shows that many Midwesterners practiced Christianity zealously and used religion to reinforce their ideals, as with Berlin. Furthermore, Angelo Ferraro asserted that he would fight for world freedom. He declared that “I am ready to shoulder a gun even though I may die.”¹⁵⁴ In addition, several other Nebraskans wanted the United States to act, but did not explicitly want to fight. For example, James Nelson questioned why “we are about to alienate the good graces of Germany.” He did not understand the objective of leaving the city for the Soviets and wanted to help the Berliners. Although Nelson did not provide a solution, he opposed America’s containment of the Germanies.¹⁵⁵

Other letters referred to the United States as cowardly. Patricia G. Wilson claimed that, “America has simply lost its guts.” Furthermore, the U.S. “government aimed at selling out Americans to communism.”¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Omaha citizen Albert Walsh highlighted

¹⁵² R.O. Heister, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, September 03, 1961.

¹⁵³ Leroy Miles, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, September 03, 1961.

¹⁵⁴ Angelo Ferraro, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, October 22, 1961.

¹⁵⁵ James Nelson, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, October 01, 1961.

¹⁵⁶ Patricia G. Wilson, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, September 10, 1961.

America's lack of toughness in Berlin. He pointed to the administration's failures in Cuba, where Kennedy recklessly attempted to oust Fidel Castro at the Bay of Pigs; and in Laos, where Kennedy acted too cautiously and disengaged from the crisis. In both of the unsuccessful conflicts, the United States appeared to lose ground to communism. Walsh insisted, "We can quit worrying about war with Russia" because the government will "find something to surrender."¹⁵⁷ These letters viewed the Kennedy administration negatively and desired more action in Berlin.

Although few Nebraskans voted for Kennedy and its residents predominantly voted for the Republicans in the previous several elections, a few of the *Omaha World Herald* letters supported Kennedy.¹⁵⁸ These letters believed in uniting around the President. Larry Leslie declared that JFK "is the man [to defend the freedom of the United States] since he was chosen by the people."¹⁵⁹ He suggested that if Americans gave their full support, Kennedy could face Khrushchev successfully. Clarence McKibben also approved of "our fine young President" and he believed that Russia "cannot destroy our nation if we face our troubles united."¹⁶⁰ But such support was scant for JFK, as was mention of fallout shelters.¹⁶¹

Although Midwesterners were aware of the Berlin crisis, they did not explicitly mention the government's policies or Kennedy's speeches. For example, while Denver's readers supported U.N. aid in Berlin, none mentioned Kennedy's September U.N. address. Also, as previously mentioned, very little concern existed regarding fallout shelters, even

¹⁵⁷ Albert C. Walsh, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, August 20, 1961.

¹⁵⁸ Poynter, *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964*, 67.

¹⁵⁹ Larry C. Leslie, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, August 27, 1961.

¹⁶⁰ Clarence McKibben, Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, October 22, 1961.

¹⁶¹ E.C., Letters to the Editor, *Omaha World Herald*, November 12, 1961. This letter was entitled "Shelters for Schools;" it was the only letter in Nebraska to reference fallout shelters.

though Kennedy talked about it repeatedly. Possibly, so few Midwesterners worried about fallout shelters, because of the region's location, far from both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Thus, presumably fewer Midwesterners watched Kennedy's addresses, even though they were knowledgeable about the Berlin crisis.

South

The South, represented here by Georgia, Mississippi, and Florida, sought a tough Cold War position from the President. Southern historian Joseph Fry asserts that "the South's proclivity for the use of force and adamant anticommunism remained prominent as the United States entered the decade of the 1960s." In addition, as the letters and polls reveal, this region was the most pessimistic "about the long-term prospects for international Peace" and their anxieties only increased with the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁶² Although fewer Southerners belonged to the Democratic Party as it moved further left, the 1960 election revealed that the vast majority voted Democrat.¹⁶³

For example, from the years between 1856 and 1964, Georgians voted for the Democratic Party twenty-five times. They only voted once for the Republicans—in 1964.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the Georgians' disillusionment with Kennedy in the following letters may show them starting to fall out with the Democratic Party.

The *Atlanta Constitution's* readers seemed mostly concerned with fallout shelters and their mixed feelings for President Kennedy. To be sure, several of the letters complimented Kennedy on his address to the U.N. Assembly (where he firmly advocated

¹⁶² Joseph A. Fry, *Dixie looks abroad: the South and U.S. foreign relations, 1789-1973* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 234, 223, 224.

¹⁶³ Rathburn, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1025. 70 districts voted for Kennedy; only 47 districts voted for Nixon.

¹⁶⁴ Poynter, *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964*, 67.

for access within Berlin and vilified the Soviet regime). On September 5, James T. Johnson declared that JFK did a great job in “taking care of a situation long overdue” in Berlin. He asserted that Kennedy succeeded in stopping the communist advance by establishing U.S. presence in Berlin.¹⁶⁵ The October 2 “Pulse of the People” dedicated a section to “Georgians Discuss JFK’s Administration and His Address to the UN Assembly,” a week after Kennedy gave the speech to the United Nations. Joseph D. Franco and C.P. Butler applauded Kennedy’s speech; Butler insisted that it was “one of the greatest speeches ever” while Franco felt the speech “dealt realistically with the Berlin crisis.”¹⁶⁶ These letters revealed that some Atlanta citizens felt proud of their President.

