

COMMENT AND RESPONSE

RESPONSE TO SKONIECKI'S ANALYSIS

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In Volume 2 of *Young Scholars*, Stefanie Skoniecki presents an accurate but partial analysis of the rhetorical strategies used in Ronald Reagan's "Tear Down this Wall" speech. Skoniecki is correct in her assertion that the former president's main goal was to "promote the world's view of the United States and to hasten the demise of the Soviet Union" (20). She effectively describes Reagan's techniques as she discusses his attempts to connect the U.S. presidency with Berlin, his boasts of the success of the American Marshal Plan, and his subtle references to American values and morals. However, Skoniecki's Burkean analysis overlooks one of Reagan's most effective rhetorical devices: his appeal to the city ethos of Berliners.

Skoniecki's discussion of the second paragraph of Reagan's address focuses on its ability to connect American presidents with the city rather than its appeal to the pride of Berlin. However, Reagan explains why American presidents are drawn to Berlin. He points to the "feeling of history in [the] city," adding that it is "more than 500 years older than the United States." He compliments the "beauty of the Grunewald and the Teirgarten" and recognizes Berliners' "courage and determination." With this early praise of the Berliners, Reagan seeks to ensure a receptive audience. Reagan must acknowledge Berlin as an equal to convince Berliners to fight communism and heed American values of freedom. He infuses his speech with appeals to the ethos of the city of Berlin to avoid sending a message of American superiority.

Reagan also uses the German language to show his respect and admiration for his audience so they will be receptive to his message of freedom. He refers to composer Paul Lincke, a nineteenth century Berlin born composer who "established [himself] as a symbol of the city" through his operettas, songs, and orchestral works (Lamb). Furthermore, Reagan quotes Lincke in German to rally his audience to his cause. Reagan includes two German phrases, the most emotional being "Es gibt nur ein Berlin" [There is only one Berlin], a powerful message for the oppressed people of a divided city. Reagan's last German sentence, "But . . . there were a few things the Soviets didn't count on—Berliner Herz, Berliner Humor, ja, und Berliner Schnauze" [Berliner heart, Berliner humor, yes, and Berliner Schnauze], is an empowering, complimentary tribute to the toughness and spirit of Berliners. The term "Berliner Schnauze," a standard German expression used only among Berliners, has an inside-joke quality, causing the audience to feel connected with Reagan.

Finally, Reagan appeals to the city ethos by explaining what holds the people of Berlin to such a broken city. He mentions Berliners' "fortitude" and "defiant courage," but in the end, he emphasizes "love both profound and abiding." This statement communicates the president's—and his country's—respect and admiration for Berlin. Moreover, it invokes Berliners' pride, motivating them to reconcile West and East Berlin.

Reagan's use of city ethos connects Berlin with the United States and encourages Berliners to oppose communism. In so doing, he avoids coming across as arrogant, pompous, and patronizing. Indeed, it is because of these appeals to Berliners' sense of identity and pride that his references to American freedom succeed.

Works Cited

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