

# **UC Office of the President**

## **Understanding the University's Role in American Culture and Society**

### **Title**

Remarks for Dedication of R/V Robert Gordon Sproul, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, San Diego, CA

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9hn3715j>

### **Author**

Gardner, David P.

### **Publication Date**

1984-12-01

REMARKS FOR THE DEDICATION OF THE  
R/V ROBERT GORDON SPROUL

Scripps Institution of Oceanography

David Pierpont Gardner, President

San Diego, California

University of California

December 10, 1984

Robert Gordon Sproul served the University as president for twenty-eight years, and during his long tenure he presided over a university that had to face depression, war, financial hardship, meteoric growth, social and political unrest--to mention just a few of the highlights of his time in office. Yet he took it all in stride, radiating energy and enthusiasm whatever the circumstances. No one who was privileged to meet him ever forgot his booming voice and charismatic presence. Before he became president he served as comptroller of the University, and in that capacity he was often called upon to present the University's budget requests before the legislative committees in Sacramento. He used to electrify legislators not only with his eloquence--which was considerable--but also with his unerring memory for numbers and his drumfire response to any and every question. "Be prepared!" was a motto Bob Sproul understood.

As president, he put his awesome oratorical powers to good use. The story is told that at one point during the Depression, a bill was introduced to cut the University's already barebones appropriation by a further two million dollars. Sproul went on the radio to oppose the cuts and was so effective that one

legislator reportedly received two hundred telegrams opposing the reduction in two days. The funds were restored.

Sproul was the first alumnus of the University to serve as its president; the first to represent it in Sacramento before taking office; and the first president ever to stress the importance of public service, outside the field of agriculture, as an essential mission of the University, along with teaching and research. He was firm in his belief that the University was one institution, not a scattered collection of campuses and research centers, and he insisted on that fact at a time when it mattered--the University of California would be a very different institution today if it had not been for Sproul's unshakable determination to build one great University for the benefit of all Californians.

He also never wavered in his belief in the importance of setting high standards of accomplishment and demanding much of both students and faculty. "Education must be active," he once said, "and those who serve it truly must be ever at work widening its frontiers and seeking, perhaps finding, new knowledge."

The result of his long, arduous work is that he made a good university into a great one. And in doing so he made a significant contribution not just to California but to the cause of higher education everywhere in America. His fellow university president James Conant of Harvard acknowledged the breadth of that contribution when he wrote to Sproul, "I see you as the university president who has done more to make the university a

center of learning than any other in our generation." But Sproul would have rejected the idea that what he accomplished, he accomplished alone. It was here at Scripps, in fact, at a Charter Day celebration that also commemorated his twenty-fifth anniversary as president, that he talked specifically about his view of the presidency. This is how he saw it:

...the development of the growing, many-sided University of California in the past quarter of a century has clearly been a team performance rather than a one-man show, and anything that I may have achieved has been made possible only by the encouragement and help of many loyal hearts and able hands.

Without the effective cooperation of vice-presidents, chancellors and provosts, the understanding and tolerance of faculty and alumni, the generous support of governors and legislators, the steadfast friendship of generations of students, and the confidence of the people of California, none of this would have come to pass. My only boast is that, while the game was going on, I kept out of the way of those at bat--in student body and faculty, only advising them occasionally to bunt, to swing hard, or in extreme cases to take a walk.

In dedicating this vessel today, we are also rededicating ourselves to what Robert Gordon Sproul represented: an unflagging commitment to the highest standards of performance; to the welfare of this one University; to the public service the

University is uniquely qualified to render to California and the nation.

All of these ideals have a place at the Scripps Institution. For eighty years Scripps has expanded the reach and quality of its work in the marine sciences until today it is the finest center for the study of these sciences in the world. From its early research studies on nearshore marine life to its more recent investigations of the depths of the ocean and the heights of space, Scripps has demonstrated its ability to contribute to our knowledge of the oceans and all that they influence. Robert Gordon Sproul would have been delighted that his name will be associated with Scripps' voyage of discovery.

Although he described himself as a landlubber, Robert Gordon Sproul had much in common with the captain of a ship. In his style and in his view of life he prized the mobile, not the static; the continual searching after the new and the unknown; the commitment to work of pioneering significance. Above all, he knew and understood that every ship requires a crew as well as a captain, and he took care to assemble the best and the brightest. May you continue to do the same here at Scripps, and may your voyages along the frontiers of knowledge be many and fruitful. Bob Sproul would expect nothing less; and I know you will not disappoint him.

During the past two decades Scripps has grown and flourished under the able direction of Bill Nierenberg, whose contributions

to Scripps and to the University are many and impressive. A distinguished scientist and administrator, he has presided over the establishment of several major programs at Scripps during his tenure, including the California Sea Grant College Program--the largest in the nation--and the California Space Institute. It is my pleasure to present the Director of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, William A. Nierenberg.