



DECEMBER 2014

ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

◆ Last year, our annual business meeting was held on December 9, 2013, at [La Parrilla](#) at Albrechtstr. 11 (in Mitte) near Bhf. Friedrichstrasse. The last year was reviewed, executive committee officers were elected for 2014, and plans were made for the coming year. The officers are: ANN WERTHEIMER (chair), PAM SELWYN (vice chair), DAVID MACBRYDE (secretary), ALAN BENSON (treasurer), JANE HARTMANN-ZEILBERGER (assistant treasurer), ISABEL COLE and GRETCHEN KLOTZ (associates).

◆ DAVID MACBRYDE continued as mailing list administrator. Contact DAVID to make any changes in your address or to add someone to the mailing list: members-berlin@avaberlin.org. He is also the person to contact if you would like to announce something that you are publishing, performing or exhibiting. PAM SELWYN is the mailing list administrator backup.

◆ Thanks to JON WOLFE, who continued as our web master. Check our web site, www.avaberlin.org for event updates including KAREN AXELRAD's great documentation. ALAN BENSON is her backup.

◆ KAREN AXELRAD continued to photograph and film AVA-Berlin events. And thanks to KAREN we always have an up-to-date information leaflet, the most recent of which appeared in February. Please see links to KAREN's photos throughout this report and wherever AVA has a presence.

◆ ANN WERTHEIMER continued as liaison to the United for Peace and Justice coalition, which we joined in 2006. As a local group with no employees, AVA-Berlin pays \$50 dues a year to UfPJ. See [\[unitedforpeace.org\]\(http://unitedforpeace.org\) where you can find us on the "members map of the world"!](http://www.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

◆ The dues for full membership with voting rights in AVA-Berlin are €30 per year, or a self-assessed smaller amount if necessary. Check our web site for details.

◆ KAREN AXELRAD takes care of our Facebook www.facebook.com/AmericanVoicesAbroadBerlin and Twitter [@AVA_Berlin](https://twitter.com/AVA_Berlin) pages. We'll be continuously updating our Facebook page with links to events, articles and petitions of interest to our membership.

◆ NPR Berlin (UKW104.1) continues to post our first Thursday of the month Stammtisch on its web site. Go to the www.nprberlin.de homepage and then click on Events (near the top of the page) to find our listing each month. AVA is also listed in the submenu of the Events page (on the left side of the screen); click on Activist Groups.

◆ This year we have had to cope with changing venues for our first-Thursday-of-the-month Stammtisch. We had our first Stammtisch of the year at PAM SELWYN'S house in Schöneberg. In February and March, we met at the new Seerose venue. Starting in April, our Stammtisch was held at [Café X-Zeit](#) at Welsersstrasse 10-12 just off Viktoria-Luise-Platz, where we still meet. See section OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS for details of our special Stammtisch themes and events.

LETTERS WRITTEN, PETITIONS SIGNED, SPEECHES GIVEN

◆ ANN WERTHEIMER's May 7th speech on behalf of AVA-Berlin at the opening of the 29th Black International Cinema (BIC) festival at Rathaus Schöneberg. This opening was dedicated

to the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's visit to both West and East Berlin in 1964. You can find photos of the event on the AVA web site.

I am here today on behalf of American Voices Abroad Berlin. We are a political group founded in 2003 as Americans in Berlin Against the War—the Iraq War. We are independent of all political parties, both in the United States and in Germany.

What I would like to tell you today is not about American Voices Abroad. I would like to briefly tell you about my own recollections of the Civil Rights movement and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to whom this evening is dedicated. As a young white woman in the northern United States, I was shaped by these events.

When I started college in 1962 at the age of 18, James Meredith was about to be the first African American to enroll at the University of Mississippi. The rioting of white students on campus in Oxford, Mississippi, prompted President Kennedy to send in troops to protect Meredith and enforce the law. At this turning point in U.S. Civil Rights history, as I was quietly starting college in New Jersey in the fall of 1962, James Meredith could finally claim his constitutional right to attend the University of Mississippi.