Other letters, however, show Kennedy in a more negative light, specifically his indecisiveness and lack of action. G.G. Howe, for example, admitted that the U.N. speech was “firm,” but he anticipated that Kennedy would “negotiate away many, if not all, of our rights in Berlin.”¹⁶⁷ William H. Cohen stated that the Cold War was “directionless,” with little foreign policy on Berlin.¹⁶⁸ Charles Bird agreed with this notion. In “Kennedy is Accused of Evasiveness,” he claimed that Kennedy refused to have the necessary, honest conversation about Berlin in his press conferences.¹⁶⁹ As shown previously, the *Atlanta Constitution’s* readers assailed Kennedy’s lack of action in the face of Khrushchev’s games. They wanted the Premier out of power. By November, Georgian citizen Bill J. Jones believed that Kennedy’s tough stance with Khrushchev had “fizzled out.” Jones declared

¹⁶⁵ James T. Johnson, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, September 05, 1961.

¹⁶⁶ C.P. Butler, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, October 02, 1961; Joseph D. Franco, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, October 02, 1961.

¹⁶⁷ G.G. Howe, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, October 02, 1961.

¹⁶⁸ William H. Cohen, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, October 23, 1961.

¹⁶⁹ Charles L. Bird, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, September 29, 1961.

that if he had his way, “we would stomp the living daylights out of [Khrushchev].”¹⁷⁰ A high school student, Durham Newton, thought America should stop yielding to the USSR. While he conceded that “Berlin itself is not worth risking a war,” he believed America should declare war or else the Soviets would try to obtain another region.¹⁷¹ These harsh opinions show that Americans were tired of appeasing Khrushchev.

Other letters insisted that Berlin was not worth a war; they lacked trust in Berliners. In late August, both Philip Shulhafer and Joseph Franco did not believe a “clear moral issue” existed in Berlin. Shulhafer determined that Berlin was wrongly leading the United States into war, and Franco deemed that the city had not “practiced nor preached” freedom.¹⁷² These letters showed no sympathy for the Germans; Atlantans feared the Berliners and had no desire to risk American lives for them. Some Georgians wanted to follow a dual containment strategy of containing German nationalism by keeping the country separated, while keeping communism out of the West.

Of all the newspapers examined, the *Clarion Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi had readers who seemed the least concerned about the Berlin crisis. Instead, the letters that related to Berlin mostly discussed the government’s unnecessary defense spending and their disapproval of Kennedy. The *Clarion Ledger* letters seemed significantly more concerned with the new policies of racial integration, and being a small newspaper, the editor devoted fewer letters to the Cold War and many more to race issues.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Bill J. Jones, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, November 02, 1961.

¹⁷¹ Durham Newton, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, September 29, 1961.

¹⁷² Philip Shulhafer, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, August 28, 1961; Joseph Franco, Letters to the Editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, August 29, 1961.

¹⁷³ Mississippians felt extraordinarily dissatisfied with integration, mostly due to religious sentiments.

Some of the Mississippi letters worried about U.S. government spending on Berlin. On September 2, John Mayes conceded that “from what I have been reading in the newspapers [...] we must, without a doubt, be living in perilous times.” He declared that Kennedy’s “New Frontier crowd” spent billions “trying to buy friendship and peace,” and had failed to do so. He was convinced that America would declare bankruptcy, giving the Soviets victory in the Cold War.¹⁷⁴ A.O. Hall repeated several of Mayes’ arguments. “Surely President Kennedy cares enough about his own people that he will put their interests ahead of nations, who at most, are questionable friends.” Hall believed that the government should pay for mass fallout shelters for Americans, instead of providing for foreign Germans.¹⁷⁵ According to historian Fry, Southerners in general were hostile to the idea of foreign spending.¹⁷⁶

The Jackson residents did not fully support the Kennedy administration. On September 6, Reverend Harold E. O’Chester compared JFK to a fictional baseball hero “who struck out when the team needed him most.” He showcased Kennedy’s past mistakes, and now, he questioned how Kennedy would respond to the “third pitch,” Berlin. Based on Kennedy’s short eight months in office, O’Chester believed that Kennedy would “strike out.”¹⁷⁷ WM. Mallett loathed Kennedy. After listing the administration officials who he accused of being “Socialists, Subversives, [and] Communists,” Mallett suggested that the administration had “gone so far in their attempts to wreck the American Republic.”¹⁷⁸ In terms of electoral votes, Mississippians did not vote for Kennedy, but neither did they vote

¹⁷⁴ John R. Mayes, Letters to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, September 02, 1961.

¹⁷⁵ A.O. Hall, Letters to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, August 30, 1961.

¹⁷⁶ Fry, *Dixie looks abroad*, 227.

¹⁷⁷ Harold E. O’Chester, Letters to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, September 06, 1961.

¹⁷⁸ WM. E. Mallett, Letters to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, September 29, 1961.

for Nixon. In an assumedly anti-establishment move, the majority of electors refused to pledge for either candidate.¹⁷⁹

Besides the following letters, very few of the *Clarion Ledger* readers referenced a solution to the Berlin Wall crisis. Woo Jung Ju and James F. Brent both declared that the United States should not negotiate. Ju, a graduate student at Mississippi College, said that America should not attend the summit meeting at the United Nations because the Soviets would use the gathering “to recover lost international face, [and] to regain prestige.” By attending, the United States would participate in “dangerous appeasement;” America would lose prestige, while the Soviet Unions’ prestige would increase.¹⁸⁰ A couple months into the crisis, Brent repeated Ju’s position of not compromising. He insisted that “we cannot give in to the demands by Communists. We cannot negotiate the un-negotiable.”¹⁸¹ Both authors held that the United States should continue its firmness in the face of Soviet threats. In contrast, John Mayes, who had written about government spending a week prior, wanted peace between the two world powers. To achieve such an objective, both nations would have to “assure” the other that it would not attack. He believed strongly in peace because he established that “if major powers fail to find a solution [...] man will be going back to his cave.”¹⁸² Mayes feared nuclear war and preferred compromise. These letters prove the varying beliefs the outspoken Mississippians held regarding Berlin.

