

from
TEAR DOWN THIS WALL
1987

Ronald Reagan

In late 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and what remained of the Cold War went with it. By this time, former President Ronald Reagan had been out of office for two years. Nonetheless, many scholars credit Reagan and his policies with hastening the end of the U.S.-Soviet conflict and helping the United States to emerge victorious.

Upon taking office in 1981, Reagan directly challenged the Soviet Union by increasing U.S. military spending and supporting anti-Communist efforts around the globe. Such actions forced the Soviets to increase their own military spending. This in turn, say many economists, further weakened the Soviet economy, which already devoted huge sums of money to the military while ignoring other key areas of society.

By 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the new Soviet leader, many observers warned that the Soviet Union risked economic collapse if it continued trying to keep up militarily with the United States. As a result, Gorbachev improved relations with the West and initiated economic reforms back home.

In 1987, President Reagan delivered a speech in West Berlin, Germany, in which he called on Gorbachev to continue his reforms and famously urged him to remove perhaps the most prominent symbol of the Cold War: the Berlin Wall dividing communist East Berlin and democratic West Berlin.

Two years later, the wall would come down. And soon after that, the reforms that Mikhail Gorbachev initiated prompted a widespread freedom movement that led to the unraveling of the Soviet Empire.

And so, by taking a strong stand against the Soviet Union while encouraging the teetering empire to reform, Ronald Reagan played a key role in bringing an end to the Cold War.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

What differences does President Reagan see between Western nations and the Soviet Union?

What does Reagan view as the main reason for such differences?

**Remarks at the Brandenburg Gate
West Berlin, Germany**

Chancellor Kohl, Governing Mayor Diepgen, ladies and gentlemen: twenty-four years ago, President John F. Kennedy visited Berlin, speaking to the people of this

city and the world at the city hall. Well, since then two other presidents have come, each in his turn, to Berlin. And today I, myself, make my second visit to your city.

We come to Berlin, we American presidents, because it's our duty to speak, in this place, of freedom. . . .

Behind me stands a wall that encircles the free sectors of this city, part of a vast system of barriers that divides the entire continent of Europe. From the Baltic, south, those barriers cut across Germany in a gash of barbed wire, concrete, dog runs, and guard towers. Farther south, there may be no visible, no obvious wall. But there remain armed guards and checkpoints all the same—still a restriction on the right to travel, still an instrument to impose upon ordinary men and women the will of a totalitarian state. Yet it is here in Berlin where the wall emerges most clearly; here, cutting across your city, where the news photo and the television screen have imprinted this brutal division of a continent upon the mind of the world. Standing before the Brandenburg Gate, every man is a German, separated from his fellow men. Every man is a Berliner, forced to look upon a scar. . . .

In the 1950s, [Soviet leader] Khrushchev predicted: "We will bury you." But in the West today, we see a free world that has achieved a level of prosperity and well-being unprecedented in all human history. In the Communist world, we see failure, technological backwardness, declining standards of health, even want of the most basic kind—too little food. Even today, the Soviet Union still cannot feed itself. After these four decades, then, there stands before the entire world one great and inescapable conclusion: freedom leads to prosperity. Freedom replaces the ancient hatreds among the nations with comity and peace. Freedom is the victor.

And now the Soviets themselves may, in a limited way, be coming to understand the importance of freedom. We hear much from Moscow about a new policy of reform and openness. Some political prisoners have been released. Certain foreign news broadcasts are no longer being jammed. Some economic enterprises have been permitted to operate with greater freedom from state control.

Are these the beginnings of profound changes in the Soviet state? Or are they token gestures, intended to raise false hopes in the West, or to strengthen the Soviet system without changing it. We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and security go together, that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of world peace. There is one sign that the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace.

General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall! . . .

Source: The Ronald Reagan Foundation Web site, www.reaganfoundation.org

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. What strides had the Soviets already taken toward a more open society, according to Reagan?
2. What would the Soviets achieve by tearing down the Berlin Wall, according to Reagan?

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THINK THROUGH HISTORY: ANSWER

Reagan views Western nations as prosperous and stable, while he views the Soviet Union as backward and poor. The main reason for this, says Reagan, is the presence of freedom and civil liberties in the West and the lack of them in the Soviet Union.

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS: ANSWERS

1. The Soviets had released some political prisoners, stopped jamming some foreign news broadcasts, and had allowed a greater degree of economic freedom.
2. The Soviets would prove to the world that they were serious about reform and advance the cause of freedom and peace.