I. Introduction

I would like to thank the Institute for inviting me to speak to you on this special day—eighteen years after the reunification of Germany and nineteen years after the events of the fall of 1989. The year 1989, which transformed not only Germany but all of Europe, will have its twentieth anniversary in 2009, and a host of historians, filmmakers, writers, museum directors, event planners, politicians, and countless societies and organizations have been preparing to commemorate this anniversary for quite some time. For this reason, I would like to focus my remarks on the revolution in East Germany in the fall of 1989. I make these remarks primarily from the perspective of a participant and eyewitness, and only to a lesser degree in the capacity of my current position as Federal Commissioner of the Stasi Files.

I grew up in East Germany, but I was never really a “child of East Germany.” For this I have primarily my mother to thank, a freedom-loving woman who was never swayed by Communism and who suffered from the existence of the Berlin Wall as long as it stood. We lived in East Berlin, while our relatives and friends of my parents lived for the most part in the western part of the city. Families and friends were torn apart by the construction of the Wall, and most of them had no contact for many years. The horizon of those living in the GDR became very narrow. Many tried to arrange their lives as best they could under the circumstances and did not seem to suffer from the pervasive loss of freedom. Many others, including my family, experienced the Wall and the loss of freedom as a permanent open wound.

Our connections to the West consisted of letters and Western media broadcasts. In contrast to other regions in East Germany, East Berliners were able to listen to western radio and watch West Berlin TV broadcasts unhindered. In my house, this was common practice. The “Westsender,” or western stations, were our media environment. In this way, our “class enemy” became a welcome evening
guest for millions of families, providing us with news and opinions and opening a window to the rest of the world. The Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling party in East Germany, raged against this practice and tried to impede and forbid tuning into the western stations, but neither their bans, their jamming transmitters, nor their propaganda could prevent citizens from “leaving” the GDR each evening via their favorite programs or from getting a taste of freedom in the process. Every Sunday, just before noon, my mother would turn up the radio and call to us: “Listen, kids, it’s the Freedom Bell!” And with the chimes of the Freedom Bell reverberating in the background, we listened to a solemn voice reciting a text that never failed to give me goosebumps:

I believe in the sacredness and dignity of the individual. I believe that all men derive the right to freedom equally from God. I pledge to resist aggression and tyranny wherever they appear on earth. I am proud to enlist in the Crusade for Freedom. I am proud to help make the Freedom Bell possible, to be a signer of this Declaration of Freedom, to have my name included as a permanent part of the Freedom Shrine in Berlin, and to join with the millions of men and women throughout the world who hold the cause of freedom sacred.

That was the bell we heard ringing in the Town Hall of West Berlin in the district of Schöneberg, and I would like to give you a brief history of this bell. Berliners had received the Freedom Bell as a gift from a group of American citizens, initiated and sponsored by the “National Committee for a Free Europe,” established in New York in 1949. The idea behind this initiative was inspired by General Lucius Clay, the “father of the Berlin Airlift.” The bell itself was cast in England and then transported to the U.S. for a tour of America. On September 6, 1950, it arrived in New York, where it was transferred to a special vehicle and began a twenty-six state tour. This so-called Crusade for Freedom traveled to Philadelphia, Washington, Atlanta, New Orleans, Houston, Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and then back to New York, where the bell was loaded onto a ship bound for Bremen. Seventeen million Americans in twenty-six different cities from New York to Los Angeles donated money for the bell, and in the process signed the “Oath of Freedom.” The text of this oath is derived in part from the American Declaration
of Independence, and the bell itself was modeled on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

On October 24, 1950, United Nations Day, the inaugural ceremony for the bell took place in Berlin and was attended by more than 400,000 Berliners. The list of signatures under the Oath of Freedom is preserved today in the tower of the Town Hall in Schöneberg, Berlin.

In contrast to its predecessor in Philadelphia, the Freedom Bell in Berlin carries an inscription: “That this world under God shall have a new birth of freedom.” The people residing behind the Iron Curtain had to wait almost four decades for this rebirth of freedom. The Berlin Freedom Bell endured throughout this period and, for all those with ears to hear, became a symbol of hope.

At some time in September 1950, on its tour through America, the bell must have stopped here in Washington, D.C. It is clear to me that at that time, with the end of the war only five years past, there must have been many American families still grieving for sons and daughters lost fighting against National Socialist Germany. Perhaps within your own family or among your circle of friends there is someone who saw the Freedom Bell and signed the Oath of Freedom back then. If that is the case, I would like to ask you to convey to them the heartfelt thanks of a woman from Berlin, who was not quite three years old at the time.