In the Florida newspaper, the *Miami Herald*, the letters mainly addressed whether America should go to war or not. Florida had more articles specifically related to Berlin

¹⁷⁹ Rathburn, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1053.

¹⁸⁰ Woo Jung Ju, Letters to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, September 28, 1961. Ju became a professor of European history and was an ardent Korean human rights activist.

¹⁸¹ James F. Brent, Letters to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, October 25, 1961.

¹⁸² John R. Mayes, Letters to the Editor, *Clarion Ledger*, September 12, 1961.

than the rest of the South, possibly due the fears triggered by the Bay of Pigs crisis earlier in the year. More Miami readers wanted peace over war, but not by a significant amount. Those who did not want war wanted peace using various tactics. For example, Bernard Lichtig insisted that the population of West Berlin move to other parts of West Germany; the crisis was not worth nuclear war.¹⁸³ The author of “Atomic Age Arithmetic Adds up War Horror” also feared nuclear war. She believed that the United States should negotiate, especially since Berlin’s fate should not require the eradication of 30 to 40 million American lives.¹⁸⁴ These letters agreed that American lives meant more than German freedoms. In addition, Martin Barry did not approve of the Germans, especially their government. He determined that the West German government pressured Kennedy to increase tensions when the “President prudently limited [the] western response.”¹⁸⁵ While Barry supported Kennedy, E.A. Gasser felt dissatisfied with the American government’s treatment of Berlin. Gasser previously thought that Berlin was the “symbol of western prestige,” but with “another victory for communism,” it no longer held this place.¹⁸⁶ Consequently, due to the government’s lack of planning, the United States should simply leave Berlin. Others who desired peace encouraged participation with the United Nations to solve the problem. Two letters written within a day of each other in September requested that the big powers “Call [a] World Meeting to Save the Peace,” while Claude Pepper claimed that “World Tribunals Can Help Settle Crisis—If asked.”¹⁸⁷ Pepper, the writer of this letter, was about to take a House of Representatives seat in Florida. He first

¹⁸³ Bernard Lichtig, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, September 21, 1961.

¹⁸⁴ Less Crossman, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, September 06, 1961.

¹⁸⁵ Martin Barry, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, August 18, 1961.

¹⁸⁶ E.A. Gasser, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, August 24, 1961.

¹⁸⁷ Herman V. Moran, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, September 08, 1961; Claude Pepper, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, September 09, 1961.

held office in the Senate in 1936, and stayed in politics until his death in 1989, commanding much respect as a fervent liberal.¹⁸⁸ Both letters summarily believed in the power of the World Court and the U.N. to solve this crisis.

Many of the letters, however, did want the United States to act more aggressively toward Berlin. Mrs. W.S VanPoyck believed that America had an “obligation to the free world” to remain firm as Kennedy said.¹⁸⁹ William Dickinson agreed with the notion to fight the Soviets. He said the United States should “fight and die [or] die in slave camps;” surrender would only lead to death by the Reds.¹⁹⁰ Robert Canon, father of an American soldier in Berlin, believed that the United States needed to show more assertiveness for the Soviets to take them seriously.¹⁹¹ Although these letters were a minority, such belligerence represented many Americans’ beliefs about the Berlin crisis. In particular, the South had strong opinions about the Cold War, though less so for Berlin. In 1961, integration, religion, and other domestic issues held the passions of Southerners over Berlin. Miami citizens, however, had more similar concerns with Easterners rather than Southerners, likely because of their proximity to Europe.

East

The *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *Boston Globe* were assessed to evaluate the East Coast opinion on Berlin. Based on the 1960 election results, the East supported Kennedy over Nixon by a relatively wide margin.¹⁹² The *Wall Street Journal*, a more conservative business newspaper, seemed to have more readers willing to explore

¹⁸⁸ Reginald Thomas, “Claude Pepper, Fiery Fighter For Elderly Rights, Dies at 88,” *New York Times*, May 31, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0908.html>

¹⁸⁹ W.S VanPoyck, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, August 19, 1961.

¹⁹⁰ William F. Dickinson, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, August 21, 1961.

¹⁹¹ Robert A. Canon, Letters to the Editor, *Miami Herald*, September 11, 1961.

¹⁹² Rathburn, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1025.

the option of going to war over Berlin. Many of the letter writers would have rather gone to war than give in to the communists. For example, after J.D. Markwood wrote that the United States should abandon Allied Berlin to avoid “possible nuclear conflict,” angry letters appeared in response.¹⁹³ One called Markwood a “befuddled” thinker and asserted that the United States should not “compromise with communists,” even to avoid nuclear war. That Berlin lay within in the Soviet zone was due only to Soviet dictator Josef Stalin’s “trickery” after World War II.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, M.B. Somerfield vehemently disagreed with relinquishing Berlin. The author claimed that the ideology that controlled Berlin would control the world. An Allied Berlin hindered the spread of communism beyond East Europe.¹⁹⁵

Many of the letters show that the readers thought President Kennedy was weak. “Defending Our Rights” called Kennedy’s actions appeasement and compared him to the pre-World War II appeaser, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.¹⁹⁶ Hugh Brenner subscribed to this representation of Kennedy and questioned why his words, but not his actions, were firm.¹⁹⁷ F.C. Brandt alleged that Americans knew what Washington did not: that the United States needed firmness when dealing with the communists for them to cease their aggression. America could “command the respect of the rest of the world” in Berlin, but according to Brandt, the government did not seem to understand that.¹⁹⁸

Although New Yorkers voted for Kennedy in the 1960 election, they voted for the

¹⁹³ J.D. Markwood, Letters to the Editor, *Wall Street Journal*, October 03, 1961, 14.