In 1963 we all heard Dr. King's 'I Have a Dream' speech. I was 19 years old then, and there is no better time in your life to hear a speech like that. And by then, in August of 1963, we all really needed to hear that speech. Earlier in the summer, Gov. George Wallace was infamously 'standing in the schoolhouse door' at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa to prevent the admission of black students. On the very next day we learned that the civil rights leader Medgar Evers had been assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi.

Not long after Dr. King's speech, four little black girls were murdered in the bombing of a Baptist church in Birmingham, Alabama. That was just two months before the assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

In June of 1964, in Philadelphia, Mississippi, three civil rights workers were brutally murdered—James Chaney (who was Black), and Andrew Goodman

and Michael Schwerner (who were white). They had been working during the 'freedom summer' in a voter registration drive. This hit particularly close to home for me because Goodman and Schwerner were Jewish kids from New York, and Andrew was just my age.

In 1964 Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize, which we all saw on TV. I can remember the television set where I saw the Oslo ceremony as Dr. King said that "civilization and violence are antithetical concepts."

In 1965 came the voting rights campaign and the marches from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital in Montgomery. And then we all watched as President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

Dr. King began to speak out against the Vietnam War as early as 1965. But it wasn't until 1967, when he spoke at the Riverside Church in Manhattan, that I understood what he meant when he said it was time to "break the silence." This criticism of U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam was so important to him that he defied his own advisors, most of whom saw the war issue as a distraction from the Civil Rights Movement. But for me this speech brought to light the connections between domestic policy and foreign policy, between violence at home and violence abroad. Dr. King had exposed—to put it in his own words—the "moral roots common to both" the civil rights movement and the peace movement.

That was when I realized, as a young woman of 24 by then working as a schoolteacher in Washington, D.C., that Dr. King was expanding our idea, my idea, of what democracy really was. And that I was included in this expansion. I was beginning to understand that civil rights—meaning voting rights, fairness in housing, desegregated schools—and the war in Vietnam were related.

Dr. King's organization of the Poor People's Campaign in early 1968 again expanded my understanding of democracy. I remember that he spoke at the National Cathedral not only about civil rights, and not only about war, but about poverty in general. I understood that real democracy was more than voting, that it had to be extended to the economy as well. In this last major speech before his assassination, Dr. King spoke of the challenges of overcoming racism, war and poverty.

To understand how radical this was, we have to remember that for so many decades, the power structure in the South—and not ONLY in the South—was able to hold power, and withhold power, by presenting as opposed the interests of white and Black Americans. By speaking out against the war, and then with the Poor People's Campaign, Dr. King was making it clearer than ever that these interests cannot be separate.

They were not separate in 1968 and they are not separate today. Today we still hear that the interests of black and white people, of the middle class and the poor, of immigrants and the long settled are distinct, and in each case we are told that the interests of one group run counter to the interests of the other. But Dr. King's legacy reminds us that democracy means that we are in this together, that our well-being is connected to the well-being of our brothers and sisters, and that violence in all its forms is antithetical to civilization.

◆ ANN WERTHEIMER's July 1st speech on behalf of AVA-Berlin at the opening of the "Footprints in the Sand?" exhibition at Rathaus Schöneberg. This opening was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's visit to both West and East Berlin in 1964.

It will be 50 years this coming September that Martin Luther King visited Berlin. At the invitation of Mayor Willy Brandt, he arrived in West Berlin on Saturday, September 12, 1964. He participated in the usual official receptions, spoke at the Berliner Festtage and the Kirchentag, and received an honorary doctorate from the Theologische Hochschule. Then, on Sunday, September 13, King preached in East Berlin, first at the Marienkirche and then, for the overflow crowd, at the Sophienkirche around the corner.

Although Martin Luther King's East Berlin sermon was essentially the same speech he had given at the West Berlin Kirchentag at the Waldbühne the day before, he now directed his words to this special audience—a congregation in East Berlin, behind what used to be called the Iron Curtain.