More than half a lifetime later, in 1996, I traveled to the United States for the first time, landing right here in Washington, D.C. The first American with whom I spoke during this trip was the taxi driver who brought me from the airport into the city. And the first thing he began to ask me about, when he heard where I was from, was the fall of the Berlin Wall. Again and again, he and his family had watched on TV the images of the Wall coming down. He said he would never forget it. And then he asked me, “Were you happy when the Wall fell?” “Yes, I really was,” I answered rather abruptly. Of course there was much more to say, and I wanted to, but at the time my English was simply too limited.

“How was it for you when the Wall fell?” “Were you happy?” On the list of questions that are now put to Germans around the world, in particular to East Germans, these two questions are always at the top. I recall the Brandenburg Gate, people strolling and running alongside the Wall, laughing and crying as they hugged each other,
climbing up onto the Wall and calling out blissfully, “Incredible!”
And this was truly an incredibly moving moment, so moving that
even today most people can remember exactly where they were and
what they were doing when the news of the fall of the Wall reached
them. For one long night, the Germans were the happiest people on
earth, and the rest of the world shared our joy.

It is no wonder the fall of the Wall became a symbol of the self-
liberation of East Germans. The fall of the Berlin Wall—how could it
have been otherwise?—brought the citizens of the GDR the freedom
they had longed for. But it did not happen quite this way. It was not
the fall of the Wall that brought freedom. The Wall fell after the East
German people had already struggled for, and earned, their freedom.
Allow me to tell you something about all of this, about the history
of this revolution, and about the three days in October that changed
our world.

II. Prehistory

The Wall, built on the SED’s orders and cynically named the “anti-
fascist protective wall,” did not just prevent people in the GDR from
traveling to the other, larger part of their country. It made 17 million
people prisoners. Along with this monstrous attack upon freedom,
the ruling party claimed the right to control people’s opinions, behav-
ior, and decisions. That was all the more dangerous for East Germans’
souls in that younger people, after twelve years of Nazism and war,
had never tasted freedom. Some people still had a memory of it, and
they experienced bitter disappointment in their hope for freedom and
democracy. People were twice robbed of their freedom and deprived
of it for more than half a century. It is difficult to assess the long-term
social and cultural consequences of this theft. Millions of people left
the GDR. And what became of those who remained? Countless num-
bers of them managed somehow to be beneficiaries of the system or
low-level fellow travelers. Others searched for niches and spheres of
comparative freedom. An astonishingly large number of people were
successful in refusing to allow themselves to be morally corrupted,
despite the state’s efforts to intimidate or threaten them.

Communist rule in the GDR always encountered resistance and op-
position, however. Many citizens were punished with heavy prison
sentences, with the loss of their jobs, and with other forms of discrimi-
nation. A not insubstantial number paid with their lives, especially
during the early years of the GDR. In the late 1980s, more and more oppositional groups began to form, and they were more daring and more in the public eye than those active in the 1960s and 1970s. The first step towards resistance for many was often the attempt to assert themselves intellectually and in terms of their own ideals. Those who distanced themselves from the pervasive system of lies and attempted to “live in truth,” as Vaclav Havel expressed it, had to reckon with persecution and prejudice. Those who had learned to appreciate how much more fulfilling a life of honesty and dignity was than a life of lies and fear accepted that risk. In this respect, the men and women in the civil rights movement in East Germany did not feel like victims. Their life was, to be sure, awkward and uncomfortable, but, at the same time, it was certainly freer and richer than the lives of those who kept them under surveillance, who harassed and tormented them.

The opposition groups in the GDR were closely allied with the Protestant Church. The reason for this was the fact that the churches were the only public institutions that were not subject to state control. This made them attractive to individuals and groups seeking a place where they could communicate openly and discuss topics that were otherwise taboo in the state-controlled public forums. While the ruling Socialist Unity Party and its underlings did everything in their power to stifle any independent social movements, the forerunners of a free, pluralistic, and combative society began to develop within the religious communities. And this attracted people who had hitherto been distant from the church. In this manner, a great many church groups developed into political workshops, simply because they made it possible to discuss social topics in a way that would have been unthinkable outside the protected space of the church. These topics included ecology, child-rearing, justice on a global scale, disarmament, minority rights, and the dream of a free and democratic society. An active and creative civil society did not exist in the GDR. The only public spaces that were not under state control were the churches. They were host to groups and events on issues that were taboo in the GDR on political grounds.

