

DRIVING MR. KERR

BY DAVID PIERPONT GARDNER

WHEN CLARK KERR DIED AT HIS EL CERRITO HOME ON DECEMBER 1, 2003, at the age of 92, he was hailed around the country for his contributions to higher education. The *New York Times* wrote that, as Berkeley chancellor and UC president in the 1950s and 1960s, Kerr “created the blueprint for public higher education in the United States.” “There isn’t anyone who had as large a role in higher education as Clark Kerr did in the post-World War II 20th century,” summed up Arthur Levine, president of Teachers College at Columbia University. Berkeley Chancellor Robert Berdahl said that Kerr was, “without question, a legend in higher education.”

His most praised and emulated accomplishment was the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education in California, which modified and confirmed a three-tiered system, with the University of California as the state’s primary research institution, enrolling the state’s ablest students for undergraduate and advanced studies; the California State University, focusing on undergraduate education; and community colleges, providing vocational training and two-year programs that could be transferred to four-year institutions. The idea behind the plan was that every graduate of a California high school who wanted further education could get it.

CLARK KERR WAS BORN MAY 17, 1911, in Stony Creek, Pennsylvania. After graduating from Swarthmore College in 1932, he came west for graduate school, beginning at Stanford, and made his first visit to Berkeley that fall. As Professor David L. Kirp wrote in these pages, reviewing Kerr’s memoir *The Gold and the Blue*: “Berkeley has been Kerr’s lifelong love—he describes his first view of the Campanile as wonderingly



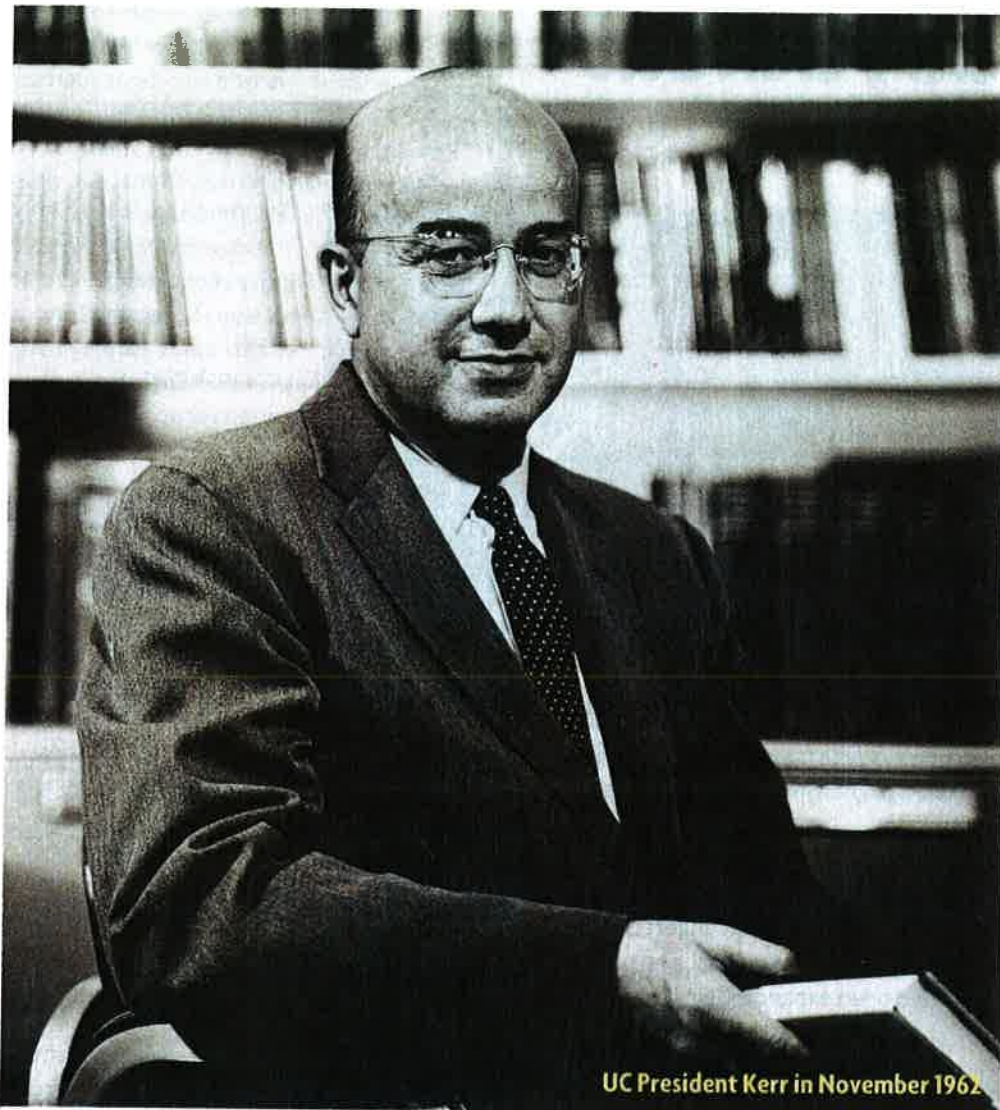
COVERING THE CAMPUS: *Time* magazine, on October 16, 1960, praised Kerr’s Master Plan and marveled at the “tidal wave” of students coming through Sather Gate.