September 1964: The Berlin Wall was already three years old, President Kennedy had given his 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech a year before, and hopes for a

quick resolution to the division in Berlin were fading.

The invitation to preach in East Berlin came from the Probst of the Marienkirche, Heinrich Grüber, who had been an opponent of the Nazis, a survivor of the concentration camps in Sachsenhausen and Dachau, and a pacifist. More recently, he had been corresponding privately with Rev. King. But the Protestant Church in the East, which played an important role in civil society, was being undermined by the East German government; and so Grüber, who had been denied entry into East Berlin since the wall was built in August 1961 and had served the Church from his exile in the West, could not participate in the Sunday service that he had arranged.

What was it about this sermon that so moved the East Berlin congregants? Although it was a true Christian sermon and was understood as a message of hope, it also carried a reminder that Christian faith can be the engine of political action. Moreover, it gave the East Berlin congregation an opportunity to identify with American Blacks—to see their own struggle in a larger context and to feel less isolated.

Rev. King began with greetings to the congregation from Christians in West Berlin and from the United States, saying that it was, quote, "an honor to be in 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."

Perhaps you can imagine the effect these words had in September 1964, the solidarity that the congregation in East Berlin must have felt. Let me read this passage in German so you can hear exactly what the congregation heard that day as Ralf Zorn, an American pastor in West Berlin and King's interpreter for the weekend, translated these words:

Es ist wahrhaftig eine Ehre in dieser Stadt zu sein, die als ein Symbol der Teilung durch Menschen auf dieser Erde steht. Und hier sind auf beide Seiten der Mauer Gottes Kinder, und keine durch Menschenhand gemachte Grenze kann die Tatsache auslöschen.

Dr. King told the congregation about the 'social revolution' taking place in the United States, and that this revolution was a struggle to free some twenty million

Blacks from what he called “the long night of segregation and discrimination.” This struggle, King said, was non-violent, a merger of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and the African-American Christian tradition. He continued: “Regardless of the barriers of race, creed, ideology, or nationality, there is an inescapable destiny which binds us together. There is a common humanity which makes us sensitive to the sufferings of one another.” In German:

Ohne Rücksicht auf die Schranken der Rasse, des Bekenntnisses, der Ideologie oder Nationalität, gibt es eine unentrinnbare Bestimmung. Es gibt eine gemeinsame Menschlichkeit, die uns füreinander und für die Leiden untereinander empfindlich macht.

Dr. King explained the sufferings of slavery and segregation, police brutality, exploitation and discrimination. It was through this suffering, King believed, that the African-American had become the conscience of the nation. Although presented in religious terms—after all, this was a sermon preached in a church to Christian believers—the secular message was explicit when Dr. King said that “we are learning to work together to fulfill our dreams through the political structures of our society.” It was their Christian faith, Dr. King said, that kept them going. And this is the faith that he recommended to the Christians of East Berlin: “With this faith,” he said, “we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to suffer together, to stand up for freedom, knowing that we will be free one day.”

In diesem Glauben werden wir miteinander arbeiten dürfen, miteinander beten, miteinander ringen, miteinander leiden, miteinander für Freiheit aufstehen in der Gewissheit, dass wir eines Tages frei sein werden.

Martin Luther King spoke both of Christian faith and political action, weaving the two threads as they are woven in African-American spirituals—in which freedom is not only a religious concept but also a literal escape from oppression. When he said that the “the dry bones of my people put on flesh and courage and faith and began marching on to freedom land,” the East German audience, identifying with American Blacks, must have felt that they too could join in a struggle, whether inwardly or for all the world to see. And in so doing, they could feel themselves on the right side of history.

The Protestant Church in East Germany would go on in the 1980s to provide a platform for opposition groups. In 1989 in Leipzig, the nonviolent “Monday Demonstrations” for peace, freedom and democracy began in association with services and prayers at the Nikolaikirche. The Monday demonstrations spread, and in one city after another throughout East Germany, hundreds of thousands joined the call, “We are the people!”

