

Resource Sheet #07

Reactions to the Rosenberg Case

Perspective A – Excerpt from Judge Kaufman’s Sentencing Speech (1951):

“I believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the Russians the A-bomb years before our best scientists predicted Russia would perfect the bomb, has already caused, in my opinion, the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resultant casualties exceeding 50,000 and who knows but what millions more of innocent people many pay the price of your treason.”

Source: Judge Kaufman’s Statement Upon Sentencing the Rosenbergs. From “Famous Trials Page,” University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Law. Accessed 2/13/14. http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/rosenb/ROS_SENT.HTM

Perspective B – Statement by the Director of the Manhattan Project to U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (1954):

“I think that the data that went out in the case of the Rosenbergs was of minor value. I would never say that publicly. Again, that is something while it is not secret, I should think it should be kept very quiet, because irrespective of the value of that in the overall picture, the Rosenbergs deserved to hang, and I would not like to see anything that would make people say General Groves thinks they didn’t do much damage after all.”

Source: Statement made on April 10, 1954 at a closed meeting of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), later declassified, published in Radosh, R., & Milton, J. (1997). *The Rosenberg File* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (Original work published 1983).

Perspective C – Telegram Writers Urging Clemency (1953):

“So far 436 telegrams in opposition to the President’s action [denying clemency] and 57 in support of his action. . . The majority of them express shock at the President’s action and urge reconsideration. Some of the other thoughts expressed are as follows:

1. The American conscience cannot accept this decision.
2. Execution would be a miscarriage of justice.
3. In the name of humanity and American decency, there should be reconsideration.
4. Such death sentence is unprecedented.
5. Execution would be a blot on the good name of America.
6. The punishment here is more severe than that given Axis Sally, Tokyo Rose, and others of that kind. . .”

Source: Memorandum from William J. Hopkins to Mr. Stephens, February 12, 1953. Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Records as President, Official File, Box 411, 101-R Rosenbergs (1). Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home, Abilene, Kansas. Accessed 2/5/14. http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/rosenbergs/5.pdf

Perspective D – Julius Rosenberg (1953):

“I had scarcely made known the purpose of my meeting when Julius launched on a quite emotionally charged tirade to the effect that he and his wife were the victims not only of a gross miscarriage of justice but a ‘deal’ made by the Government on the one hand and his brother and sister-in-law, David and Ruth Greenglass. . . He is very bitter also toward his sister-in-law, Ruth Greenglass, and lays great stress on the fact that she got off scot-free while his wife Ethel gets the death sentence. . . He also claims that he was convicted on the basis of perjured testimony and trickery on the part of the prosecutor.”

Source: Memorandum, Report of Interview with the Rosenbergs by James Bennett (Director, U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons) to Herbert Brownell, June 5, 1953. Herbert Brownell Papers, Box 75, B(3). Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home, Abilene, Kansas. Accessed 2/5/14.

<http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/rosenbergs/Binder10.pdf>