as European immigrants remember the sight of the Statue of Liberty.” In 1933, Kerr enrolled as a graduate student at Cal; he earned his Ph.D. in economics in 1939 and joined the Berkeley faculty in 1945.

In 1952, in part for his firm support of faculty members who refused to sign the loyalty oath, Kerr was chosen as the first chancellor of the Berkeley campus. In 1958, he became president of the University system. His most influential book, *The Uses of the University*, presented as the Godkin Lectures at Harvard University, was published in 1963. After being dismissed by the regents in 1967, he chaired the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education and, later, the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. He was named *Alumnus of the Year* by the California Alumni Association in 1981.

Throughout his life, Kerr continued to be deeply dedicated to Berkeley and the University of California, and to advise Berkeley chancellors and UC presidents—including David Gardner, who here remembers his mentor and friend.

—The editor



UC President Kerr in November 1962

As Berkeley's first chancellor ("a title in search of a job," as he once described it) and UC's 12th president, Clark Kerr helped build the University of California into the most distinguished public university in the world. Considering the academic strength of the entire UC system, the worldwide reputation of its faculty for scholarship and scientific achievement, and the breadth and depth of its curriculum, the world had never seen anything quite like it.

It was Kerr the intellectual more than Kerr the administrator who moved UC from the great university entrusted to him by President Robert Gordon Sproul in 1958 to the superior one Kerr bequeathed in 1967. A public university system rooted in substantive accomplishment and unchallenged achievement was his unwavering objective—that is what drove Clark Kerr—throughout his service to UC.

I first met Clark in 1959 at a Christmas party at Alumni House on the Berkeley campus. Kerr had been UC's president for a year and a half, and Glenn Seaborg was Cal's chancellor. Also present were President Emeritus Robert Gordon Sproul and many of Berkeley's senior faculty members, key staff, and alumni and student leaders. I was there because I was to start work with the Alumni Association in two weeks to oversee the activities of the alumni clubs, scholarship committees, and orientation programs for incoming Cal freshmen.

The party was like the gathering of a large and extended family—as was the campus generally in those days—and people went out of their way to welcome us to Cal. I have always remembered the warm and gracious way the Kerrs, Seaborgs, and Sprouls put us at ease and made us feel at home.

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Declaration of independence

"Kerr's father, an apple farmer who had been the first member of his family to go to college, spoke four languages, held a master's degree from the University of Berlin, and taught his son the value of independent thought. 'He believed that nothing should be unanimous,' Kerr once said. 'If he found everybody else for something, he'd be against it on principle.'"

—Los Angeles Times,
December 2, 2003

How Kerr attended Stanford

"After graduating from Swarthmore in 1932, he crossed the country as a member of an American Friends peace caravan. At the end, he continued on a drive to acquaint himself with the Pacific Coast. Arriving at Stanford University, he saw a line outside one of the buildings and decided to ask what was going on. He happened to fall behind Dean E. McHenry, who...told him it was graduate-school registration. Clark decided to stay in line and see if he could be admitted to a master's program in economics. He was, on the spot, and the two men became roommates, fast friends, and lifelong colleagues."

—Charles E. Young, chancellor emeritus of UCLA, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*,
December 19, 2003

Why he transferred to Berkeley

"My major professor at Swarthmore, when he heard I had gone to Stanford, said: 'If you have to go to California, go to Berkeley, don't go to Stanford. You should transfer as soon as you can.'"

—Clark Kerr, "Q&A," *California Monthly*,
March-April 1982

false. The report also was loaded with comments from Kerr's critics on and off campus. Johnson withdrew the offer. As a federal appeals court later ruled as a result of my FOIA lawsuits, the FBI unlawfully used the background report as a pretext to sabotage Kerr's career "because FBI officials disagreed with his politics or his handling of administrative matters."