We cannot know the exact significance of Martin Luther King’s speech for these subsequent events. But if there is a lesson here for us today, it is perhaps this: Change begins when we call for it; words are powerful, but they may come to fruition only after they are cultivated and shared. The words and deeds of one decade and one person may be carried through the years, be joined in the collective mind and the collective will with the words and deeds of others, until freedom and justice can be achieved.

OUR OWN AVA-BERLIN PROJECTS

◆ Several times a year we choose a theme for the Stammtisch. Our own ELLEN ROSEN volunteered to tell us everything we always wanted to know about Walmart, which is the subject of her recent book. ELLEN spoke at the first Stammtisch of the year, January 6, at PAM SELWYN’s house. See the [AVA web site](#) for notes from her talk.

◆ On April 3, the Stammtisch moved to [Café X-Zeit](#) to discuss the surveillance case of the early 70s right here in Berlin. Several of the plaintiffs were present and over 30 guests. ANN WERTHEIMER opened the discussion with a review of the case and was soon joined by other *Zeitzeugen*, especially KAREN HILLMER, DOUGLAS HILLMER, GRACE QUITZOW and DAVID KRAMER. See the [AVA web site](#) for photos. By the way, there is now an archive at The Government Accountability Project (GAP) in Washington, D.C. dedicated to this case. You can read “How a Group of Americans Challenged Military Intelligence in West-Berlin: Low-tech Surveillance, Whistleblowers and the Court Case that Resulted” by going to: www.avaberlin.org/?p=1223.

◆ On June 5, our own Rich Rosen gave a talk on “The Science of Climate Change, and its Implica-

tions for Prevention” at our monthly Stammtisch. A particularly interesting discussion followed. We are all looking forward to part II.

Rich, himself a scientist, has long traveled between Berlin and Boston working with the [Tellus Institute](#)—research and action for a global civilization of sustainability, equity, and well-being. The institute was established in 1976 as an interdisciplinary not-for-profit research and policy organization and has launched a website called the [Great Transition Initiative](#).

◆ On September 4, AVA hosted the Rev. Ralf Zorn at its regular first-Thursday Stammtisch dedicated to the events of September 13, 1964. It was on this day that Martin Luther King visited both West and East Berlin. Rev. Zorn was the interpreter and driver for Dr. King 50 years ago. It was due to Rev. Zorn’s persistence that Dr. King was able to cross the border at Checkpoint Charlie without his passport, using only an American Express card as his identification. The Stammtisch, organized by JOAN KLA-KOW, was AVA’s special contribution to the 50th anniversary festivities. After a Q and A, MICHAEL STELTZER showed his pictures documenting that day in West and East Berlin, and more discussion followed. See photos of the Stammtisch at www.ava-berlin.org. For other contributions to the MLK festivities, see OTHER PEOPLE’S PROJECTS THAT AVA-BERLIN SUPPORTED.

◆ AVA sponsored Johanna Hamilton’s film 1971 at this year’s One World Berlin documentary film festival. This film was screened on the festival’s opening night, November 20, with director Johanna Hamilton attending. PAM SELWYN hosted Johanna at her apartment in Schöneberg and DAVID MACBRYDE organized an info table in the Arsenal foyer. ISABEL COLE gave this short introduction to the event:

I’m Isabel Cole from American Voices Abroad Berlin. We’re very happy to be partnering a film at the One World Film Festival once again this year. Thanks to Natalie Gravenor and the One World Film Festival for organizing the screening, and the Arsenal Kino for hosting. Thanks to Johanna Hamilton for making this timely film, and for joining us here tonight. And to Annie Machon, Wolfgang Kaleck and Ann Wertheimer for agreeing to speak about state surveillance

from different perspectives on the panel after the film, and Nadja Vancauwenberghe from the Exberliner for agreeing to moderate. I’d also like to thank Janne Teller of Writers Against Mass Surveillance for bringing the film to our attention.