Encouraged by developments in neighboring countries and by the shift in the direction of Soviet politics, the opposition in East Germany increasingly went on the offensive and sought publicity. In a country where, for decades, the formation of any unauthorized group was punishable, where the media were subject to total censorship, and where even the children knew precisely what they could
talk about at home but never in school—in such a country this new development was like a mummy opening its eyes, and, in amazement, beginning to move its limbs—not elegant, but sensational. More and more illegal publications were printed and distributed, and the various opposition groups increasingly started to form networks, to get organized throughout East Germany, and to seek contact with the public outside the protective walls of the church. Arrests of opposition leaders triggered public vigils and protests. The public in both East and West Germany learned about these actions mainly from the broadcasts of West German television and radio stations, who had had officially accredited correspondents in the GDR since the 1970s. The state hesitated to use force openly to put down these protests because it did not want to jeopardize its hard-earned international recognition.

Consider a few examples of the increasingly open, increasingly bold protests. When, in 1988, several high school students in Berlin were expelled from school for publishing their political views, a wave of solidarity rose up and swept across the country. At public events throughout the GDR, the school system was subjected to massive criticism, and an alternative evening school for adolescents was established. And when the church newspaper—the only legal medium which, at least occasionally, and then with the necessary restraint, was able to publish critical reports and commentaries—was banned, hundreds of citizens demonstrated in the streets. They had advanced only about 300 meters before the police and other security forces broke up the demonstration and arrested many participants. Footage of the demonstration was, however, broadcast on the evening news for everyone to see. That had not happened before in the GDR: men and women taking to the streets to demonstrate against actions of the state government.

One of the most effective campaigns of public protest at this time was the proof of state election fraud on May 7, 1989. It was not the point of this campaign to prove the deceptive and undemocratic character of state elections in East Germany—this was already all too obvious: The act of voting was not voluntary, there were no competing candidates or parties, and there were no boxes to check on the ballot. Under the supervision of vigilant official observers, voters were instead expected to fold their ballots and deposit them in the ballot box; anyone who made use of the voting booths, erected pro forma in a corner, was immediately suspect. Official election results regularly yielded approval
ratings of more than 99 percent for the so-called candidates. On election night, May 7, representatives of the citizens’ movement observed the vote tallies at hundreds of polling places in dozens of towns and cities and were able to prove that the announced results of the election did not correspond to the actual vote tally. Even the SED rank-and-file were appalled.

In the early summer of 1989, the peaceful student protesters in Beijing drew a great deal of our attention and sympathy. We secretly printed and distributed stickers and bookmarks with the Chinese characters for democracy, pasting them on doors and walls. We were horrified by the Tiananmen Square massacre of students by the Chinese military on June 4. At the entrance of the Samaritan Church in Berlin, we erected an altar of mourning, which was decorated week after week with white flowers, a symbol of mourning in China. A group of church members paid tribute to the victims of violence in Beijing by beating drums in different parts of the city until police chased them away. They became an example to others, and similar actions that drew public attention took place in other cities. Of course, the SED leadership showed solidarity with the mass murderers. There was talk in the GDR of the “chinesische Lösung”—the “Chinese solution”—and we thought the SED leadership was capable of a similar reaction if confronted with mass demonstrations. The situation intensified from month to month. While state authorities reacted with increasing nervousness, the opposition groups became more and more daring and self-confident, despite the fact that their strategies and ultimate goals were anything but clear or unified. It was not their shared vision of the future that united them. Indeed, it was not what they were for, but rather what they were against, that brought them together. They were simply fed up with the German Democratic Republic. German unity itself was not yet a motivating force for them.

In September 1989, the “New Forum” party was founded, offering many thousands of citizens the means to express their discontent and impatience and to demand drastic reforms. The Social Democratic Party, founded on October 7, spelled out its platform more clearly: It demanded a top-to-bottom democratization of the GDR, strict separation of powers, parliamentary democracy, and party pluralism. At the same time, it professed explicit allegiance to the concept of “dual German states as a consequence of their guilt-ridden past.” With its “call for intervention in our own affairs” on September 12, the citizen movement “Democracy Now” voiced similarly far-reaching demands,
thus anticipating German unity. Although the opposition was growing steadily stronger, many people were of the opinion that there was no hope of change in the GDR. More and more people were leaving the country. Many risked great danger in fleeing. Others tried to leave legally. That often entailed years of harassment and uncertainty, as well as trouble for relatives who remained. Nevertheless, tens of thousands decided to pursue this route.

