

William P. Rogers

William Pierce Rogers (June 23, 1913 – January 2, 2001) was an American politician, diplomat, and lawyer. He served as United States Attorney General under President Dwight D. Eisenhower and United States Secretary of State under President Richard Nixon. Despite Rogers being a close confidant of Nixon, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger overshadowed Rogers and eventually succeeded him as Secretary of State.^[1]

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Early life and career

Rogers was born June 23, 1913, in Norfolk, New York.^[1] After the death of his mother, the former Myra Beswick, he was raised during his teen years by his grandparents in the village of Canton, New York.

He attended Colgate University, where he was initiated into the Sigma Chi fraternity. He then attended Cornell Law School, where he was an editor of the *Cornell Law Quarterly*.^[2] He received his LL.B. in 1937, graduating fifth in his class of 47^{[3][4]} as a member of the Order of the Coif, passing the New York bar in the same year. He married Adele Langston Rogers (August 15, 1911 – May 27, 2001), a fellow law student whom he had met at Cornell. The couple had four children: Dale R. Marshall, Douglas L. Rogers, Anthony W. Rogers and Jeffrey L. Rogers.^[1]

William P. Rogers



55th United States Secretary of State

In office

January 22, 1969 – September 3, 1973

President Richard Nixon

Preceded by Dean Rusk

Succeeded by Henry Kissinger

63rd United States Attorney General

In office

October 23, 1957 – January 20, 1961

President Dwight Eisenhower

Preceded by Herbert Brownell

Succeeded by Robert F. Kennedy

4th United States Deputy Attorney General

In office

January 20, 1953 – October 23, 1957

President Dwight Eisenhower

Preceded by Ross L. Malone

Succeeded by Lawrence Walsh

Personal details

Born William Pierce

After serving about a year as an attorney for a Wall Street law office, he became an assistant district attorney in 1938 and was appointed by District Attorney Thomas E. Dewey to a 60-man task force aimed at routing out New York City's organized crime.

He entered the Navy in 1942, serving on the USS *Intrepid*, including her action in the Battle of Okinawa. His final rank was lieutenant commander.

In 1950, Rogers became a partner in a New York City law firm, Dwight, Royall, Harris, Koegel & Caskey. He thereafter returned to the firm when he was not in government service.

While serving as a Committee Counsel to a Senate committee, he examined the documentation from the House Un-American Activities Committee's investigation of Alger Hiss at the request of Representative Richard M. Nixon. He advised Nixon that Hiss had lied and that the case against him should be pursued.

Rogers also advised Nixon in the slush fund scandal, which led to Nixon's Checkers speech in 1952.

U.S. Deputy Attorney General

Rogers joined the Administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower as Deputy Attorney General in 1953.

As Deputy Attorney General, Rogers had some role in or insight into the process that led to the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for espionage.^[5]

As deputy attorney general, Rogers was involved in the Little Rock Integration Crisis in the fall of 1957 of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. In that capacity, he worked with Osro Cobb, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, to implement federal orders and to maintain peace in the capital city. Cobb would recall in his memoirs that Rogers called him to discuss the possibility of violence: "Our conversation was somewhat guarded. I had never recommended the use of federal troops, and Rogers asked if I thought they were necessary. I told him I hoped not. Then to my surprise he stated, 'They are on their way already.'"^[6]

U.S. Attorney General (1957–1961)

Rogers served as Attorney General from 1957 to 1961. He remained a close advisor to Vice President Nixon throughout the Eisenhower administration, especially during Eisenhower's two medical crises. Rogers became attorney general upon the resignation of his superior, Herbert Brownell Jr., who had worked to implement the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School. In 1958, Little Rock closed its public schools for a year to oppose further desegregation required by the U.S. government. At the time, Rogers said, "It seems inconceivable that a state or community would rather close its public schools than comply with decisions of the Supreme Court."^[7]

	Rogers June 23, 1913 Norfolk, New York, U.S.
Died	January 2, 2001 (aged 87) Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.
Political party	Republican
Spouse(s)	Adele Langston (m. 1937–2001)
Children	4
Education	Colgate University (BA) Cornell University (LLB)
Signature	
Military service	
Allegiance	 United States
Branch/service	 United States Navy
Rank	 Lieutenant Commander
Unit	USS <i>Intrepid</i>
Battles/wars	World War II

In 1959, Martin Luther King Jr. hailed Rogers for advocating the integration of an elementary school in Alabama that had excluded the children of black military personnel.^[8]

Return to legal career

He returned to his law practice, now renamed to Rogers & Wells, where he worked until his early eighties. He played an important role in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* a 1964 case before the Supreme Court.

From 1962 to 1963, Rogers was head of the Federal City Council, a group of business, civic, education, and other leaders for the economic development in Washington, DC.^{[9][10]}



William P. Rogers (right, in background) with staff members as President Richard Nixon speaks to French President Charles de Gaulle in March 1969.