A few words about my group, AVA-Berlin. We came together in 2003 during the Iraq War as “Americans in Berlin Against the War” and have continued since then as a casual forum for Americans in Berlin interested in non-partisan progressive politics, civil liberties, and German-American political dialogue. We have been protesting civil rights and privacy abuses under the PATRIOT ACT from the very beginning, and since the Snowden revelations we have renewed our focus on the problem of mass surveillance.

We were excited to learn of Johanna Hamilton’s film because it adds a deeper historical perspective to the issue, exploring the tensions of the Cold War period that are so crucial to understanding the situation today, and reflecting the experience of some of our members who were politically active during the early 70s. It tells a nuanced story about a time in recent history that in many ways was as turbulent and disillusioning as our own – and leaves us with the hopeful message that it is possible for a few brave citizens to take on an organization like the FBI, and that their actions can ultimately lead to reforms.

Sadly, it seems this is a message that each generation needs to learn anew. It is all the more crucial that after 40 years, the members of the “Citizens’ Commission to Investigate the FBI” have chosen this time to speak out, and that Johanna Hamilton has captured their story in such an insightful and gripping film.

After the screening, a panel discussed government surveillance and whistle-blowing from several perspectives and then took questions from the audience. KAREN AXELRAD’s photos can be seen on our website: www.avaberlin.org.

OTHER PEOPLE’S PROJECTS THAT AVA-BERLIN SUPPORTED

◆ AVA-Berlin has continued its support of *The Clearing Barrel* and its organizers, Meike Capps-Schubert and Chris Capps. *The Clearing Barrel* is

a GI café in Kaiserslautern, which is the home of Ramstein Air Base and Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. About 50,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel live in the area.

Today, in the entire world, there are only 3 GI coffee houses: *Under the Hood* at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas; *Coffee Strong* near Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Lakewood, Washington; and *The Clearing Barrel*. During the Vietnam War, GI coffee houses “played a vital role as organizing centers for US active duty military personnel and veterans” and today these three coffee houses “see themselves in this tradition.”

The Clearing Barrel, seat of the Military Counseling Network, is part of the GI Rights Hotline. It is the only non-profit and non-governmental organization overseas providing a place for U.S. military personnel, veterans and their families to socialize, find support and receive free, confidential and accurate information on U.S. military regulations and practices. *The Clearing Barrel* has been supported by the Military Counseling Network, Connection e.V., the Center on Conscience and War, the German Mennonite Peace Committee, members of IVAW and Veterans For Peace, and many other German and American friends and activists. You will find a link to *The Clearing Barrel* <http://theclearingbarrel.blogspot.de> on the AVA-Berlin site.

At the beginning of 2014 a representative of *The Clearing Barrel* (Meike Capps-Schubert) had the opportunity to go on a unique speaking tour in the U.S., visiting various anti-war and veterans’ organizations as well as church and activist groups on the West Coast. Meike accompanied representatives from the two GI Coffeehouses in the U.S. *The Clearing Barrel* raised \$2000 for travel expenses, and AVA-Berlin contributed €200 from its treasury to this effort with an added €20 as a donation to betterplace.org.

◆ On May 7, ANN WERTHEIMER spoke on behalf of AVA at the opening of the 29th Black International Cinema (BIC) festival at the Rathaus Schöneberg. This opening was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King’s visit to both West and East Berlin in 1964. You can find photos of the event at www.avaberlin.org.

◆ On July 1, ANN WERTHEIMER spoke on

behalf of AVA at the opening of the “Footprints in the Sand?” art exhibition at Rathaus Schöneberg. This opening was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King’s visit to both West and East Berlin in 1964.

◆ On July 4, DAVID MACBRYDE represented AVA at the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy. Four panelists with political, gender and racial diversity discussed the topic: “Reflections on American Identity.”

