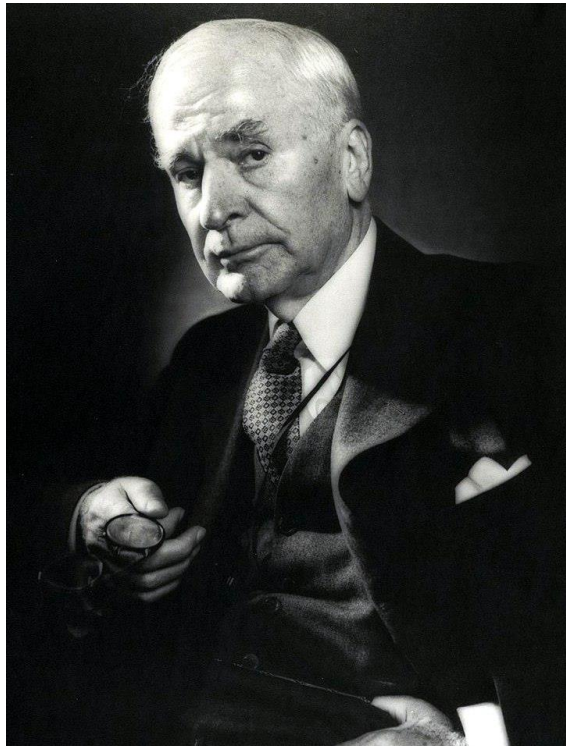


Time for a New U.S. Secretary of State (1944)

*John Q. Barrett**

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In late November 1944, United States Secretary of State Cordell Hull, nearly twelve years in office, tendered his resignation to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Secretary Hull, age 73, did not wish to leave office



September 1944: U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull

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For an archive of selected Jackson List posts, many of which include document images or photographs, visit <http://thejacksonlist.com>. This essay is posted there as a PDF file with "live" hyperlinks.

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before World War II was won, but the reality of his recurring, worsening problems with pulmonary sarcoidosis and strong advice from his doctors dictated his decision.

On Sunday, November 26, President Roosevelt visited Secretary Hull at Bethesda Naval Hospital, where he had been receiving treatment for more than a month, for a long conversation.¹

The following day, the President held a news conference to announce Hull's resignation. The White House then released the texts of the letters of resignation and reluctant acceptance that Hull and the President had exchanged.²

Later that day, the President nominated the Under Secretary of State, Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., age 44, who had been Acting Secretary in Hull's absence, to succeed him.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously and favorably reported Stettinius's nomination to the full Senate on November 29.

The next day, the Senate confirmed Stettinius by roll call vote, 67 to 1. Notified of his confirmation, Stettinius travelled promptly to Bethesda to pay his respects to Secretary Hull.³

Secretary Stettinius signed his commission and took his oath of office on Friday, December 1, 1944. The ceremony occurred in the Office of the Secretary of State, in the State, War, and Navy Building (today the Eisenhower Executive Office Building) next to the White House.

At Stettinius's request, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson administered the oath.

At the conclusion of the oath, after Stettinius said "I do," Jackson asked "So help you God?," prompting Stettinius to respond "So help me God."⁴

¹ See C.P. Trussell, *President Accepts Hull's Resignation, Names Stettinius*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 28, 1944, at 1.

² See *id.* at 16.

³ See Kathleen McLaughlin, *Senate Approves Stettinius, 67 to 1*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 1, 1944, at 18.

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Secretary Hull was of course unable to attend the ceremony. It was attended by other senior officials, including General George C. Marshall, Jr., the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, and Senator Harry F. Byrd (D.-VA). Stettinius's wife and children attended, as did Jackson's wife Irene.

The ceremony was well-lit and photographed by still and newsreel photographers. For newsreel film of the occasion, including Justice Jackson administering the oath and then he and Secretary Stettinius signing the commission, click here:

www.criticalpast.com/video/65675037150_Edward-R-Stettinius_Secretary-of-States_swear-in_Justice-Jackson_General-George-C-Marshall.⁵



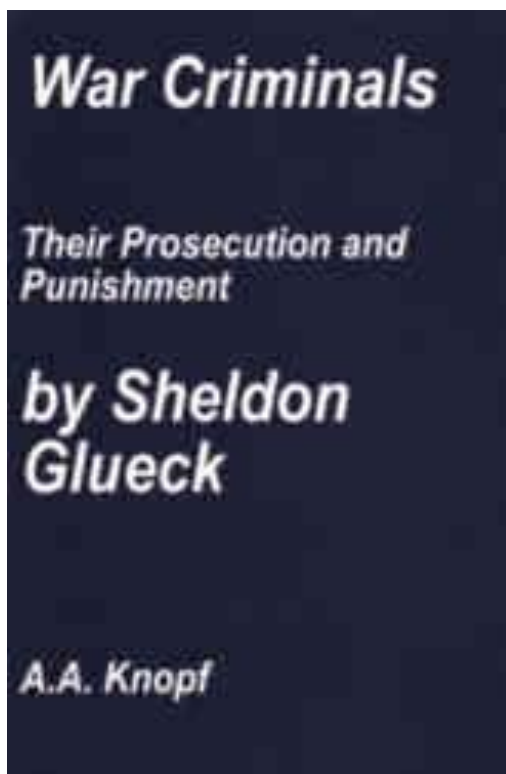
December 1, 1944: Justice Robert H. Jackson (right) watches new U.S. Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius, Jr., sign his commission.

⁴ See Edward T. Folliard, *Stettinius Pledges to Uphold Hull Policies*, WASH. POST, Dec. 2, 1944, at 1.

⁵ Thanks to Catherine E. Fitts, Curator of the Supreme Court of the United States, for pointing me to this online newsreel film.

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Coincidentally, December 1, 1944, was also the date on which Alfred A. Knopf published Harvard Law School professor Sheldon Glueck's book *WAR CRIMINALS: THEIR PROSECUTION AND PUNISHMENT* (jacket price \$3.00).



In the months ahead, Secretary Stettinius and Justice Jackson each worked on the challenges of prosecuting war criminals. Indeed, Professor Glueck became one of Jackson's consultants in his work as U.S. chief prosecutor at Nuremberg of Nazi war criminals.

The enormity of that undertaking might have been present, at least elliptically, when Stettinius stated to the cameras on December 1, 1944, that building world peace following the war would "need active participation and support of all...."