



# FOREWORD

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WHEN I WAS asked to write a foreword to this book, which brings to life a truly remarkable man, I was thrilled. For nearly forty years, from the spring of 1965, when he came to Harvard University while I was in my first year of graduate study, until his untimely death in 2003, Richard E. Neustadt played a central role in my life—as my teacher, mentor, and finally my friend. His friendship remains one of the most cherished memories of my life.

Each of these chapters reveals a different aspect of the work of this gifted man who reached the top in an unusually wide range of fields—as a public servant, a professor, an institution builder, and a writer whose scholarship will last for generations. These pages also show, however, the astonishing range of close relationships that Neustadt developed with his colleagues and his students, winning our lasting affection through his generosity of spirit, his contagious laughter, his unquenchable interest in our work, and his exceptional faculty for bringing out the best in all of us.

Harvey Fineberg writes of Neustadt's "abiding respect for the views of others regardless of their status or station." Graham Allison recalls his mentor's uncanny ability to let his colleagues take credit for his achievements.

“Never before had any reader been so helpful” in critiquing a manuscript, Charles Jones writes, “and only one since: him.” Jonathan Alter remembers the lavish time and colorful stories his former teacher willingly shared with him when he embarked on his recent book about Franklin Roosevelt. Matt Dickinson suggests that the integrity of Neustadt’s character and his ability to walk between the two worlds of politics and academia “enriched everyone, from President to student, who had the great fortune to know Dick.”

As I read Ernest May’s analysis of the “molding events” in Neustadt’s “many-sided” life—the flu epidemic in 1918, the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, his role on Truman’s White House staff, his work with John Kennedy—I realized more than I had before the extent of Neustadt’s involvement in a number of the “molding experiences” that have shaped my own journey through the worlds of academia, government, and writing.

As a teaching assistant in Neustadt’s celebrated course on the Presidency in 1966, I caught an invaluable firsthand glimpse of the qualities that make a great teacher: the careful preparation that went into each one of his lectures, his subtle blend of penetrating analysis with spirited human anecdotes, his infectious enthusiasm for his subject, and, above all, his ability to weave his own experience into his scholarly points so that the figures he described became flesh and blood to his enraptured students.

I can still see him as he stood on the stage of Harvard Hall delivering his lectures. As Anthony King so vividly describes, “He spoke very . . . very . . . very slowly,” with long pauses between his sentences, which gave the impression that he was still thinking about what he was saying, allowing us to believe that if we listened carefully enough we would not simply be passive recipients of his knowledge; we might magically enter his mind and begin to replicate his manner of thinking!

Nor will I forget the many evenings at the Neustadt house on Traill Street where his wife, Bert, fed us better than we could possibly eat anywhere else as graduate students. The give and take of the dinner discussions never ceased to amaze me. One moment, we were listening to Neustadt’s stories about President Truman. The next moment, he was listening to our stories of the classroom discussions that followed his lectures. Sometimes he would start the conversation with a question. “Do the times make the man or does the man make the times?” He was the star but he made us feel that we were educating him. And always there were lively arguments about present-day politics. These dinners, occasionally followed

by games of charades in the living room, mitigated the loneliness that graduate students commonly feel and gave us a feeling that we had found a second home.

While I was Neustadt's teaching assistant, he encouraged me to take a White House Fellowship, even though it meant postponing my dissertation. Knowing how much his own service in the Truman White House had contributed to his scholarship, he was anxious for his graduate students to have an opportunity to experience the practice of governing firsthand. I ended up working directly for President Johnson and then accompanied him to his ranch to help him on his memoirs during the last years of his life. In the vulnerable state in which the President found himself during his retirement, he opened up to me in ways he never would have had I known him only at the height of his power, sharing his fears, his sorrows, and his worries about how history would remember him. Indeed, the older I've become, the more I realize what a privilege it was to have spent so many hours with this aging lion of a man—a privilege that fired within me the drive to penetrate the inner persons beneath the public figures that I have tried to bring to each of my books since then.

When I returned to Harvard in 1969 after my White House Fellowship, Neustadt proposed that I take over his Presidency course while he was in the process of creating the Kennedy School of Government. It was a terrifying prospect to follow in his footsteps, knowing how legendary his course had become, but he shared his notes, his insights, and, most important, his confidence that I could do it. Under his guidance, the course became for me a labor of love. The case studies he had devised—Truman's attempted steel seizure and his firing of General MacArthur, Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis, Johnson and the passage of the Voting Rights Act—gave the students a firsthand look at the decision-making process inside the White House, offering such rich portraits of the Presidents and their cabinet officials that it seemed as if the events were taking place at that very moment.