U.S. Secretary of State (1969–1973)

He succeeded Dean Rusk as Secretary of State in the Nixon administration from January 22, 1969, to September 3, 1973. Nixon had long distrusted the State Department, whom he had accused under the Truman administration of being staffed with liberal diplomats who were insufficiently anti-communist and who were responsible for the "loss of China" in 1949.^[11] Given his dislike of the



The official portrait of Secretary of State Rogers, 1970.

State Department, Nixon when he came into office in 1969 wanted to conduct his foreign policy via the National Security Council in a bid to marginalize the State Department.^[12]

Nixon had selected an ambitious political science professor from Harvard, Henry Kissinger, to be his national security adviser who soon emerged as his main adviser on foreign affairs.^[12] Nixon selected Rogers to be the secretary of state because he knew nothing of foreign affairs and was unlikely to assert the interests of the State Department.^[12] On Nixon's Inauguration Day, 20 January 1969, Rogers was handed a lengthy volume containing a summary of the world's major issues written by the State Department's leading experts in order to brief him for his new job, leading him to remark in surprise: "You don't expect me to read all this stuff, do you?"^[13] Rogers's ignorance of foreign policy issues and his unwillingness to assert the interests of his department duly led to the State Department pushed to the sidelines under his stewardship with the major decisions taken by Kissinger with no input or even the knowledge of Rogers.^[12]

Kissinger later said of Rogers, "Few secretaries of state can have been selected because of their president's confidence in their ignorance of foreign policy."^[14]

In February 1969, Nixon began to discuss plans to bomb the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese bases just over the border in Cambodia, which Rogers felt was unwise, warning that such an bombing offensive might damage the peace talks in Paris.^[15] On 16 March 1969, Rogers attended a meeting at the White House where Nixon discussed Operation Menu, the plans to bomb Cambodia in secret.^[16] Through the State Department's experts

stated that the main source of weapons for the Viet Cong as the Ho Chi Minh Trail coming down from North Vietnam via Laos, not Cambodia, Rogers had not read their assessments.^[16] At the 16 March meeting, Rogers offered the most tepid opposition to the plan to bomb Cambodia, which began the next day.^[16]

One of his notable aims was to initiate efforts at a lasting peace in the Arab–Israeli conflict by the so-called Rogers Plan on 3 December 1969. Throughout his tenure, however, his influence was curtailed by Nixon's determination to handle critical foreign policy strategy and execution directly from the White House through his national security adviser Henry Kissinger.

On the night of 21 February 1970, Kissinger first met in secret with the North Vietnamese diplomat Le Duc Tho in a house in Paris suburb, opening a new set of talks that were independent of the official peace talks in Paris.^[17] Kissinger only first informed Rogers of the secret talks in Paris parallel to the official talks in February 1971, a year later.^[18] On 23 March 1970, Rogers told the press that the United States had the utmost respect for the "neutrality, sovereignty and independence" of Cambodia, stating categorically there no plans to invade Cambodia.^[19] In the same press conference, Rogers stated: "We don't anticipate that any request will be made" for help from the new Lon Nol government.^[20] Unknown to him, Nixon and Kissinger were already discussing plans to invade Cambodia.^[21] On 30 April 1970, the United States invaded Cambodia.

On October 15, 1973, Rogers received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Nixon. At the same ceremony, his wife, Adele Rogers, was presented with the Presidential Citizens Medal.

Later life

Ronald Reagan asked Rogers to play the US President in IVY LEAGUE 82 (March 1982), a command post exercise of American nuclear forces under SIOP.^[22]

Rogers led the investigation into the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. The Rogers Commission was the first investigation to criticize NASA management for its role in negligence of safety in the Space Shuttle program. Among the more famous members of Rogers's panel were astronauts Neil Armstrong and Sally Ride, Air Force general Donald Kutyna, and physicist Richard Feynman.^[23]

Rogers worked at his law firm, now renamed Clifford Chance Rogers & Wells after a 1999 merger, in its Washington office until several months before his death.

He died of congestive heart failure, at the Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, on January 2, 2001, at the age of 87.^[1] Rogers was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Legacy

In 2001, the Rogers family donated to Cornell Law Library materials to reflect the lives of William and Adele Rogers, mostly from 1969 to 1973.^[24]

Publications

Articles

- "U.S. Foreign Policy: A Discussion with Former Secretaries of State Dean Rusk, William P. Rogers, Cyrus R. Vance, and Alexander M. Haig, Jr." (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44234902>).