¹⁹⁴ C.W. Alsworth, Letters to the Editor, *Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 1961, 18.

¹⁹⁵ M.B. Somerfield, Letters to the Editor, *Wall Street Journal*, November 01, 1961, 14.

¹⁹⁶ Carlyle Alexander, Letters to the Editor, *Wall Street Journal*, September 07, 1961, 12.

¹⁹⁷ Hugh Brenner, Letters to the Editor, *Wall Street Journal*, October 09, 1961, 16.

¹⁹⁸ F.C. Brandt, Letters to the Editor, *Wall Street Journal*, October 16, 1961, 12.

Republican candidate in three out of the four prior elections.¹⁹⁹ Thus, Kennedy would need to be stronger to gain the respect of these readers.

As opposed to the New York newspaper, the *Washington Post* was relatively anti-war, and offered alternative suggestions. Residents of Washington, D.C. were unable to vote in presidential elections until 1963. Nonetheless, the city was relatively liberal leaning and presumably, most of the citizens were Kennedy supporters.²⁰⁰ With its close proximity to the White House, it received information quicker than other sources in the various regions, especially if the newspaper presented the administration in a positive light. Kern, Levering, and Levering assert that high government officials would “alert them to the issues the administration considered most important [...] the *Post* dared not risk being cut off by the high level sources who contributed so substantially to its success.” Thus, “The *Post* by the early 1960s was the most influential paper in the capital.”²⁰¹ Consequently, the newspaper’s more liberal view of the Berlin crisis may have influenced many Americans to observe the crisis in the way Kennedy hoped. Many of the letters vehemently disagreed with military action in Berlin. A few days after the Berlin Wall was constructed, the writer of “Quiet Diplomacy” feared that “political warfare” would lead to a third world war. Therefore, he suggested a conference to discuss and even fix the problems.²⁰² American History Professor Herbert Clancy of Fordham agreed with this solution and furthered it by proposing an international conference to force the Soviets to follow Stalin’s promise of free elections for East Berlin; otherwise, the United States should

¹⁹⁹ Poytner, *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964*, 67.

²⁰⁰ Randy James, “A Brief History of Washington, D.C.,” *Time*, February 26, 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1881791,00.html>.

²⁰¹ Kern, Levering, and Levering, *The Kennedy Crisis*, 16, 13.

²⁰² Mohammed S. Ghazy, Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, August 17, 1961, A20.

implement trade sanctions.²⁰³ In addition, John Harcourt believed that Berlin should fall under full United Nation control, as the U.N. had “world authority.” The agreement would make Berlin “a disarmed area,” which would bring the world closer to universal disarmament.²⁰⁴ Other letters show American disdain for the military buildup. Evelyn Johnson asserted that “Our military obsession is losing democracy’s battles.” She believed in “peaceful techniques” to solve the crisis, not militaristic ones.²⁰⁵ In “Aiding Mr. K?,” the writer also questioned the \$6 billion military build-up because it might devalue the dollar and force America into poverty.²⁰⁶ These letters searched for peace, mainly for financial justifications, but also for moral and political reasons.

The Boston Globe looked less at whether or not America should go to war, and instead questioned why it should help the Germans, who had already instigated two world wars in less than a century. From August to September, at least one letter each week referred to this issue. Only two days after Ulbricht’s government built the Wall, “Should We Help Them Again” asked why the United States should aid the Germans, when the Berlin situation was their own fault “with their horrible war record.” The author, Edward Bowker, knew that that the Germans would “sacrifice the lives of 10 million Americans” if it meant the restoration of their city.²⁰⁷ These harsh notions showed the lack of support these readers had for the Berliners. At the beginning of September, Bowker shared similar opinions and retorted that even though the West Germans feared Soviet tyranny, they should have kept “their own tyranny from other people’s lands.”²⁰⁸ Relatedly, Mrs. Victor

²⁰³ Herbert J. Clancy, Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, August 30, 1961, A18.

²⁰⁴ John T. Harcourt, Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, September 04, 1961, A18.

²⁰⁵ Evelyn Johnson, Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, September 18, 1961, 12.

²⁰⁶ Russell F. Egner, M.D., Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, August 19, 1961, A8.

²⁰⁷ Edward Bowker, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, August 15, 1961, 10.

²⁰⁸ Edward Bowker, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, September 07, 1961, 6.

Penzer believed that America should not fight for German freedoms since the Soviets treated the Berliners better than the Germans had treated the Soviets in World War II.²⁰⁹ In addition, William Treadwell questioned why, even after the Nazi regime, democracy in Berlin sufficed as a reason for the United States to trust the West Germans. He claimed the West Germans only acted democratically because they feared Soviet control.²¹⁰ German atrocities remained clear in the minds of Americans twenty years after the war, and played into the strategy of dual containment.