◆ On August 30, AVA-Berlin was an official Bündnis Partner at the *Freiheit Statt Angst* rally sponsored by the Arbeitsgruppe Vorratsdatenspeicherung. See pictures of the demonstration at www.avaberlin.org. Through ISABEL COLE’s involvement with Writers against Mass Surveillance, AVA has made a new connection and found an additional focus. Here is ISABEL’s German text for this year’s *Freiheit Statt Angst* demonstration:

“Pauschale, verdachtsunabhängige Überwachung verstößt gegen die Menschenwürde und rüttelt an den Grundlagen der freiheitlichen Gesellschaft. Ein Staat, der seine Bürger als prinzipiell suspekt behandelt, der ihre Privatsphäre nicht respektiert und schützt, sondern willkürlich verletzt, der Ängste instrumentalisiert, um diese Haltung zu rechtfertigen, ist nicht demokratisch, sondern autoritär.”

And here is AVA’s official contribution to the *Freiheit Statt Angst* Pressemappe:

*American Voices Abroad Berlin ist eine Gruppe in Berlin lebender Amerikaner, die sich bei Protesten gegen den Irakkrieg im März 2003 zusammengeschlossen hat. Seitdem haben wir uns sowohl mit den Fragen der amerikanischen Außenpolitik als auch den wichtigsten innenpolitischen Fragen beschäftigt.**

Die amerikanische Verfassung schützt die Bürger der USA vor staatlichen Übergriffen. Sie garantiert Sicherheit der Person und der Wohnung und schützt Urkunden und Eigentum vor willkürlicher Durchsuchung (unreasonable searches). Und seit mindestens 120 Jahren kennt auch die amerikanische Rechtsprechung das allgemeine Recht auf Privatsphäre (the right to privacy). Heute ist es offensichtlich, dass die von unserer Verfassung und unserer Rechtsprechung garantierte Privatsphäre es uns erlaubt unsere

Persönlichkeit zu entfalten, unsere Beziehungen zu gestalten, Freundschaften zu schließen und Vertrauensverhältnisse aufzubauen.

Wir müssen keine dystopischen Romane gelesen haben wie z.B. 1984 von George Orwell, Der Report der Magd von Margaret Atwood oder Yevgeny Zamyatins Wir, um zu wissen, dass eine freie Gesellschaft mit dem Recht auf Privatsphäre nur unter den oben genannten Voraussetzungen gewährleistet ist. Wenn sich eine Regierung jedoch in unser Privatleben einmischt—wenn sie wissen will, was wir lesen, mit wem wir sprechen, oder was wir tun, sei es alleine oder zusammen mit anderen, dann schwindet unser Vertrauen in diese Regierung. Dann schwindet der Bürgersinn, und dann verlieren wir unsere Demokratie. Weil wir dies nicht wollen, sind wir selbstverständlich dabei, wenn man in Deutschland für Freiheit statt Angst demonstriert.

*American Voices Abroad Berlin, or just AVA-Berlin for short, offers a community for engaged U.S. citizens and provides a forum for a wide spectrum of views. AVA seeks to foster open and constructive discussions on the sometimes contentious issues most important to Americans. AVA is independent of all political parties both in the United States and Germany.

◆ On September 13, AVA joined the U.S. Embassy and Democrats Abroad Berlin (DA) in celebrating the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's visit to

West and East Berlin at the Marienkirche. Specifically we encouraged the sponsorship of the African American music that enlivened the speeches and 'Zeitzeugen' reports. We thank Donna Brown and the Black Pearls Gospel Choir. (Earlier in the afternoon a large contingent from AVA was present at the Berlin Rathaus to inaugurate the festivities.)

◆ On September 21, a sizable AVA contingent joined the Climate March organized by AVAAZ. See FLORIAN SCHIEDHELM's photo at www.ava-berlin.org.

OUR OTHER MODEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

◆ Although AVA-Berlin has no affiliation with any political party, we are always happy to join the Berlin chapter of the Democrats Abroad to explore our common interests.

◆ AVA-Berlin is always pleased to announce English-language events around the city, especially those at the Einstein Forum in Potsdam and the American Academy at Wannsee.

◆ Let us know about your own exhibitions, publications, openings and performances. Just send the information to our email administrator, DAVID MACBRYDE, at members-berlin@avaberlin.org.