III. Three Days in October

On October 4, 1989, representatives of all the important opposition groups met in an apartment in Berlin and agreed upon a “Unified Declaration,” at the center of which stood the demand for free elections with secret ballots to be monitored by the United Nations. The GDR’s systemic conflicts and contradictions were coming to a head at this time: The massive exodus of refugees underscored the political bankruptcy of the GDR leadership, and citizens were openly demonstrating their disaffection. Nonetheless, the ruling party and the state did everything in their power to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the GDR just as they had in previous years, as if nothing had changed. It was simply eerie. On October 6, while thousands of youngsters, members of the Free German Youth organization, marched in a torchlight procession on the eve of the anniversary and cheered on the leaders of the ruling Socialist Unity Party, two thousand people gathered in the Church of the Redeemer (Erlöserkirche) in Berlin for an event entitled “Workshop on the Future: What’s next, GDR?” (Zukunftswerkstatt: Wie nun weiter, DDR?) The Unified Declaration of October 4 was approved to huge applause. The demand for free elections, signaling the end of Socialist Unity Party rule, was now on the table and impossible to ignore.
The Monday demonstrations in Leipzig became larger with each passing week, beginning with prayers in the large city center churches and spreading to the Ring, the major street surrounding the city center. In many other cities, thousands of people came together, primarily in churches, the only places available for such gatherings. Most of those who met there were not Christians. They came to meet kindred spirits, to have access to information, and to share their hopes and fears. They talked, shared information, sang, and prayed. “Dona nobis pacem” was among the most popular songs, a canon in which people—Christian or not—took one another’s hands and sang together. Perhaps one reason there was no violence on the part of the demonstrators was that people who join hands and stand shoulder to shoulder while singing “dona nobis pacem” can’t pick up and throw paving stones. They held candles. That was not only peaceful; it was clever. To beat people with stones in their hands is easier than if they are holding candles.

On October 7, the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR, the state’s plan for Berlin was a day of festivity. But the day ended more dramatically and differently than planned. At Alexanderplatz, a small group of protesters grew into a large crowd. Police and security forces reacted with brutal force. Hundreds were arrested. At this time, I was at the Gethsemane Church in Prenzlauer Berg almost around the clock. The large church, a beautiful Gothic revival edifice from the Wilhelmine period with space for at least 2000 people, was open day and night. A sea of candles burned in front of the main entrance. The church had become the political center of the city for protesting Berliners. Around the church there were a few trees and bushes, separated from the street by a fence. Faced with TV crews from all over the world, police and security forces did not dare to set foot on the church grounds. In the church and around it, young opposition activists held vigils for the political prisoners. The altar area was a barracks of sleeping bags and crates as a group on hunger strike held vigil and prayed there.

In an adjoining room of the church was the so-called contact telephone—a type of information pool for opposition groups and other interested parties. A group of opposition members had installed it a few months before in order to be able to coordinate the activities of the various groups around the country. At a time when there were no other means of fast communication and only a few telephones, such an information hub was invaluable. Of course,
we knew the phone was bugged; we were used to that. We had long since learned to live with informers in our midst. And we had almost nothing to hide any more—our protest was public and on the offensive. The contact telephone number was quite widely known, and that would prove to be very important in the first days of October.

Every evening, thousands of people gathered in the church. Initially, the protest was against the wave of arrests in Leipzig, but, in the meantime, it had come to encompass more. The evening of October 7 began as had the previous evenings—until the crowd made its way from Alexanderplatz to the Gethsemane Church. Suddenly, we were surrounded by armored police vehicles and water canons. The first telephone reports of arrests and detentions of demonstrators reached us. How many were there? Where were they being taken? We asked how many and who had been arrested and kept records of what we were told. That was the beginning of the comprehensive documentation with which we were later able to prove how forcefully and with what planning the police and Stasi had acted.

