

**“...there is no East, no West..:”**  
**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Visits Cold War Berlin**

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**“...there is no East, no West, no North, no South, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole, wide world:”**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Sermon at the Marienkirche, East Berlin, September 13, 1964

In 1964, the city of Berlin was divided between East and West Berliners, much like the United States was segregated by black and white Americans. If anyone knew and understood the political and social ramifications of such divisions and discriminations, that person would be African American Baptist minister, nonviolent civil rights activist, and leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. At the invitation of Willy Brandt, Mayor of West Berlin, Dr. King traveled to Cold War Berlin in September 1964 to speak at the 14<sup>th</sup> annual cultural festival. In one and a half days, Dr. King spoke and toured the city of Berlin “which [stood] as a symbol of the divisions of men on the face of the earth,” on the principles of unity and faith: “we are all one in Christ Jesus and that faith overcomes all man-made barriers.”<sup>1</sup>

Following Dr. King’s signing of the Golden Book at Berlin City Hall (Figure 1), he opened the cultural festival at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall with a memorial service to late President John K. Kennedy, who visited the city the year before he was assassinated. In his eulogy, Dr. King emphasized “Kennedy’s devotion to human rights throughout the world and specifically to civil rights issues at home.”<sup>2</sup> Later that afternoon Dr. King delivered a sermon before a crowd of 20,000 West Berliners in Waldbühne amphitheater on the occasion of “Tag der Kirche” (Day of the Church). After his sermon, Dr. King learned that an East Berliner had been shot when he attempted to escape to West Berlin. Immediately, he insisted to be taken to the Berlin Wall where the shootout had taken place between the U.S. soldiers and East German border guards.<sup>3</sup> (Figures 2 & 3)

In his pursuit to promote the spirit of brotherhood, he also wanted to visit East Berlin, as he believed that “we are all one in Christ Jesus, for in Christ there is no East, no West, no North, no South, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole, wide world.”<sup>4</sup> Later that evening, without a passport, he surprisingly managed to cross at Checkpoint Charlie, the border crossing point between West and East Berlin, into East Berlin with his American Express card as his form of identification.<sup>5</sup> While there, Dr. King spoke at a church service at the Marienkirche (St. Mary’s Church), where he preached essentially the same sermon he gave earlier that day in West Berlin to 2,000 standing-room-only East Berliners.<sup>6</sup>

“My dear Christian friends of East Berlin,” Dr. King began as he spoke eloquently of “his spiritual message of brotherhood” as the city of Berlin symbolized a “divided humanity.”<sup>7</sup> Identifying faith as a means to reconcile and not divide the people, regardless of the “man-made barrier” of the Berlin Wall, he stated, “...this city, which stands as a symbol of the divisions of men on the face of the earth. For here on either side of the wall are God’s children, and no man-made barrier can obliterate that fact.”<sup>8</sup> He also called attention to African American’s fight for civil rights in the United States, “As you know, there is a great social revolution taking place in the United States of America, and it is the struggle to free some twenty million Negroes from the long night of segregation and discrimination.”<sup>9</sup> The congregation was so moved by his sermon’s emphasis on the similarities of the faith, struggles, and sufferings of African Americans in the U.S. to their own, that some wept openly.<sup>10</sup> Since the church was filled to capacity, the overflow crowd was sent to the nearby Sophienkirche (Sophia Church), and Dr. King ended up making a second, last minute appearance there. Before returning to West Berlin, Dr. King also took the time to speak with students from Humboldt University and church officials at the Hospice Albrecht.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. King’s visit to Cold War Berlin (Figure 4) and his message of brotherhood, peace, faith, and civil rights for all of humanity, brought hope to both West and East Berliners of a possible peaceful social revolution. Dr King argued that a “common humanity, common history, common calling, and common hope for the salvation of the world” binds together people in the divided city of Berlin and also in the segregated America, “regardless of the barriers of race, creed, ideology, or nationality.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “East and West-God’s Children” (Sermon at the Marienkirche, East Berlin, September 13, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> Telegram 380 from US Mission Berlin to Secretary of State, September 14, 1964, RG 84, Germany; U.S. Mission Berlin (USBER); Classified Central Subject Files 1961-1978, box 21, National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>3</sup> “German Connections-Black History Month Martin Luther King, Jr. in East and West Berlin,” The German Way & More, accessed November 13, 2012, <http://www.german-way.com/famous-mlk-german.html>.

<sup>4</sup> King, “East and West.”

<sup>5</sup> The German Way & More, “German Connections.”

<sup>6</sup> State Department Telegram.

<sup>7</sup> King, “East and West,” State Department Telegram, and “Tracing an Untold Story: Dr. Martin Luther King’s Visit to Cold War Berlin,” The Civil Rights Struggle, African-American GI’s and Germany, accessed June 11, 2013, [http://www.aacvr-germany.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=92&Itemid=64](http://www.aacvr-germany.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92&Itemid=64).

<sup>8</sup> King, “East and West.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> State Department Telegram.

<sup>11</sup> The German Way & More, “German Connections.”

<sup>12</sup> King, “East and West.”