As Berkeley became a center of protest against the Vietnam War in 1965, Hoover and CIA Director John McCone '22 leaked FBI reports on students, faculty, and three Democratic regents to regent Edwin Pauley '23, the board's harshest critic of Kerr's handling of student demonstrations. But the FBI realized that while Edmund G. "Pat" Brown was governor, Pauley could not muster the votes to fire Kerr. Then Ronald Reagan defeated Brown in November 1966, charging that the administration had stood by as a "small minority of beatniks, radicals, and filthy speech advocates ... brought such shame to ... a great university." Within weeks, FBI officials secretly briefed Reagan about the campus. On January 20, 1967, at the first regents meeting attended by Reagan, Kerr was fired in a 14-8 vote that turned on the new governor's appointees to the board.

One of our last conversations occurred at the El Cerrito home where Kerr had lived during most of his years with UC. One wall of the house displayed framed editorial cartoons depicting Kerr's battles with the students and Reagan; from another hung a Japanese print of a windblown tree rooted on a cliff. As he reviewed FBI documents showing that some of the nation's most powerful officials had secretly joined with his campus critics in an effort to topple him, he said he was proud he had defended academic freedom—especially when it was dangerous to do so—because it was best for UC and the nation.

Seth Rosenfeld '81 is a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. His award-winning story, "The Campus Files: Reagan, Hoover and the UC Red Scare," can be seen at sfgate.com/campus.

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At this time, Kerr had bold moves in mind for the University in the decade ahead: the California Master Plan for Higher Education; a doubling of UC's enrollment; converting the campuses at Davis, Riverside, and Santa Barbara from specialized to general UC campuses; constructing new campuses at Santa Cruz, Irvine, and San Diego; and decentralizing UC's management structure.

To achieve these visionary goals required UC to deal effectively with fiscal, educational, political, and jurisdictional issues. Kerr needed to reach out to the University's alumni and friends, and then to the citizens of the state, if public support was to be secured. Before long, I found myself arranging for Kerr (and Seaborg) to visit alumni clubs and civic organizations throughout California.

My job was to set the dates, plan the meetings, extend the invitations, work with interested alumni and others, inform the press, donors, and UC's friends, and make sure that these visits served their purpose. Most important to me, I would chauffeur Kerr as we toured the state.

Our car was standard issue from the Berkeley motor pool—not very comfortable, not even totally dependable. Kerr sat in the passenger seat up front, the back seat strewn with his papers. When I tired, he drove. Always, we talked.

At meetings all over the state, Kerr would move through the crowd with a genuine interest in people, asking them about their work, their families, and mutual friends. He was a master at making complex issues simple, explaining his views in a positive fashion, taking account of his audience's interest and level of sophistication, and phrasing his presentation accordingly.

I remember him addressing a combined service/alumni club luncheon in the Central Valley just a few months before the Free Speech Movement. There had already been a few problems on the Berkeley campus, and Kerr was called to account by some angry alumni, who kept referring to Cal students as "your students": *your students did this* or *your students did that*. Kerr finally responded to these barbs in his usual low-key way. With a slight smile, he asked: "Do you mean *your* children? After all, you've had them most of

Are you now, or have you ever been...?

"Kerr met Catherine 'Kay' Spaulding at a student meeting near UCLA in 1934. The meeting was dominated by Communist Party speakers. She passed him a note, 'Are you a Communist?' He said, 'No.' She wrote back: 'I'm not either.' They were married that year on Christmas Day."

—Berkeleyan, December 4, 2003

Quotable Kerr

Two comments Kerr made decades ago are still repeated today. The first was a paraphrase of Samuel Johnson's remark about London: "If you are bored with Berkeley, you are bored with life." The second came at a faculty meeting in 1957, when he was asked what he as chancellor was doing about parking. Kerr replied that the chancellor's job was to provide "parking for faculty, sex for the students, and athletics for the alumni."

Kerr inside and out

"He once said he possessed the 'stomach of a goat and the hide of an alligator'—qualities that enabled him to work 80 to 90 hours a week without disturbing his composure."

—San Francisco Chronicle,
December 2, 2003

The regents preferred Marx to Freud

Kerr told the *Monthly* in 1982, while discussing the "Filthy Speech Movement" which followed the Free Speech Movement: "The regents could live with Marx, but they couldn't live with Freud. They could live with sort of a political revolt and the talk of revolution; they knew such things were around in the world. But they couldn't live with this Freudian charge coming up from the counter-culture. That's what threw them."