The next two days were filled with uncertainty: Would the weakened state again use force and attempt to discipline the increasingly bold and self-assured people? In Beijing shortly before, Egon Krenz had reaffirmed his support for the Chinese leadership’s terrible response to the events at Tiananmen Square and indicated that all means at the state’s disposal would be used if necessary. I cannot recall that I was afraid; there was probably too much excitement for that. But we knew the dangers. For example, we had provided each other with written powers of attorney so that, in the event that some of us were arrested, our friends would have the right to care for our children during our detention.
October 9, 1989, was a Monday and thus a day of peace prayers and demonstrations in Leipzig. But this Monday was different. Party leadership and security forces were more nervous than ever. Again and again during the day, we received alarming news: schools and preschools in Leipzig were closed, and hospitals were stocking up their blood banks. But more people than ever met that evening in the streets of Leipzig. They held prayer vigils in the churches and then they went, some arm in arm or holding hands, into the street. The SED leadership was initially intent on confrontation. Seventy thousand demonstrators faced eight thousand members of the People’s Police, the National People’s Army, and the Ministry for State Security, supported by five thousand so-called social forces from the party and state apparatus.

Simultaneously, thousands of people had gathered in the Gethsemane Church in Berlin, awaiting information and offering each other moral support. The church was still surrounded by police and Stasi, and again there were arrests. We waited nervously for news from Leipzig, since this day would decide whether the Socialist Unity Party was actually prepared to move against the people with armed force. Finally, the liberating news arrived: The citizens of Leipzig were in the streets and demonstrating unchallenged. Not one shot had been fired. Much later, it was learned that it was the local Leipzig authorities that had decided not to use force against the demonstrators. Egon Krenz, who went on to claim that he had prevented the politburo from using force, only endorsed that decision later. In Berlin, our relief was boundless. The forces surrounding the Gethsemane Church had also vanished like ghosts, and a sea of lights awaited us in front of the church as people from the surrounding buildings lit candles. Someone climbed the church tower and rang the bells. It was hard to believe: those in power were in retreat. Nothing was
yet decided, but for the first time, we tasted freedom. I hope I have been able to clarify why October 9, for many people, still symbolizes the democratic revolution in the GDR.

**IV. 2009 – The Year of Commemoration**

2009 will be a year of commemoration in Germany. In the spring, the Federal Republic of Germany will be 60 years old, and in the fall, we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the events I have been able to recount for you in only fragmentary form and only from personal memory. It is probably clear that it will take a long time before today’s Germans feel they have a common history. Whether East Germans will accept the sixtieth anniversary of the country’s founding as their holiday still remains to be seen. October 9, on the other hand, will probably be celebrated only in Leipzig, Berlin, and other Eastern German cities. We are still far from the day when West Germans will think of October 9 with grateful remembrance as the first German revolution with a “happy ending.”

The German situation has parallels in other parts of Eastern Europe. Most new members of the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe were, like the GDR, previously in the East Bloc. They will continue to bear the consequences of forty years of economic and cultural decline under Communist dictatorship for a long time to come, and no one can know when the wounds caused by tyranny, deportations, and political persecution will be healed. But the suffering of the peoples of the Baltic, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia is still foreign to the countries of Western Europe. The Velvet Revolution of the Czechs, the Singing Revolution of the Estonians, the Peaceful Revolution in the GDR—these are not yet understood to be an integral part of European history.

For us, the 1989 revolution was a significant, liberating event in the context of world history; for others, it meant only the collapse of the GDR or a “turning point” (*Wende*)—a concept Egon Krenz, the last party General Secretary and State Chairman of the GDR, put forward in October 1989. What our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will read one day in their history books about the fall of 1989 has not yet been decided. Since almost all the protagonists and antagonists, winners and losers, contemporary witnesses and non-participating observers are still alive today, they argue vehemently, sometimes bitterly, about these historic events. Of course, this debate is not only about what actually happened: The excellent
state of the documentation allows no uncertainty, and the salvaged
documents of the GDR’s secret police, the Stasi, also bear witness
to these events. The subtext of the debates has far more to do with
the battle about the role of specific groups and individuals, with un-
acknowledged errors and vanities. It has to do with the painful loss
of vanished world views, with disappointed hopes, with slights and
retribution, and with legends and historical lies. And, of course, it’s
also about individuals using—and possibly exploiting—20-year-old
events for themselves or their party.

