

## BOOKS: EDUCATION

# Making the University of California

Roger L. Geiger

Clark Kerr, former chancellor (from 1952 to 1958) of the Berkeley campus and president (from 1958 to 1967) of the University of California, has chosen to recount these experiences in two volumes. *Academic Triumphs* focuses chiefly on academic governance and the explosive transformation of the University of California. *Political Turmoil* (anticipated to release in January 2003) will treat the political controversies that swirled around the University during these years: the Loyalty Oath, the Free Speech Movement, and Kerr's firing by Governor Ronald Reagan. Although the forthcoming volume is eagerly anticipated for its potential revelations, *Academic Triumphs* might prove the more enduring contribution.

This volume is both a personal memoir and thoroughly researched account. The author has long been recognized for his deep understanding of the nature of universities and how they are led. His acute sense of both history and future trends was demonstrated in his Godkin lectures at Harvard in 1963 (*I*) and in numerous subsequent writings. These same qualities are applied here to the subject nearest and dearest to Kerr—the University of California.

To many, the success of the University of California may seem “overdetermined” (as Neil Smelser notes in the book's foreword) by the size and wealth of the state, plus California's enormous commitment to public higher education. The implicit message of this volume, however, is that these “triumphs” were contested and contingent. At each crucial step, alternative courses of action were proposed and might have prevailed. This was especially true for the most crucial components of the UC success story, unique achievements that far transcended fortunate

circumstance, such as the national preeminence of the Berkeley campus, the academic parity of the nine UC campuses, and the Mas-

ter Plan of 1960. All occurred on Kerr's watch and were due in large measure to his vision and leadership.

In 1952 the entire UC was run (and run fairly well) out of the office of Berkeley's President Robert Gordon Sproul. Forced by the regents to create the position of campus chancellor, Sproul accorded Kerr the title but delegated no duties. Over the next five years, Kerr essentially shaped this position, assuming authority over appointments and campus planning and exerting what powers he had to build departments of the highest academic distinction. When the first post-war academic ratings appeared in 1957, Berkeley challenged Harvard at the pinna-



cle of the university hierarchy, where it remains today, the only public university to attain this level of academic distinction.

Kerr's experience as chancellor convinced him that the individual campuses under the UC umbrella needed to control their own operations. He carried this conviction to the presidency in 1958 and created a new form of academic organization. The decision to expand the university was taken before he assumed the presidency. But Kerr presided over the elevation of the campuses at Davis, Santa Barbara, and Riverside, as well as the planning and launching of San Diego, Irvine, and Santa Cruz. He implemented the radical notion that each of these campuses would receive funding through the same formula and be given operational autonomy. *Academic Triumphs* describes the battles this entailed. The result was a multi-centered rather than a flagship-centered university. No other state had the wisdom or courage to follow this course despite its success. Today the campuses of the UC dominate the top ranks of public universities in the United States.

In order to achieve its goals, the UC had to define, delimit, and, above all, de-politicize its role within California higher education. This insulation was achieved by the Master Plan, which established separate

spheres of responsibility for the UC, what became the State College and University System, and California's community colleges. Negotiations for the Master Plan were long and difficult, but Kerr's vision ultimately prevailed. This remarkable “peace treaty” among the competing sectors of higher education not only endured, but provided an internationally admired model for publicly funded higher education.

The overriding theme of this volume is the implacable advance of the University of California. However, Kerr does not allow his text to become cloying on this point by judiciously apportioning credit to his colleagues, and occasionally accepting blame.

The wishful thinking that inspired Kerr's plan to create a UC version of a liberal arts college at Santa Cruz, for example, is fully described, as are the disappointing results.

The governance of the University of California depended upon the balanced working of four sets of actors: the regents, the president, the chancellors, and the Academic Senate. The regents reflected, for good and for ill, the political forces in the state, but they also muffled the impact of such forces on the UC. The operations of the Academic Senate had to be adapted

to a nine-campus university, but its function did not change. Numerous adjustments had to be made to perfect this decentralized model of the university because it implied a delicate relation between the campus chancellors and the UC. Unlike some chancellors, Kerr consistently supported the Senate; here, he accords it much of the credit for conveying the high academic standards of Berkeley across the other campuses.

Overall, Kerr's profound grasp of academic governance suffuses this book, and this material constitutes the book's greatest contribution to the scholarly literature on higher education. In another sense, this volume juxtaposes a clear and compelling vision of university development against the messiness of human relations. Leadership in building the University of California on a day-to-day basis meant finding and supporting the right people for leadership roles, neutralizing the miscreants, and gingerly confronting the powerful. Fortunately for the University of California, these skills were also Kerr's strength and they played no small part in the triumphs recorded in this fascinating and important history.

## Reference

1. C. Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, ed. 5, 2000).

**The Gold and the Blue**  
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of the University  
of California,  
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The author is at the Higher Education Program, Pennsylvania State University, Suite 400 Rackley Building, University Park, PA 16802-3203, USA. E-mail: rlg9@psu.edu

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