Furthermore, like the *Washington Post*, several letters requested U.N. support for the Berlin issue. In "What UN is For," James Psellas asked why the world was "risking a war" when the United Nations existed to solve such problems.²¹¹ Months after the erection of the Berlin Wall, Francis Morse thought that the U.N. should move its headquarters from New York City to Berlin. Then, the Soviet Union and the United States would be "off the hook" to fix the crisis since the current plan of "insisting on our 'rights'" did not seem to work; it only increased "Cold War bitterness."²¹² The idea of moving the United Nations continued to arise throughout the crisis. Those who insisted on moving it believed in the U.N.'s effectiveness as an international governing body. Upon the death of U.N. Secretary General Hammarskjold in September, however, the U.N. itself was experiencing its own crisis that made the proposal unfeasible.

Even though the majority of Bostonians seemed against helping Berlin, they supported the President in his actions. 80% of Bostonians voted for Kennedy in the

²⁰⁹ Victor Penzer, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, August 23, 1961, 10.

²¹⁰ William Treadwell, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, August 31, 1961, 18.

²¹¹ James Psellas, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, September 02, 1961, 6.

²¹² Francis Morse, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, November 04, 1961, 4.

Presidential election.²¹³ This significant majority may be due in part to the city's Catholic roots. Another noteworthy reason may have been that Kennedy grew up in the region and served as its representative in the US Congress. George Taylor had faith that Kennedy "will back up his words with deeds" in order to prove Khrushchev wrong that "we won't start a war because of Berlin."²¹⁴ The writer of "More Harm than Good" also agreed with Kennedy, but in contrast to Taylor, he approved of Kennedy's decision that "atomic weapons would only be used if used on us first."²¹⁵ Finally, Barbara Harking defended the President against his critics who are "complaining" about the high taxes due to the military budget increase. She noted that Kennedy campaigned on "sacrifice," which the American people now had to endure in order to avoid nuclear war and help Berlin.²¹⁶ The *Boston Globe* readers supported Kennedy, but for various reasons that often contradicted one another. This inconsistency shows that Americans did not fully understand Kennedy's stance since he often sounded like a warmonger, while pursuing diplomacy.

Regional newspapers reveal key aspects of public perceptions. The twelve newspapers from the four regions showed distinctive characteristics. The West worried most about fallout shelters; the Midwest mainly disapproved of Kennedy's weak actions in Berlin; the South cared little about Berlin; and the East discussed whether the United States should go to war. The states that had coastal, large metropolitan cities, seemed to yield the most concern about nuclear war for Americans. For example, Omaha, a small city in the

²¹³ Rathburn, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1049.

²¹⁴ George Taylor, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, August 20, 1961, A2.

²¹⁵ Seymour W. Nadler, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, October 23, 1961, 10.

²¹⁶ Barbara Harking, Letters to the Editor, *Boston Globe*, September 02, 1961, 6.

middle of the country, very rarely mentioned worries of nuclear war, unlike the West, especially Hawaii, which regularly commented on the benefits of fallout shelters.

Through these newspapers, it seemed that Americans were informed of the events of the Cold War and Kennedy's addresses on Berlin, as many letters referenced specific speeches, especially the U.N. speech and the July speech that first mentioned Berlin. For example, at the end of September, the *Atlanta Constitution* dedicated its letters to the editor section to discussion Kennedy's speech to the United Nations. Enough Americans listened to this speech to participate in the dialogue by writing letters to their newspapers.

Furthermore, regions' political stances often correlated with the political stance of the partisan newspapers. For example, the West and Midwest encompassed conservatism, and their newspapers portrayed their sensibilities with conservative editorials and letters. In Denver, moreover, when the city's newspaper published a column by liberal editorialist Drew Pearson, a Coloradan wrote a letter vehemently protesting the idea that Berlin was not worth fighting for by claiming that if that was the case, then "America is not worth fighting for."²¹⁷

²¹⁷ M. Lee, Letter to the Editor, *Denver Post*, August 29, 1961.

Chapter IV

Polling Americans:

“War! I don’t believe in giving them another inch.”

Regional and national polls also help determine public opinion. Polls indicate strong support for President Kennedy during the Berlin crisis, but the public feared nuclear war. In relation to the Berlin Wall, the polls asked questions about the satisfaction of Americans toward their leaders, their feelings toward war, peacekeeping ideas regarding Berlin, and the means of protection they endorsed against nuclear war. Many of the polls, both regional and national, asked the same types of questions in different months, enabling analysis of a potential shift in public opinion over a short amount of time.

Only seven months into his tenure, JFK had endured the Bay of Pigs disaster, unsuccessfully met with Khrushchev in Vienna, and watched the deteriorating situation in Laos. As July concluded, and after Kennedy revealed his concerns about Berlin on July 25, 1961, the Gallup polling organization asked, “Do you approve or disapprove of the way John Kennedy is handling his job as President?”²¹⁸ From this point through 1961, perceptions of Kennedy’s job performance (which included domestic and foreign affairs) remained overwhelmingly favorable. Nationally, this poll showed that 77% of Americans approved of Kennedy and only 12% disapproved. Regionally, these numbers remained consistent. The percentages in the East and the Midwest stayed within the margin of error (plus or minus three percent), while the South and West had relatively lower approval ratings, with 66% and 71% approving, respectively.²¹⁹ As the crisis escalated, Gallup asked

²¹⁸ George H. Gallup, ed., *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, Vol. 3 (New York: Random House, 1972), July 27 – August 01, 1961, 1732 - 1733.