Sources


- The Presidency Project (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=4004>)
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Notes

1. Stout, David (January 4, 2001). "William P. Rogers, Who Served as Nixon's Secretary of State, Is Dead at 87" (<https://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B02E5D6113BF937A35752C0A9679C8B63>). *New York Times*. Retrieved December 25, 2008. "William P. Rogers, a suave and well-connected Republican lawyer who was secretary of state under President Richard M. Nixon and attorney general in the Eisenhower administration, died on Tuesday in Bethesda, Md. He was 87. Mr. Rogers lived in Bethesda and worked in the Washington office of the law firm of Clifford Chance Rogers & Wells, where he was senior partner, until becoming ill several months ago. He suffered from congestive heart failure, his family said."
2. Smith, J.Y. (January 4, 2001). "Lawyer-Statesman William P. Rogers Dies" (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2001/01/04/lawyer-statesman-william-p-rogers-dies/be9a8dda-5455-4d35-ad90-ebdee837bfa2/>). *The Washington Post*. Washington DC: Washington Post Company. Retrieved August 16, 2017.
3. Rhoades, Frank H.T. (Spring 2003). "Tributes to William and Adele Rogers" (<https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1505&context=cilj>). *Cornell International Law Journal*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Law School. **36** (1). Retrieved February 10, 2019.
4. "Registration". *Cornell Law Quarterly*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University. **22** (1): 84. Fall 1936.
5. Roberts, Sam (June 26, 2008). "Spies and Secrecy" (<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/06/26/podcast-spies-and-secrecy/#more-3235>). *The New York Times*. New York City: New York Times Company. Retrieved June 27, 2008. "Shortly before he died, I interviewed William Rogers. He was the deputy attorney general when the Rosenbergs were executed. I guess, I said to him, the government got what it wanted: the Rosenbergs were indicted, convicted and executed. No, he replied, the goal wasn't to kill the couple. The strategy was to leverage the death sentence imposed on Ethel to wring a full confession from Julius — in hopes that Ethel's motherly instincts would trump unconditional loyalty to a noble but discredited cause."
6. Cobb, Osro (1989). Griffiee, Carol (ed.). *Osro Cobb of Arkansas: Memoirs of Historical Significance*. Little Rock, Arkansas: Rose Publishing Company. p. 234. ISBN 978-9993049630.
7. Cobb, pp. 267–268.
8. King, Martin Luther Jr. (November 19, 1959). "To William P. Rogers" (http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol5/19Nov1959_ToWilliamP.Rogers.pdf) (PDF). Stanford, California: Stanford University.
9. "Federal City Council Elects William Rogers". *The Washington Post*. Washington DC: Washington Post Company. October 1, 1963. p. B1
10. "Federal City Council Elected". *The Washington Post*. Washington DC: Washington Post Company. September 30, 1970. p. D9.
11. Karnow 1983, p. 578 & 587.
12. Karnow 1983, p. 587.
13. Karnow 1983, p. 587-588.

14. Brauer, Carl (November 1988). "Lost in Transition" (<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/politics/polibig/brauer.htm>). *The Atlantic*. Washington DC: [Emerson Collective](#). Retrieved March 14, 2018.
15. [Karnow 1983](#), p. 5591.
16. [Karnow 1983](#), p. 591.
17. [Karnow 1983](#), p. 623.
18. [Karnow 1983](#), p. 624.
19. [Karnow 1983](#), p. 605-606.
20. [Karnow 1983](#), p. 607.
21. [Karnow 1983](#), p. 607-608.
22. Burr, William, ed. (December 22, 2016). "National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 575: Reagan's Nuclear War Briefing Declassified" (<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb575-Reagan-Nuclear-War-Briefing/>). The National Security Archive, George Washington University.
23. Feynman, Richard P. (1988). [Leighton, Ralph](#) (ed.). *What Do You Care What Other People Think?*. New York City: W. W. Norton. p. 124. ISBN 0-393-02659-0.
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External links

- [Papers of William P. Rogers, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library](https://eisenhower.archives.gov/Research/Finding_Aids/R.html) (https://eisenhower.archives.gov/Research/Finding_Aids/R.html)
- [Finding aid for the William P. Rogers Oral History, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library](https://eisenhower.archives.gov/Research/Oral_Histories/Oral_Histories.html) (https://eisenhower.archives.gov/Research/Oral_Histories/Oral_Histories.html)
- [William P. Rogers](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/6407259) (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/6407259>) at [Find a Grave](#) 
- [Appearances](https://www.c-span.org/person/?williamprogers) (<https://www.c-span.org/person/?williamprogers>) on [C-SPAN](#)

Legal offices		
Preceded by Ross Malone	United States Deputy Attorney General 1953–1957	Succeeded by Lawrence Walsh
Preceded by Herbert Brownell	United States Attorney General 1957–1961	Succeeded by Robert Kennedy
Political offices		
Preceded by Dean Rusk	United States Secretary of State 1969–1973	Succeeded by Henry Kissinger

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