Kerr's report card

In 1966, President Kerr released a report on UC, stating that it had doubled its student population (from 43,000 to 88,000), added three new campuses (San Diego, Irvine, and Santa Cruz), and picked up the accolade that still warms hearts on this campus: Berkeley was rated the Number One graduate school in the country, the first public institution ever to top Harvard. The number of Nobel laureates also rose during this period, from five to 12, and the Berkeley campus moved up to second place in its memberships in the National Academy of Sciences and to first in Guggenheim Fellowships.

How to clear Sproul Plaza

When the Free Speech Movement hit, "I just took it as part of life—a problem to be handled," Kerr said in a 1997 interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. "But an awful lot of people—alumni, regents—just got terribly upset. A lot of people felt this was the beginning of the revolution, the storming of the Bastille. They felt that something drastic had to be done. I got phone calls [from people suggesting] taking a machine gun and shooting the students off Sproul Plaza."

Kerr's price tag

In one of his first moves as governor, Ronald Reagan cut UC's budget by 10 percent. Part of the deal the regents made with Reagan, Kerr later said, was that if they voted for his dismissal, the governor would take back \$20 million in cuts. "So, I wasn't sold all that cheaply," Kerr said, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

their lives; we've only had them for a few months." The audience laughed, the point was made, and the evening moved on.

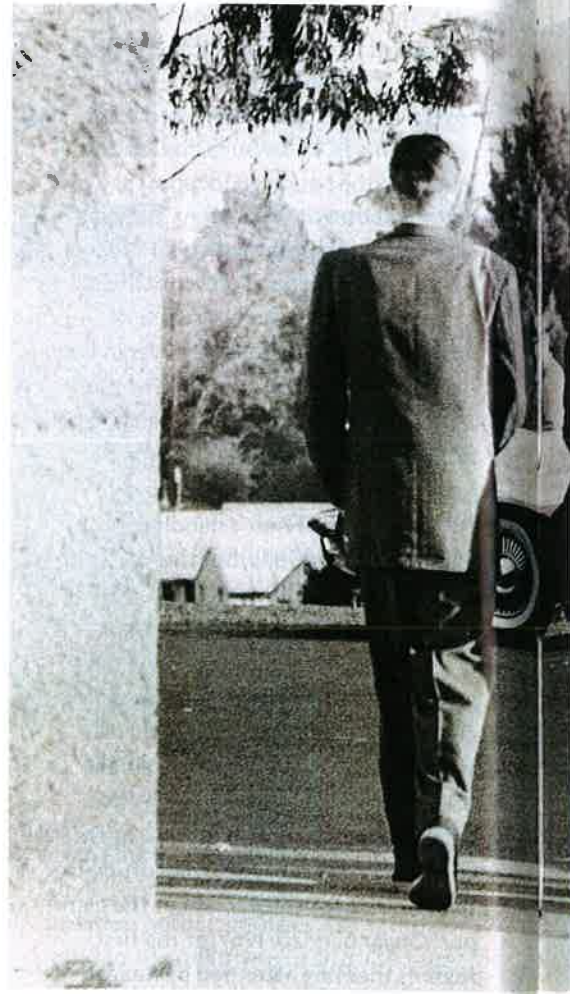
As I was driving Kerr, he spoke at length about his strategic plan for doubling the University's enrollment while simultaneously improving its overall quality and capability—partly in response to my questions, but mostly because he wanted to rehearse his upcoming speeches. During these conversations, I came to appreciate the scope and scale of the University of California, its inner workings, and the magnitude of the task that Kerr confronted in seeking his objectives.

On these journeys, I observed how determined and competitive Kerr really was, how relentless a champion for his beliefs, how driven to achieve the best for the University of California. He was a person of great personal integrity, and a quiet, wise, and courageous individual. How else could he have succeeded in as volatile, complex, and unforgiving an environment as California in general and UC in particular?

I was also able to observe Kerr firsthand during the Free Speech Movement. In the fall of 1964, he invited the heads of the alumni associations of each campus and a member of the chancellor's staff to come to Berkeley. I was just starting my work at UCSB as an assistant to the chancellor and accompanied our alumni representative.

Kerr had set aside two hours for the meeting. He took most of the first hour explaining the issues in dispute, how the campus was handling them, the role of the chancellor versus the role of the president, who the principals were, who the outside interested parties were, which administrative decisions had proven to be unwise or ill-conceived, and which had proven to be efficacious. It was an astoundingly honest and insightful account of a remarkably complex and volatile series of events—and all from memory, no notes.