²¹⁹ Comparing polls after the first 100 days in office, 83% of Americans approved of Kennedy, while each U.S. President that followed him had approval percentages in the 50s to 60s (The American Presidency Project).

this question again in both September and October. Kennedy's popularity remained consistent with, respectively, 76% and 77% of the population approving of him.²²⁰

Regionally, California and Wisconsin asked their citizens the same question, but in terms of whether they thought Kennedy "is doing a good, fair, or poor job." Between the Midwest and West, significant differences for Kennedy's approval existed. In Wisconsin, 43% believed Kennedy was doing a "Good" job in late August.²²¹ A mere month later, 63% of Californians answered that he was doing "good."²²² One could argue that the change in highly favorable ratings may have involved the speeches Kennedy gave that month (for example for U.N. speech), but the national poll did not reflect that difference. Thus, the West seems generally more favorable of Kennedy than the Midwest.

These polls correlate spectacularly with the survey, "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the United States Government is handling the Berlin situation?" In both late August and late September, the public expressed satisfaction over 60% of the time.²²³ Admittedly, from the time the Soviets erected the Wall to the following month, the public ratings fell 5%.²²⁴ Although not a significant drop, Americans were nonetheless concerned with the administration's handling of the crisis. The Trendex Public Opinion Poll asked New Yorkers the same question about Berlin that the Gallup Poll asked nationally, but in direct relation to the U.N. speech. Some 63% of New Yorkers felt satisfied with the

²²⁰ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, September 21 – 26, 1961, 1738; Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, October 19 – 24, 1961, 1742.

²²¹ "Wisconsin Agriculturist Omnibus #6109," *Wisconsin Agriculturist*, August 28-September 5, 1961, *Roper Center Public Opinion Archives*, Question 35.

²²² "California Poll # 6103," *The Field Institute*, September 30-October 6, 1961, *Roper Center Public Opinion Archives*, Question 6.

²²³ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, August 25 – 29, 1961, 1734.

²²⁴ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, September 21 – 26, 1961, 1738.

government in Berlin, which was almost the same percentage as the rest of America.²²⁵ New Jerseyites seemed to share similar sentiments with New Yorkers; Gallup revealed a New Jersey woman's thoughts on the issue in the *Clarion Ledger*. "I think the Berlin situation is being handled well. They did the right thing in calling up the troops—it was a show of strength without fighting. And they're willing to negotiate, not running into it. They've taken a firm policy without open warfare or cringing."²²⁶ Thus, Kennedy enjoyed significant popularity at this time, and the satisfaction regarding his administration's handling of Berlin at the beginning of the crisis only added to his favorable ratings. Conversely, although the majority of Americans said he handled Berlin properly in August and September, by November, Americans alluded to Berlin when listing his weaknesses. Therefore, it appears that the farther the region was from the crisis, the more they disliked Kennedy. In the top five answers of the Gallup poll, the public responded that he was "Hesitant in actions, indecisive," "Too weak in foreign policy, pushed around by Premier Khrushchev," and "Doesn't back up words with action, hasn't lived up to promises."²²⁷ This poll shows that the public found him to be a pushover; he did not act when Khrushchev broke the agreement of restricting access to Berlin by building the Wall.

Furthermore, Americans seemed both to encourage and fear war during the months following the crisis. Polling questions asked at which point the United States should turn to war. For example, every month from July to October, pollsters asked, "If Communist East Germany closes all roads to Berlin and does not permit planes to land in Berlin, do you

²²⁵ E.G. Hynes, Jr., *Trendex Public Opinion Poll*, September 25, 1961, *Central Subject Files, John F. Kennedy Library*, Boston, MA, Question 5.

²²⁶ George Gallup, "Majority Back JFK's Handling of Berlin," *Clarion Ledger*, September 06, 1961, 4.

²²⁷ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, November 17-22, 1961, 1744.

think the United States and its Allies should or should not try to fight their way into Berlin?" A majority answered that the United States and its allies should fight, but the amount varied from month to month. In late July, the Kennedy administration found that nationally, 67% thought the United States should fight for Berlin, and 16% disagreed.²²⁸ Regionally, the West and East had similar numbers to the national poll, but the Midwest and South did not. The Midwest was more willing to fight the Soviets—72% believed America should act aggressively. A poll released by *McClure Newspaper Syndicate*, described the public's views, including this Ohio woman's opinion: "War! [...] I don't believe in giving them another inch."²²⁹ This sentiment seemed compatible in the Midwest, as the poll numbers show. The opposite held true in the South. Fewer Southerners (only 59%) wanted to fight, which disproved Fry's theory that the South was more militaristic than the rest of the country.²³⁰ Even though the administration released the poll before Kennedy spoke publically about Berlin, an August poll revealed that 64% agreed to fight for Berlin; this poll, which was circulated after the Wall went up, had numbers similar to the July poll.²³¹ By the following month, however, 6% more Americans wanted to fight than in August.²³² Nonetheless, by October, the amount of Americans who wanted to fight decreased to 62%.²³³ These numbers may have changed because of the way Kennedy spoke about Berlin to the public from month to month. From July to September, Kennedy's rhetoric included aggression, but by October, he spoke more often about negotiations.

²²⁸ "U.S. Public Opinion and the Berlin Crisis-1961." *Public Opinion Surveys, Inc., JFKL*, July 12-19, 1961, 7, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKPOF-117-013.aspx>.

²²⁹ Jack Boyle, "What America Thinks." *McClure Newspaper Syndicate*, July 22-23, 1961. *Central Subject Files, JFKL*, 19.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, August 25 - 29, 1961, 1735.

²³² Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, September 21 - 26, 1961, 1738.

²³³ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, October 19 - 24, 1961, 1742.

