

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection  
Rusk OOOO: Part 2 of 2  
Benjamin H. Read interviewed by Richard Rusk  
1985 August

The complete interview also includes Rusk NNNN: Part 1.

READ: We're talking about the soiree in honor of the Rusks at the very end of the Johnson Administration. And in came some very generous contributions toward a present, so we got something that would be on permanent display in the State Rooms in the State Department and for him more personally. Chip [Charles Eustis] Bohlen told us that Dean had admired several times, when he was in the embassy in Paris, a painting of Ben [Benjamin] Franklin minus wig in Paris during his days in the 1780s. And Clem [Clement E.] Conger found a marvelous reproduction painter. We brought back the original and commissioned the reproduction, and the final product looked identical. But it was a marvelous evening. We talked to the President's appointment secretary, and he and Mrs. [Claudia Alta Taylor "Lady Bird"] Johnson immediately agreed to come over, and gave the warmest of remarks.

RICHARD RUSK: I heard those, yeah.

READ: Then his final morning departure I remember, in a way that he probably doesn't remember, waiting with him in his own office. I think there were just the two of us at one point and it was early that morning, or I guess it might have been lunch time. But anyway, there was a huge stream of people coming in or leaving through the C Street entrance below, and Dean turned around and said, "What do all these people do?"

RICHARD RUSK: "What do all those people do?"

READ: Yes. Because so often he would know what had to be done and couldn't understand why it took an army to do it. I found it a marvelously poignant remark. But at any rate, he went, and Bill [William Pierce] Rogers was finally ensconced. I guess he left right at the hour of the inauguration. I can't remember. I think it was before Rogers had come back. And he went down and said a few words to a law group that had gathered in the front diplomatic entrance to the Department. Hundreds of people had turned out for the occasion.

RICHARD RUSK: Were his remarks recorded? Did anyone get a copy of that?

READ: They may have been in the newsletter of the Department. I don't know.

RICHARD RUSK: What was the gist of his remarks?

READ: Well, it was just an expression of great respect for the Foreign Service and the Department, people who were so often the butt of the public criticism and criticism by politicians. There was another thought I had before we break up today, Rich. I think I did

mention it on the occasion of the 75th anniversary party in Washington. In his relationship with his successors he was unfailingly helpful. He never made life more difficult for them. And you can't say that of practically any other Secretary during this period. When Rogers, who was savaged very badly during his term of office as Secretary, was most wounded, I remember seeing Dean and him lunching together at the Metropolitan Club. And I know what a solace it was to Bill.

RICHARD RUSK: Really? This happened several times?

READ: I can't say. When Henry [Alfred Kissinger] was in office--and your father hadn't been one of his greatest admirers during Henry's professorial days and later when he had been at odds with Rogers--but after Henry became Secretary of State he was immensely helpful to him. I knew Henry quite well. And I remember breakfasting with him the morning of my own appointment back in the government, and he just said in such a heartfelt way that, "I can't tell you how indebted I feel to Dean Rusk."

RICHARD RUSK: He told me that. I haven't interviewed him yet. But he said, "Dean Rusk is a hero to me and I want you to know it."

READ: He hadn't always thought that, you know. He had been critical of him during Vietnam. I remember when Henry told me that Rogers had been appointed. He didn't say it was Rogers because it was still not revealed. He said, "We have appointed a man who in a year's time is going to be better than Dean Rusk." Well, we know what he ended up thinking. And we know also today, and with the full luxury of hindsight how much he admires Dean Rusk and his virtues. Even [Alexander Meigs] Haig [Jr.] has told me that Dean was always there when he needed him and wanted advice. I don't know how often he sought it or anything else, but Haig felt that way: and of course, [Cyrus Roberts] Vance and [Edmund Sixtus] Muskie the same.

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