When Kerr finished, and as though he had said nothing at all, the president of one of the alumni associations drew a three-page typed document from his coat pocket and read one of the most blistering and judgmental criticisms I had ever heard directed toward Kerr for his "handling of the FSM." Clark listened to the entire statement without comment and then turned to him and quietly said, "Well, Bill, if I may paraphrase Shakespeare: 'Hell



FAMILY LEAVE: Clark Kerr and his family exit the Gree

hath no fury like that of a noncombatant."

Reasonable people could hold very different views about the merits of the issues in contention, the motives of the protesting students, and the wisdom of his actions to date, Kerr said. But "no one should doubt," he added, that his actions were taken to serve the most essential and enduring values of free universities everywhere. "We will not secure these values for future generations by compromising them now merely to assuage the anger either of the protesting students or those who find fault with them," he said.

Kerr was a thoughtful, forthcoming, straightforward, and honest person. He was also self-effacing and shunned the trappings of office. But he was not one to be pushed around. Instead, he always sought to be himself and to preserve his independence. For example, on his final day as president, January 20, 1967, Kerr twice was asked to resign. But he refused to do so, believing that he "had done nothing that would warrant such an action." After he was unceremoniously

Translating Clark Kerr

“Clark Kerr’s minuscule handwriting is legendary. My ability to transform his handwriting into readable manuscript was, it turns out, my job security. Many times I could not make out a word and, after long frustrating minutes counting squiggles, I’d guess and insert something creative (‘imaginative’ he called it). But he was very sensitive about his handwriting and disliked my reference to working with it as ‘translation’—he insisted it was not a foreign language (though he had a propensity to use Latin and German terms that posed even larger challenges). We somehow managed, and over 35 years ended up with six file drawers of speeches and just as many publications.”

—Maureen Kawaoka, editorial and administrative assistant to Clark Kerr since the summer of 1967

Kerr’s car wash

“My garage is too full of stuff to hold an automobile, so for many of the 35 years I did research for Clark Kerr, I parked on the street under a large bush that dropped dust and pollen most of the year.

When I’d take some books or papers to his El Cerrito home, if he was out in the yard he’d often say, ‘Roll up your windows and pull over by the hose.’ On occasion, he’d even get out his scrubber and soap to go after a stubborn spot while I stood there—watching UC’s president emeritus wash my little Civic.”

—Marian Gade, M.A. ’60, research associate for Kerr and current deputy director of the Center for Studies in Higher Education

A PUBLIC MEMORIAL FOR CLARK KERR WILL BE HELD AT 3 P.M. ON FEBRUARY 20 AT ZELLERBACH AUDITORIUM. THE PUBLIC IS INVITED TO ATTEND.



Greek Theatre after his inauguration as president of the University of California on September 29, 1958.

dismissed by the Board of Regents later that day—one of the worst decisions, in my opinion, the board has ever taken—Kerr joked that he had left the job as he had entered it: “fired with enthusiasm.”

Nevertheless, this action wounded him deeply and, I believe, it troubled him the rest of his life, especially in recent years. He felt he had let the University down when it needed him more than ever. Whenever he raised this issue, I told him he’d had no choice; he had done exactly what should have been done under the circumstances. I said the regents involved should be bearing the burden of the decision, not he. “No,” he would say, “I should have anticipated this action and taken steps to deal with it before the only remaining possibilities were to resign or be fired.”

Shortly before he was dismissed, Clark asked me to write a history of the Free Speech Movement; he volunteered his papers and any help he could give to the project. For a number of reasons, the book never came to pass. But, after our work together on that

project, he went out of his way to help me in any way he could.

When I was serving as president of the University of Utah and then of UC, Clark Kerr was my most valued counselor. No person could have had a better mentor, a closer colleague, a steadier friend, or a more honest critic. And I am sure I am not alone; many others have also benefited from Kerr’s friendship, generosity of spirit, and intelligent, candid, honest advice. It is very unlikely that we will see his kind again. How fortunate we were that Clark Kerr devoted to the University of California so much of his talent, energy, and remarkable life.

David Gardner, M.A. ’59, Ph.D. ’66, served as the fifteenth president of the University of California (from 1983 to 1992) and was the CAA’s Alumnus of the Year for 1989. His “Earning My Degree: Memoir of an American University President,” will be published in the fall by UC Press.