For example, there is the question of whether these events even de-
serve to be called a “revolution.” Some historians vehemently deny
it, questioning in particular the role of the opposition. They argue
that the Communist rulers were not chased out by a protesting
people but that the GDR “imploded,” that the party and government
would have capitulated when they were economically finished, when
they could no longer count on the military protection of the Soviet
occupation forces, and when—despite the Wall and barbed wire—
more and more people left the country. Why, they ask, should we
pay our respects to the men and women of the citizens’ movement?
Such historians claim that the significance of the small opposition
groups is grossly overestimated. Moreover, they state, the demon-
strators and protesters were more concerned with the prized West
German mark than with freedom, and the sole freedom they sought
was the freedom to have this coveted Western currency to purchase
video recorders and other goods they had long had to do without.
An early proponent of this view was Otto Schily, a prominent Green
and then Social Democratic politician who later served in the federal
cabinet. When on the evening of March 18, 1990 — the day of the
first free and democratic election in the GDR — Schily was asked by
a journalist why citizens of the GDR, in the first free election, voted
for the party that promised the fastest way to unification, he scorn-
fully thrust a banana at the camera instead of answering. Bananas
had been notoriously scarce in the GDR.

It is true that opposition groups in the GDR were weak and, until
1989, had had no decisive influence on the populace. In part, this
was the case because millions of people had left the GDR, including
many whose strength and radicalism would have served the citizens’
movement well. It was also significant that a large number of elites
who hadn’t gone to the West were corrupt and did not consider
joining the citizens’ initiatives in opposing the Socialist Unity Party.
Thus, it is all the more amazing that the couple of thousand people from the opposition groups and their supporters essentially shaped events. The list of their achievements is extensive: They gave form and voice to the mass protests, openly questioned party legitimacy, demanded new elections, organized a show of solidarity with the Rumanians oppressed by Ceausescu and with the Chinese students. They maintained contact with supporters in the West, with western media, and with the opposition groups in Poland and Czechoslovakia. They also documented state tyranny, formulated public values such as democracy, self-determination, and human rights, organized prayer vigils and protests against arrests, founded new and legitimate political parties, and occupied offices of the secret police. Finally, they saved the files of the Ministry of State Security from destruction, making sure that the archives were opened, and carried through a largely successful change of elites as well.

V. Eighteen Years of German Unity

On October 9, 1989, there was probably no one who considered it possible that Germany would be united just a year later, on October 3, 1990. Children born when people were demonstrating in the streets are grown-ups now; they take the free, democratic, united Germany for granted. My generation—in the East and in the West—was the first to grow up and be socialized in postwar Germany; we accepted the division of Germany as a fact of life. That had to do not least with the National Socialist past. For many, the division of Germany was not only a result of the war but a consequence of Germany’s monstrous crimes. To desire reunification made one suspect of not wanting to accept German guilt. A newly won German identity that permits one to like one’s own country, to experience joy and even to sing along when the national anthem is played at the end of a competition, is a rather new experience for many in my generation. How could such a feeling of community have arisen as long as both parts of Germany belonged to opposing power blocks and, above all, as long as a quarter of the German population was encircled by a wall and living in a dictatorship?

For many former GDR citizens, the once longed-for West remains a stranger. They enjoy its advantages but are unable to come to terms with the uncertainties and risks of an open society. Being accustomed to a life controlled by the state “fathers” makes freedom seem fearful. Decades of life in the GDR have clipped the wings of
many, have made them careful and mistrusting. The shadows of dictatorship are long. But the East Germans are not alone in their difficulties with freedom. There is at most only a gradual difference between East and West Germans in this regard. The history of Germans and freedom is not exactly a passionate love story. Heinrich Heine described it as follows:

The Englishman loves freedom like his lawful wife. He possesses her and even if he doesn’t treat her with any special tenderness, at least he knows how to defend her in an emergency. The Frenchman loves freedom like his chosen bride. He throws himself at her feet with the most exaggerated declarations of love. He pleads on her behalf as a matter of life and death. He commits on her account thousands of reckless deeds. The German loves freedom like his grandmother.

So that my remarks do not end with this rather sober view of Germans’ passions, I would like to remind you, once again, of the Freedom Bell in the Berlin City Hall. It stands for a great deal that Germans, especially the people of Berlin, owe to the United States. Americans could not have given us a better gift. I would venture to say that if General Lucius D. Clay were to visit us in Berlin today, he would not be entirely dissatisfied. What more can one ask for?

translated from the German by Richard W. Pettit and Kathryn Buck

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