Other questions included whether the United States should go to war over the right of East Berliners to hold elections to decide their system of government. The Kennedy administration asked, "Do you think the U.S. and its Allies should back up this right, even if it means going to war?" Fewer Americans, nationally, would fight for the right of elections than if the Soviet Union cut off access. Nonetheless, 58% of Americans believed in this right and would fight for it. Again, the South was less willing to fight, as only 52% of Southerners echoed that sentiment. Interestingly, Westerners (at a 63% approval rate) seemed most impassioned about the topic of elections. The other regions fell within this criterion.²³⁴

Other issues also yielded results that showed Americans were determined to stay in Berlin through the crisis. In July, the administration asked about U.S. troops in Berlin, specifically, "Do you think we should pull out our troops and leave West Berlin exposed to a take-over by Russia—or keep our troops in West Berlin even if it means risking war?" Nationally, 6% of Americans wanted to pull out troops, while 85% disagreed with this act. Again, the South and West appeared as the outliers.²³⁵ In addition, the administration's July poll and an October Gallup poll asked, "If Russia insists on controlling Berlin, do you think this will lead to a fighting war, or not?" Even though three months had passed, both polls reported that 59% of Americans thought Soviet control would lead to war.²³⁶ In July, both the East and the West thought war was less likely than the Midwest and South did, by a 10% difference.²³⁷ Nonetheless, every month that went by showed that a significant amount of the population supported military intervention.

²³⁴ "U.S. Public Opinion and the Berlin Crisis-1961." *JFKL*, July 12-19, 1961, 19.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³⁶ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, October 19 - 24, 1961, 1742.

²³⁷ "U.S. Public Opinion and the Berlin Crisis-1961." *JFKL*, July 12-19, 1961, 8.

Several questions inquired about America's actions regarding Berlin, war or other peacekeeping methods. For example, in Wisconsin, a poll asked, "If you have read or heard something about the Berlin crisis, what do you think should be the actions of the U.S.?" The most popular answer, by almost 20%, declared, "We should let the Russians know that if necessary we will fight to hold the city."²³⁸ This poll, along with the others, hinted at the Midwest's willingness to fight. Another poll in July questioned, "If Russia should take a separate treaty with East Berlin and if the East German government should refuse access to West Berlin, what steps, if any, do you think the United States should take to save West Berlin from the Communists?" Some 55% of Americans believed they should go to "war or risk war," while only 6.5% claimed "Peace at any price."²³⁹ In the middle of these extremes, 22% believed that America should "Take positive action," which included doing "what government thinks necessary," and "action by the United Nations" as the most significant percentages in that category.²⁴⁰ In New York, pollsters questioned the motives of respondents who answered that they were not satisfied with the government's actions pertaining to the Soviet Union. 77% of dissatisfied Americans felt frustrated with the Berlin crisis because they wanted the United States to be "firmer in its position," while only 18% wanted them to be "more willing to negotiate."²⁴¹ These percentages show the assertiveness of Americans.

In September, just 5% of Americans desired action by the United Nations in the poll asking what America should do. The results differed in July though, when the Kennedy

²³⁸ "Wisconsin Agriculturist Omnibus #6109," August 28-September 5, 1961, Question 45. The second most popular option was about negotiating an agreement with the Soviets.

²³⁹ Boyle, "What America Thinks." *McClure Newspaper Syndicate*, July 22-23, 1961, 18.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Hynes, Jr., *Trendex Public Opinion Poll*, September 25, 1961, Question 6.

administration asked questions about the U.N.'s role in Berlin. "Do you think the United Nations should or should not try to settle the Berlin problem between Russia and the U.S. and its Allies?" Nationally, 80% expressed that the U.N. *should* settle the problem. In this poll, the South had the least faith in the U.N., while 84% of the East Coast trusted the institution.²⁴² Nonetheless, when the poll asked whether the U.N. "can or cannot settle it," the answers changed. Nationally, only one in four Americans thought the United Nations was *capable* of settling the crisis. For this question, the Midwest had the most confidence in the U.N. with 47% agreeing that it could settle the crisis, while only one in three Southerners held the same opinion.²⁴³ Interestingly, whether questions used "should" or "can," in relation to the U.N., significantly changed American opinion. Consequently, Americans *wanted* U.N. involvement but had little faith that the institution *could* actually help.

The most striking question involved America turning communist in the event of a war precipitated by a crisis like Berlin. In October, Gallup asked Americans, "Suppose you had to make the decision between fighting an all-out nuclear war or living under communist rule—how would you decide?" In a flourish of anti-communist sentiment, a tremendous 81% of Americans claimed to prefer nuclear war to communism. Only 6% said they would rather convert to communism.²⁴⁴ Incredibly more than eight out of ten Americans would rather suffer nuclear war than live as communists.

But Americans had not prepared for this reality. In September and November, Gallup asked Americans if they had made any plans to prepare their homes or protect their

²⁴² "U.S. Public Opinion and the Berlin Crisis-1961." *JFKL*, July 12-19, 1961, 15.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁴⁴ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, October 19 - 24, 1961, 1741.

family from a nuclear attack. In September, only 7% said they made plans to protect their homes, and in November, after months of Kennedy discussing fallout shelters, only 12% said they planned to make any changes in case of a nuclear weapons attack.²⁴⁵ Considering Americans' talk of war, surprisingly, they had not seriously considered protecting themselves or property. On the other hand, during the same November survey, 60% said they had given some thought to life in a fallout shelter.²⁴⁶

Americans certainly had reason to suspect nuclear war, based on the fact that they believed the conflict with the Soviet Union would continue. In October, Gallup asked, "If the Berlin problem is solved peacefully, do you think there will be a long period of peace, or do you think the Russians will stir up strife again in the future?" By a significant minority, only 12% thought that there would be "a long period of peace," while 78% thought the "Russians will stir up strife."²⁴⁷ Americans believed that Cold War crises, as in Berlin, could lead to a Soviet nuclear attack.