After I had taught the Presidency course for several years, Neustadt loved to tell the story of walking behind two undergraduates crossing Harvard Yard. They were comparing notes about their classes. "I'm taking Doris Kearns's course on the Presidency," he heard the first student say. "Didn't that used to be taught by Richard Neustadt?" his companion asked. "Yeah, I think so," replied the first. "Whatever happened to him?" The

other student shrugged and said, "I dunno. I think he died!" It was so typical of this great-hearted man that he relished telling this tale that put his protégée in the spotlight at his own lighthearted expense.

His self-deprecatory humor was part of his charm. I can still hear his laughter when he told of attending a White House reception with Bert during Johnson's Presidency. As all of us who knew Bert can testify, she was a stunning woman—a Katherine Hepburn look-alike with high cheekbones and a perfect figure. Standing just in front of Dick on the receiving line, Bert reached the President first. Not surprisingly, Johnson was so smitten by her looks and her easy smile that he engaged her in conversation for a full five minutes before he noticed that the line had come to a dead halt. When Dick's turn finally came to shake the President's hand, Johnson smiled, looked back at Bert and over to Lady Bird, and said: "I see that we both married above our station."

While I was writing my first book on Lyndon Johnson, my father died of a sudden heart attack. My mother had died when I was fifteen. Bert and Dick insisted that I spend a good part of that summer with them on Cape Cod. What better place not only to heal but to watch a master craftsman at work as he played with every sentence and every paragraph, seeking, as Beth Neustadt writes, "a particular rhythm for each sentence," probing for "just the right phrase." Under his guidance, I came to understand that the key to reaching a larger audience lay in developing a narrative style, complete with rich details and colorful anecdotes. I dedicated that first book to my parents and to Bert and Dick Neustadt.

Neustadt's classic work, *Presidential Power*, became a bible for me as I set out to become a presidential biographer. As Graham Allison observes, this original study established Neustadt as "the most penetrating analyst of power since Machiavelli," and profoundly influenced the way generations of scholars would write and think about the Presidency. With each new subject, I returned to the book, each time gaining fresh insights that I had missed in my earlier readings.

Of even greater value, however, were the long conversations with Dick as I followed my study of Lyndon Johnson with studies of Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. How he loved to talk about Franklin Roosevelt, who was, as Jonathan Alter correctly observes, "the gold standard for him," a natural politician blessed with profound self-confidence and a remarkable capacity to transmit his cheerful strength to others.

Labor Secretary Francis Perkins claimed that Roosevelt's "capacity to inspire and encourage those who had to do tough, confused and practically impossible jobs was beyond dispute." Like everyone else, she said, she "came away from an interview with the President feeling better, not because he had solved my problem . . . but because he had made me feel more cheerful, stronger, more determined."<sup>1</sup>

The same could be said of Richard E. Neustadt. I can still recall the enthusiasm with which he greeted my decision to study Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and the home front during World War II. To my worry that so many books had been written about the Roosevelts, he countered with the observation that this was because they were worthy of so many books. Besides, he said, "This project will consume several years of your life. Who would you rather wake up with in the morning and think about when you go to bed at night? Franklin Roosevelt or Millard Fillmore?" A terrific question, for as it turned out, my study of the Roosevelts and the war years took longer to write than the war took to be fought. A similar discussion preceded my decision to study Abraham Lincoln. Once again Neustadt encouraged me to think big, expressing confidence that somehow I would find my own way into this historic figure.

To this day, I still experience occasional nightmares in which I am heading into a final examination totally unprepared. For some unknown reason, I have failed to attend any of the classes and have done none of the reading. I know many others share some variant of this dream. Beyond this familiar dream, however, I am periodically visited by another, more peculiar, dream in which I am seated in a chair faced by a panel of all the Presidents I have studied. A large audience has gathered. Each President takes his turn, outlining everything I got wrong in my understanding of him, his inner circle, and his era. But when I wake I take comfort in the thought that if such a panel were to be assembled, the moderator would be none other than Richard E. Neustadt, "the guardian of the Presidency." And while he would acknowledge where my interpretations had gone wrong, he would, given his sympathetic and generous spirit, be sure to tell the panel and the audience everything I had gotten right. And that would be the only message I would need to hear!