After examining these polls, one would assume that JFK had public support regarding Berlin. Questions seemed to shift from war over the Berlin Wall to nuclear war, culminating in a primary focus on fallout shelters in November. In terms of each region's thoughts, the polls indicated that the Midwest and the West were most willing to fight. The South did not want to go to war, but it expected war more than the other regions. For instance, a July poll asked, "Do you think there will be a world war within the next five years, or not?" Nationally, 38% of Americans believed war would strike, while 41% did not

²⁴⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, September 21-26, 1961, 1742; Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, November 17-22, 1961, 1745.

²⁴⁶ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, November 17-22, 1961, 1745.

²⁴⁷ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, October 19 - 24, 1961, 1741.

think war was imminent (many claimed not to know). In comparison, 45% of the South was certain of war, while only 31% did not think there would be war.²⁴⁸ In addition, the East followed national averages more often than not. Examining polls and their results at least partially determines public opinion. Furthermore, the shift in poll questions and results show that public opinion changed during the crisis.

²⁴⁸ "U.S. Public Opinion and the Berlin Crisis-1961." *JFKL*, July 12-19, 1961, 3.

Conclusion

The Future: “*Ich bin ein Berliner*”

The city of Berlin stands as a symbol of the Cold War. The Cold War period began in 1948 with the blockade of Berlin, and the fall of the Berlin Wall occurred at its culmination. In the course of the Cold War, the Berlin crisis made 1961 a definitive year. The Berlin Wall stands as a prime example of Cold War tensions— neither side fired a bullet at the other, nor did the conflict affect the daily lives of Americans or Soviets. Only a rather overlooked third party (Berliners) felt its impact. Nonetheless, the world feared a nuclear conflict when Berlin grabbed headlines on the night of August 13, 1961.

Most scholars would argue that Khrushchev won because the Soviets disregarded the treaty agreement, with little retaliation by the Americans. But on June 26, 1963, nearly two years after the erection of the Wall, Kennedy stood among enthusiastic fans in Berlin and announced that he was, like all citizens of the world, “*Ich bin ein Berliner*.”²⁴⁹ The German audience cheered fervently for this show of commitment to their city.

By 1964, the main actors of the Berlin crisis no longer affected the situation. Chancellor Adenauer and Premier Khrushchev were forced out of office in 1963 and 1964, respectively, while President Kennedy was assassinated. Besides agreements between the world powers, including the Quadripartite Agreement of September 3, 1971 that regulated access to the city; Berlin settled into the status quo of its physical division until 1989.²⁵⁰ Therefore, the Berlin Wall crisis diminished a decade after its creation. Twenty-eight years after the Berlin Wall went up, on November 9, 1989, the barrier fell. As masses arrived in

²⁴⁹ Nigel J. Ashton, "Cold War Political Theater," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 3 (June 2009): 535, EBSCOhost.

²⁵⁰ "Ostpolitik: The Quadripartite Agreement of September 3, 1971," *U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany*, August 2001, <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga5-710903.htm>.

the city from across the world to remove the graffitied pieces of the broken Wall, Berlin reunited.

Implications

The Berlin Wall had been a hot point in the Cold War, the focus of political leaders, editorialists, news articles, and the public. Commentators deliberated about Berlin for months after the start of the crisis. The public response to the Berlin crisis remains significant because it shaped Kennedy's diplomacy on the issue. The crisis also was important to his domestic political standing. That the general American public did not demand immediate war likely boosted his efforts to keep the crisis from escalating into armed conflict. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that public response influenced JFK, but that he shaped public response through his speeches and conferences to a greater extent.

Americans trusted Kennedy to take the necessary measures to avert war and contain both the Soviets and the West Germans. His approval ratings stayed consistently high. Still, even as opinion polls backed the President, many letters to the editor disapproved of his handling of the crisis. In addition, Kennedy's speeches seemed to manipulate the American people. He did not reveal his thoughts on Berlin, especially the need for dual containment. By tolerating the egregious life changes the Berliners had to endure with the erection of the Wall, JFK disregarded their suffering in order to lessen tensions. In sum, Americans agreed with Kennedy that while he had a responsibility to the individual Berliners; he had to avoid nuclear holocaust at all cost.

While this thesis presumed that polls would most reveal American opinion, it was the letters that showed Americans' true feelings. In letters, Americans were able fully to develop their opinions, not simply answer a multiple-choice question.

Furthermore, my expectation regarding regional opinions changed when analyzing the data, due to modern assumptions of regional stereotypes. For example, the South simply did not care about the crisis in 1961, so the region was not as conservative as previously presumed. In contrast, the views of the Midwest met expectations; it was more conservative, desiring war or firm action, as seen in letters and polls. The West, back in the early 1960s was also conservative, a surprising finding considering its liberalism today. Even the East did not poll according to expectations, as many of the letters and polls did not seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis; but in general, Easterners had practical concerns and largely sided with Kennedy. Historians should examine American regions because even regarding this crisis, of national and international importance, regions differ based on local political affiliations.

This research is an attempt to add to the scholarly work on the Berlin Wall by adding a new dimension—the American public—to the crisis. Historians have examined the political implications of the crisis, but not its public impact. Instead, scholars analyze the media and the government because of the influence of these institutions. In contrast, scholars rarely use letters to the editor to analyze history, and they often utilize polls to support their argument rather than as a focus of the research. This thesis showed that the public response, and Kennedy's manipulation of that response, were important factors in shaping American foreign policy during one of the most notable crises of the Cold War.

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